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### 2006 Europe's Young Entrepreneurs

Provided by

**BusinessWeek**

#### Europe's Young Entrepreneurs

By Andy Reinhardt

Content Provided by: Businessweek.com

With promising ideas and an inherently international outlook, more young Europeans are aiming for startup success. These 15 have found it

Though the popular image of the startup centers on American—and, increasingly, Asian—enterprises, Europe also is alive with small companies. All told, there are 23 million small to midsize businesses in the European Union, accounting for about 75 million jobs and much of the Continent's employment growth. And with many large corporations increasingly sending jobs elsewhere, young people are attracted as never before to the idea of starting their own businesses.

To be sure, Europeans still tend to be more risk-averse than their counterparts in the U.S. and Asia. The culture of entrepreneurialism isn't as well developed—nor is the infrastructure of business mentors, startup support services, and risk financing. But for a growing class of young entrepreneurs with good ideas and a strong work ethic, those impediments don't matter. Their passion to succeed overcomes the barriers.

Governments, too, are waking up to the job-creating capacity of startup businesses. The European Commission is spurring high schools across the 25-nation bloc to offer courses in business, including encouraging students to set up small companies. Initial studies suggest that up to 20% of students enrolled in such courses try to start their own businesses after graduation.

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE.** Britain, meanwhile, is setting the pace in its support of business incubators, where entrepreneurs can set up shop in subsidized office space and work with mentors to develop their strategies and business plans. From 25 such facilities in Britain in 1996, the number has now surged to 270 around the country, according to figures from the Trade & Industry Dept. Britain also now hosts nearly 100 science parks, up from 39 in 1998.

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One advantage many European entrepreneurs seem to enjoy is a more global perspective. Many are multilingual and have lived or worked abroad. "We are starting to see very interesting companies forming that are capable of competing on a global basis from day one," says Danny Rimer, general partner at venture capital firm Index Ventures in Geneva. "It's partly generational, but also a case of success breeding success. Companies like Skype have served as an inspiration to a whole generation."

Since the middle of the summer, BusinessWeek.com has set out to find the best examples of this new European spirit. We asked readers to nominate outstanding entrepreneurs age 25 or younger, and now we present the candidates in a slide show that showcases their remarkably imaginative and successful businesses. You can view the presentation and cast your vote on the last page for the entrepreneur who seems the most promising. We'll present the results of the voting in November.

**FROM EUREKA TO EARNINGS.** What all the nominees share is a spirit of adventure and opportunism. For many, the inspiration for their businesses came from a momentary observation that lodged in their minds and became the seed of a startup. Overflowing garbage cans in a college apartment? That gave James Gibson the idea for trash-bin liners that pop up from the bottom of the can. Partygoers trying to sleep on a beanbag chair? That was enough to inspire Matt Roberts and Irfan Badakshi to develop a plush chair that morphs into a bed.

Similar "Eureka" moments made other young entrepreneurs diverge from the safer course of corporate careers into the treacherous waters of a startup. Tristan Cowell's mother was looking for a way to display her Christmas cards, and now the 25-year-old Brit presides over a thriving business that sells all manner of gewgaws for displaying photos on walls, refrigerators, and doors. Marvin Andrä, 24, of Saarbrücken, Germany, turned a harrowing trip to the dump into the inspiration for BagPax, removable soft-shell containers that save car owners from dirtying the trunks of their cars with refuse.

For many young entrepreneurs, starting their own companies is a way to unite different threads in their lives. That was what moved 25-year-old Karm Singh, a British-born computer science graduate of Indian heritage, to launch a Web site called Desitouch.com that features music and video from South Asia. Something like a cross between iTunes, MySpace, and YouTube, but for Bollywood productions and Bhangra music, and it has already attracted a strong following from the South Asian community at home and abroad.

**THE WEB WAY.** A similar passion moved Grant Lang, 24, to start a coffee company called Mozzo. Sure, Lang loves coffee. But he's also a big believer in organic products and "Fair Trade" business practices that give growers decent wages and work conditions. He also loves art and music. So he pulled them all together into a "sustainable lifestyle" coffee brand that espouses environmental and social responsibility—and makes money.

Then there's Lars Duursma, 24, from Rotterdam. The reigning world debate champion in the non-native English-speaker category, he has a passion for good language and clear argumentation. Now, he has leveraged his skills into a thriving consultancy that teaches politicians and corporate leaders how to communicate better.

Of course, today's young entrepreneurs grew up with the Internet, so

many of their businesses revolve around the Web. Dutchman Ben Woldring, 21, launched his first Web site at 13 and now offers his compatriots four online comparison sites that let them shop for the best rates on fixed and mobile phone service, Internet access, and utilities. Austria's Fathi Said, 24, started a Web hosting business at 18 and lost it at 20, then started another that's even more successful.

**TRADITION THRIVES, TOO.** The Web is also home to Julien Genestoux's Jobetudiant.net, a job site aimed at French students that has already attracted 200,000 registrations. London's Wayne Berko is running a similar site—but aimed solely at getting students and professional actors jobs as film and TV extras. And Britain's Neil Waller has turned the notion of an online travel site on its ear. He launched Marbellainfo.com to give British travelers better information about the Spanish coastal resort city, only to discover that the locals liked using it just as much. Now he aims to launch travel-and-community sites for other popular destinations.

Despite the Web's allure, some entrepreneurs are sticking to more traditional fare. Matthew Hubbard, 24, started a film and video production company in the West Midlands that has gotten traction producing media for special education programs. Matteo Böhme turned his love of inline skating into a thriving events-planning business in Dresden. And Joav Ben Jaakow started a business with his parents when he was 15, importing and reselling drip irrigation systems in Germany.

The variety of ideas is dazzling, and the energy and excitement of these young entrepreneurs is infectious. Take a look at our [slide show](#) to learn more, and then be sure to send a vote of support to the entrepreneur who you think has the best idea. Europe is hungry for more examples of such derring-do and optimism.

Europe's Young Entrepreneurs		
Name	Company	Business
<a href="#">Tristan Cowell</a>	IC-Innovations	Ideas factory
<a href="#">Ben Woldring</a>	Bencom	Mobile phone services prices and rate plan comparison service
<a href="#">Karm Singh</a>	Desitouch	A blend of iTunes, MySpace, and YouTube - but stocked with Bollywood movies, soundtracks, and Bhangra music
<a href="#">Lars Duursma</a>	Debatrrix	Persuasion training
<a href="#">James Gibson</a>	BinFix Ltd	Bin liner
<a href="#">Marvin Dominic Andrä</a>	Bagpax Cargo Systems	A series of padded liners that fit in the truck or back of a car and protect it from messy payloads
<a href="#">Neil Waller</a>	Information Websites Ltd	www.marbellainfo.com - a community site used by local residents to find services and exchange information
<a href="#">Julien Genestoux</a>	Jobetudiant	Internet jobs service aimed specifically at students
<a href="#">Grant Lang</a>	Mozzo	Organic "Fair Trade" coffee bean distributor
<a href="#">Fathi Said</a>	Ecommerce Holding	Web hosting company
<a href="#">Matt Roberts &amp; Irfan Badakshi</a>	Bean2Bed Ltd	Bean2Bed product - one minute it's a comfy chair in the corner, and then presto, it's a bed.
<a href="#">Matteo Böhme</a>	Matteoevents	General events management business
<a href="#">Matthew Hubbard</a>	Reels in Motion	Production of educational and training DVDs, especially in the area of special-needs education
<a href="#">Joav Ben Jaakow</a>	BJ Bewässerungstechnik	State-of-the-art drip irrigation systems
<a href="#">Wayne Berko</a>	Uni-versalExtras	A matchmaking website for movie extras

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