

Entrepreneurial Clients to Watch!

Whether they are selling consumer goods or assisting nonprofits, entrepreneurs have an inventor's resolve that sets them apart from the crowd. Here are the stories of two NIU EIGERlab clients that have identified a problem, created a solution and are succeeding as entrepreneurs.

Nicole Sdao is founder/CEO of NonProfitTHRIVE, a product enabling nonprofits to procure and manage volunteers and track volunteer hours all using one seamless, easy-to-use system.

A life-long volunteer and chiropractor by profession, Nicole thought there should be a simpler, more intuitive way to assist both volunteers with the desire to contribute and nonprofits with the need for volunteers. She used her skills to develop an innovative software product that helps both audiences.

Nicole won NIU EIGERlab's "Spirit of Entrepreneurship" FastPitch Competition award in 2015. Today, she has a total of 515 registered volunteers, 73 nonprofits (19+ in Rockford) and is currently an incubating client in gBETA's sought-after nationally ranked startup accelerator for early-stage companies with local roots.

NonProfitTHRIVE's web-based platform captures verified volunteer hours applying that data for a variety of purposes including PR--marketing companies community engagement, taxes, and to attract new personnel—specifically millennials. Until now, this labor-intensive process was the nonprofit's responsibility to record.

"I think the most defining steps for an entrepreneur are the ones taken after listening to push-back, Nicole says..."Identifying the nature of the push-back will help you to process whether to stay the course or pivot."

For more information about NonProfitTHRIVE, go to <https://nonprofitthrive.com/>.

Santosh Arcot is president of Titan IP, a company engaged in inventing, developing, manufacturing and launching new and innovative products in the consumer goods space like others who have chosen to escape from corporate America, Santosh's previously demanding role as a global marketing manager at a large healthcare company left him with no time for family or friends. He was testing the entrepreneurial waters with his first product on a part-time basis but decided to take the plunge of being a full-time entrepreneur in late 2013 and hasn't looked back.

Santosh learned the ins and outs of bringing a product to market with his first invention, but because of manufacturing issues, he chose to move forward with product number two, which has been a growing success—the HopperTopper™, the ultimate lawn and leaf bag reusable funnel, which is made in the USA. Again, he targeted a pain point that anyone with a yard and trees have—making the removal of leaves and other yard waste more manageable.

The success of the HopperTopper has been impressive. Within one year of hitting the market, the HopperTopper can be found 2000 Walmart locations. Additional retail outlets carrying the product include Bed Bath & Beyond, True Value Hardware, Ace Hardware, DoltBest, Amazon and, soon, Home Depot. Santosh is currently working with NIU EIGERlab's Center for Product Development on a new product that will launch at the 2018 National Hardware Show in May. He is continually considering new problems to solve and new products to invent.

"I told my wife: if you find that there is any task around the house or yard that you think could be improved, be sure to let me know," Santosh says with a smile. Visit <http://hopper-topper.com/> for more information.

NIU EIGERlab embraces startups and supports entrepreneurs like Nicole and Santosh along the pathway toward success. Programming and services are in place at two NIU EIGERlab locations to assist startups and existing businesses—entrepreneurs in all phases. To learn more about the programming and services available, visit www.EIGERlab.org or call 815.753.2192.

By Sherry Pritz