

Award winner used his head

A lack of masculine hair salons in Denver inspires New Yorker's entry in CU-Denver contest.

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When Jung Park moved to Denver from New York City in 2000, something was missing. Park, 33, couldn't find a hair salon where he felt comfortable like the "culturally easier" salons in New York City. The barbershops seemed too "old school," and the unisex salons were intimidating.

The need for a more masculine salon was the drive behind his plan for MetroBoom - a salon for men that provides a variety of hair care and grooming services and the latest trends in fashion.

For his business plan, Park earned top honors and \$10,000 Tuesday at the University of Colorado at Denver's Third Annual Bard Center Business Plan Competition at the Denver Marriott City Center. Park was one of six finalists selected from 31 applicants to make presentations.

Other finalists included an inexpensive insurance-management brokerage firm; a method of diagnosing and monitoring chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; a water purification system for the dental industry; a guide that helps shoppers navigate stores and find sale items; and a means to improve the outcomes of critically ill patients using heat shock proteins.

But Park's presentation stood out.

He grabbed the audience's attention as he focused on "metrosexuals" - straight men into urban culture and looking good - and referred to the styles of the Fab Five from the cable-TV show, "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy."

Jim Lejeal, chief executive and co-founder of Oxlo Systems and a judge of the competition since its start three years ago, said the combination of Park's presentation and his business plan sealed the decision. "His plan was excellent," Lejeal said. "The business strategy was viable, and there was great clarity."

And although every competitor cannot receive the top award, Lejeal believes "they all have potential for success."

"Every business is fraught with risk," Lejeal said. "These businesses aren't any different. But I think our winner has the greatest chance."

Sandy Bracken, executive director of the Bard Center, said the competition is a "stepping stone" for all of the entrants.

"We hope we enhanced the probability of success," Bracken said. "In all, it's to get them to the next level. We are helping new, young companies be successful."

Park's winning business plan wasn't his first choice, however. He originally wanted to propose a customer-relations management system. But after his business partner backed out at the last minute, he had no choice but to go with MetroBoom.

"Honestly, I thought (MetroBoom) was too fluffy," he said referring to the seriousness of some of the biotech proposals. "It seemed very shallow." But with advice from his CU-Denver professor, John Ruhnka, Park pursued his proposal. Park plans on taking his business plan one step at a time to ensure success.

"After a lot of the feedback today, I am first going to work with a financial analyst and make a franchise model," he said. "That's the goal. That's my dream."

Park, an MBA student at CU-Denver, said he would like to expand in areas similar to Denver, such as Phoenix; Austin, Texas; and Columbus, Ohio.

Park received a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the Parsons School of Design in New York City. He will complete his master's in entrepreneurship in December.

Park said Denver residents can expect MetroBoom to debut in January.

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