

[App]ly Yourself: Meet the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

By Jennifer Chang

Picture this: you're at a baseball game in its 9th inning when suddenly, you're hit with an overwhelming craving for nachos. The lustful, gotta-have-them-now kind of craving that demands your attention and refuses to let go, leaving you unable to watch the game a minute longer. Succumbing to your desire, you get up, walk around the stadium, and find a vendor that isn't closed—and it's packed. You wait what seems like an eternity, and finally you are handed your plate of cheesy, heavenly goodness. You make your way back to your seat, but as tragic fate would have it, the game has ended. Your night is ruined, with only cold nachos and broken dreams to serve as a cruel reminder of the injustice of the world. If only there were a better way.

Luckily for all you sports and nacho fans, there very well may be.

Some ideas, like penicillin and artificial sweetener, are born out of happy accidents. Others are designed to fill a need. For third-year computer science major AJ Jain and his team, the idea for an app called Shnack was conceived because of a mutual frustration: having to wait in line for food. The app is currently in the developmental stage, and was created to make concerts, sports games, and other events more enjoyable by streamlining the process of ordering and receiving food.

With Shnack, the user is able to order and pay for food with the touch of a virtual button, and is notified when the order is ready, eliminating the need for long lines and at snack vendors and giving the user something back no other app can—time. The tagline (“Never miss a

moment. Never miss a meal.”) is a testament to what Jain and his team hoped to achieve with Shnack—using mobile phones is to make life more convenient.

Of course, as with any invention, the process of making life convenient is anything but. It's grueling, time-consuming, and altogether exhausting.

“We sacrificed a lot of sleep,” said Jain. “Development mostly consists of buckling down and sitting in a room for hours on end, just writing code.”

But so far, it's been a payoff for the Shnack team, who will enter the New Venture Competition in spring quarter, and were selected as finalists in the University Mobile Challenge in Barcelona out of thirty other teams.

Now, the next step is marketing and logistics.

“We've already gotten into a couple stadiums and venues and started meeting with potential clients,” said Jain. “Eventually, we want to expand to other places where people experience the same problem—theme parks, movie theaters. There's no reason to ever have to wait in line.”

Now more than ever, the mobile landscape is changing the way we interact with the environment. But the mobile landscape itself is also changing—whether it's ordering a plate of nachos without leaving your seat or tracking where your friends are at any given moment—making it easier for aspiring entrepreneurs to get their ideas off the ground and into the market.

Two of these entrepreneurs are fourth-year biopsychology major Brandon Shin and fourth-year

geology/GIS major, who are revolutionizing the way we spend time with friends.

“After you leave the dorms, you have three or four groups of friends but you only really hang out with a couple of them,” said Bernales. “I wanted to know what my peripheral friends were doing, and also I lost touch with my old roommate, which gave me the idea.”

Together, Bernales and Shin, with the help of two other friends, developed an app to help students stay updated on events around campus and in IV. Shin describes it as “an actionable landscape” that allows students to easily access all events on a map interface using event discovery.

“I thought back to Week of Welcome, when there are so many events going on but you don't know where they are,” said Shin. “Notifications are calendar-based or text-based, and you have to go to different websites to access them, which is a pain. We offer an easy-to-use platform.”

The app creates different channels to break down your social life into multiple groups of friends, including different groups that you can follow like Associated Students or the Multicultural Center, and you can get alerts when events are occurring. Pinpoint on a map of the area display where the events are, making them easy to find.

Both Bernales and Shin plan to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors when they graduate, hoping to hit the job market while they have minimal responsibilities, and to try to bridge the gap in technology that exists in the present.

But it doesn't make them take their responsibilities lightly—Shin

understands the importance of hard work, persistence, and taking action.

“Ideas are cheap. There’s no reason to protect ideas...it’s about creating an iterative process,” said Shin. “Ideas are worthless if they just stay ideas, so stop thinking about how everything is going to work and just do it. Find a mentor. Be the person to reach out, really stick your neck out, and see what’s possible.”