

Tech Titans Of Tomorrow

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CONFERENCE BRINGS TOGETHER TEEN AND GROWN-UP ENTREPRENEURS Article Launched: 05/14/2008 01:34:57 AM PDT



At 15, Daniel Brusilovsky runs his own podcast and blog about Apple and works part time for a video-streaming company. Operating on Internet time, the sophomore from Aragon High in San Mateo is in a hurry.

On Tuesday, he was in Palo Alto hunting for a venture capitalist to invest in his company, Teens in Tech.

"What's the point of waiting until you're 22 when you can start right now," he asked.

Daniel and his business partner Richard Escobedo, 14, were among the 150 people at Hewlett-Packard's auditorium Tuesday for the second annual "Teens Plugged In" conference sponsored by the non-profit SDForum. The event brings together young and older technology developers.

Executives from Sun Microsystems and Microsoft, innovators and investors gathered to explore teens' interests, inspire them and - possibly - invest in them.

The teens were eager to network.

Daniel and Richard sported dress shirts and chatted up their baby, Teens in Tech, a podcast-blogging-video forum community for teens. They would like to pay their seven employees - currently all working for free - and to afford the \$50-per-month charge to host Teens in Tech's audio files.

"I gave away all my business cards," said Daniel, who is listed as the company's CEO and founder.

Complex market

But if the young entrepreneurs were hunting for deep pockets, the laptop-toting corporate set also saw visions of dollar signs dancing in their heads.

Teens are a potentially lucrative but elusive market.

"Teens have a lot of money to spend but they are very careful what they spend it on," said Steve Hoffman, chief executive officer of the gaming company Rocketon, and a veteran of instant-messaging, games and interactive TV companies.

For instance, young people will pay for ring tones, online games and outfitting characters in a virtual world, he said. If you've got a product to sell to teens, he advised, "The idea for vendors is to make getting into it free. Then once you suck them in, you have to make it enough of a value so that they will part with their money."

The key is to secure teens' loyalty and entice them to invite their friends, panelists said.

Some in the audience asked speakers to think not only of how much they could sell to teens, but what the purpose was. "Do you think about teaching teens to cooperate with their family and society?" asked

Tiffany He, an investor from Fremont, who said she worries about the influence of violent video games on her children.

Technology developers and funders seemed most interested in a panel of teen consumers, whose habits portend tomorrow's market. Panel members offered insight into their media habits.

"I only watch video when I need comic relief from English essays," and then it's YouTube, or sometimes videos from Netflix, said Sejal Hathi, a junior at Notre Dame High School in San Jose.

What they'd pay for

Jonathan Wilde, 15, of Mountain View said he hates calling people on the phone, and would love it if online videos could appear in higher resolution.

But what would they be likely to pay for? Priyanka Bhatia, 16, a sophomore at Lynbrook High School, listed indie music; Deanna Alexander, 17, a senior at Freestyle High School in Mountain View would like to watch more sports online.

But Sejal would be more careful with her dollars. "It would have to be something truly marvelous and amazing," she said, "for me to pay for it."