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BUZZ

[BRAIN STORM] Power Players

ENTREPRENEURS ARE BECOMING THE FRONT-RUNNERS OF INNOVATION.

BY NICHOLE L. TORRES **ARE YOU A DAVID?** If you're one of the entrepreneurs making a ruckus and leading the innovation edge of the 21st century, then you're who author Glenn Reynolds examines in his book *An Army of Davids: How Markets and Technology Empower Ordinary People to Beat Big Media, Big Government and Other Goliaths*. From the lone writer with an influential political blog to the forward-thinking entrepreneur manufacturing cutting-edge ships for the U.S. Navy, the power to create, influence and innovate is squarely moving from the shoulders of giants to the Davids of the world.

"Tools and techniques that used to be available only to nations or to big organizations are now available to individuals in small businesses [and]

in small groups," says Reynolds. "You're able to do things on a small scale that used to be possible only if done on a very large scale—and that turns out to have all kinds of impacts." Designing a product on a computer, uploading the plans to a design shop and having a prototype shipped to you quickly—that's just one of the innovative possibilities.

One David-like company is Weston, Massachusetts-based GotVMail Communications, founded in 2003 by Siamak Taghaddos and David Houser, both 24. Providing virtual hosted phone systems to other small businesses, the pair pioneered the technology that allows companies to use any type of phone (landline, cellular or VoIP) to route calls to exactly where a person is at any given moment, network employees in different locations within a single system

and pick up voice mails as MP3 files online. The technology even works with PDAs and smartphones. "It has all the functionality and features that you find on a typical phone system, but it's all managed and administered online," says Taghaddos. And because of how this 20-employee company has been able to streamline the process, it's able to offer the service to other entrepreneurs affordably, building sales to a projected \$5 million in 2006.

That's exactly the kind of niche-filling that small David-like companies will be doing in all areas of society. "I think the market will be much 'niche-ier' than it used to be, and so the cream will rise to the top of its particular niche," says Reynolds. "But there are going to be a lot of niches—and there won't be as many megastars."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Got a great idea for a new food product? Now there's an easier way to make your innovative idea a reality: Instead of pitching to a Kraft executive to try to get a sales meeting, simply submit your concept online.

In May, the \$34 billion food and beverage giant launched its Innovate With Kraft program, offering for the first time a standardized process for the public to submit ideas for tasty new products, unique packaging ideas or innovative business processes or systems.

"We've always been open to receiving ideas from people—we just haven't had a user-friendly system to get there," says Todd Abraham, vice president of global research and technology strategy for Kraft Foods. "So this really enables people to get their ideas in front of us."

Though hundreds of ideas have already poured in via Kraft's website (www.kraftfoods.com/innovatewithkraft), you have an edge as an entrepreneur because you have lots of experience pitching ideas and you already know the most effective methods to communicate them.

Ideas that are patented, have the intellectual property in place and are ready to be brought to market are especially eye-catching, says Abraham. But it all boils down to being proactive and taking that first step. So don't hesitate to cash in on your burning idea—it just might sizzle.

—Amanda C. Kooser



70% of people feel that taking risks is more important to success than avoiding mistakes.



Tech savvy: Siamak Taghaddos (l.) and David Houser's phone systems have the innovative edge.