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# Cambridge University entrepreneurs are in the money

May 16 2005

For a second year running, several teams of students from the CMI-sponsored Masters programmes have triumphed at the Cambridge University Entrepreneurs business creation competition.

Amongst the highly imaginative ideas they came up with were a novel way of mending broken wrists and ankles; mobile internet cafés for the developing world; a floating clinic to get vital medical services to remote parts of Indonesia; a low-cost unit you can clip on to manual wheelchairs to give users added power; and affordable wind turbines that can be bought and run by local communities and small villages.

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Three start-up businesses were named as winners of the £50k competition – a business plan competition that was set up at Cambridge in 2000 inspired by the highly-successful $50K Competition at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Amongst them was **Cambfix**, a prospective business headed by two students taking the CMI-sponsored Masters programme in BioScience Enterprise, Linda Pomeroy and Ali Bajwa.

Ali Bajwa is an orthopaedic surgeon who has spent eight years mending broken wrists and ankles.

> "Typically, a third of such cases develop a complication during treatment, " he says, "and I have seen patients complaining of infection or stiffness in the joint."

Cambfix has invented a series of new products to serious fractures that don't involve drilling pins into the bone and which, unlike a plaster cast, allow the patient to keep the joint mobile so it doesn't stiffen up. By cutting down on complications, say the Cambfix team, they could save the healthcare industry $800 million a year.

In a change to the competition format this year, instead of being handed their prize money, winners had to bid for funding from a panel of business angels who included Boyd Mulvey, co-founder and Chief Executive of East of England venture capital company CREATE, Acorn Computers and ARM co-founder Hermann Hauser, telecoms guru David Cleevely, serial bioscience entrepreneur Andy Richards, and Hugh Parnell from Great Eastern Investment Forum Ventures. So after their names were read out by Professor Michael Kelly, Executive Director of the Cambridge-MIT Institute, Cambfix had to stand up and pitch to the panel.

Sadly for Ali and Linda, they failed to attract funding from the angels – despite attracting a lot of interest and questioning, particularly when Ali pulled a skeleton arm and hand out of his bag to demonstrate his point. But they are serious about Cambfix and intend to keep working on their business plan and trying to attract funding, they say.

BioScience Enterprise is one of six MPhil programmes that have been introduced at Cambridge University with CMI's support. They offer students the chance to combine a discipline base in science or engineering with teaching in business management and entrepreneurship.

Amongst the winners of the £1k 'business idea' competition, there were two winning teams involving students form the BioScience Enterprise course. Medicines worth £400 million are donated every year but these donations could be increased, and targeted more accurately if there were more accurate information available on unmet medical needs and sources of donations. **Medicines for Humanity** aims to address this with the creation of a MedMap database available both to pharmaceutical firms, donation channels and recipients. **Floating Clinic** is a project aimed at providing vital medical services in remote parts of Indonesia.

Meanwhile, a student from the CMI Technology Policy Masters programme was behind another £1K winner, **Wheelchair Drive**. Dan, a design engineer who has previously worked on mobility aids, is developing the prototypes for a lightweight, affordable unit that could clip on to 400,000 manual wheelchairs currently used in the UK to give wheelchair users and/or their attendants more power. Currently, existing powered wheelchairs are very expensive and difficult and bulky to transport.

And more of the CMI Masters students were featured among the finalists of the 3P (People, Planet, Productivity) contest, which is aimed at stimulating the establishment of social enterprises. Both **Windnet** and the **Loxion Internet Café** team are made up students from the CMI-sponsored MPhil in Engineering for Sustainable Development. Windnet's Andrew Burston used to be a designer of Formula 1 racing cars; he is now designing a small, affordable wind turbine that could be bought and operated by villages and local communities. They can sell the power they generate to the National Grid and the money they receive in return can be offset against their electricity bills. He says:

> "We feel this is the best way to overcome public opposition to wind turbines, as currently the people livign near wind

farms receive little or no direct benefit."

Mpumelolo Ncwadi and Modhi Hasli Hasan are also students on the CMI-sponsored MPhil Engineering for Sustainable Development programme and are working on developing mobile internet cafés in the developing world.

Another winner of the £50K Competition is BOPPHY Technologies, led by students based at the Computer Laboratory. This business is developing new technologies for delivering extremely high-speed broadband internet access over powerlines – particularly useful in rural areas and / or in developing countries where there are many more power lines than telephone lines. PhD students Stavros Tsiakkouris and Inaki Berenguer didn't succeed in winning up-front funding – but they did receive a personal invitation from Dr Hermann Hauser to go and pitch to Amadeus Capital Partners, the venture capital company specialising in high-technology investments. Inaki is a PhD student, who has spent the past year working with Professor Jon Crowcroft on developing wireless technologies as part of the Communications Research Network – one of CMI's Knowledge Integration Communities.

But the biggest winners at the event were a team of young entrepreneurs who invented a new way of recycling drinks cartons. Friday 13th is traditionally an unlucky day – but not for post-doctoral researcher Carlow Ludlow-Palafox and PhD student Alex Domin from Cambridge University's Chemical Engineering Department who successfully talked the business angels and entrepreneurs into giving their business EnvAl £150,000 of start-up funding.

EnvAl, which began life as Dr Ludlow-Palafox's PhD project, is developing a new technology for recycling the millions of Tetrapak drink cartons thrown away every year. Its new process extracts usable aluminium, oil and gas from the cartons, so that they can be completely recycled rather than thrown away.

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Dr Ludlow-Palafox has been working on the idea for eight years along with his supervisor Prof Howard Chase, Head of the University's Department of Chemical Engineering. He says:

"I am very excited about seeing something I invented get so close to becoming a commercial reality."

EnvAl aims to use the £150,000 funding to build the equipment it needs to demonstrate the process, including a mobile pilot recycling plant that can be used by paper manufacturers.

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