

UPDATE: RPI Graduate Brothers Do It Again!

Many of you may recall the article we did on five Graduate Brothers from the RPI Chapter and their successes related to HipCal (See August, 2008 Article Below). Well, their entrepreneurial spirit continues. Three of the original five Graduate Brothers – Pete Curley, Garret Heaton, and Chris Rivers left Comcast to develop another project that focuses on internal communications within an organization. They have developed HipChat, an instant message service for companies to utilize for internal communications. “More and more companies are taking an interest in this program and we are excited by the possibilities,” notes Pete. What’s next? “We have had some good success and want to continue to focus on developing HipChat,” they comment. Congratulations to them and Best Wishes!!

Chapter RPI Graduate Brothers Take College Class Project and Turn it Into a Career!

Imagine you’re a graduating senior and the phone rings. It’s a vice president from a major high tech company. He’s calling because he has heard all about this class project you designed, developed and marketed to your college friends. He wants you to fly out to Silicon Valley, company paid of course, to meet with you and learn more about the software you developed. They put you up in a nice hotel, meet with you over two days, wine and dine you, and then it happens... they offer you a job right there on the spot. Too good to be true?! Not for 5 Alpha Chi Rho graduate brothers from RPI. That’s exactly the experience Pete Curley, Chris Rivers, Garret Heaton, Glenn Dixon, and Tawheed Kader had just 2 years ago.

It all started back when Garret was a sophomore. He had to develop a website for an engineering class project. As he thought about it, he decided to develop a website that would facilitate multiple scheduling software packages to be able to interface with each other. The project was a success, in more ways than one. “People in the fraternity started using it a lot to keep track of their schedules,” Garret reflects. “Then Pete suggested that we take it to another level.”

They started marketing to their friends on campus. Their parents gave them \$500 to purchase a domain name; something edgy that would attract students, they thought. So they came up with *MyPIMP – Personal Information Management Portal*. “One thing led to another,” Pete states, “and then we got this phone call from a woman representing a church group. She was interested in using our scheduling website for the church group, but there was a slight problem – the name was too edgy for the group.”

So the men came up with a new domain name – *HipCal*. “It was cool and fun.” The logo was always a cartoon hippo, thus the “Hip” and the “Cal” stands for calendar. Originally, the men let their brothers at Alpha Chi Rho use it, as well as other RPI students. “We posted it on blogs; back then, if we had 301 users in one day we considered it a great day.”



“We never thought about this as an opportunity to develop a start-up company,” Pete offers. “We went about it differently – we just did it.” The men had no business model to work from. They saw a need and tried to help people.

That need turned into a popular site that soon attracted the interest of folks in Silicon Valley. “It was the middle of my senior year,” offers Pete, “and we got a phone call from the Vice President of Engineering at Plaxo just south of San Francisco.” It seems that Plaxo was interested in developing a calendar. “They had heard what we were doing and wanted us to come out to talk with them.” So Plaxo flew out all five men. Each had their own hotel room. “We were used to rooming together, so having our own room was definitely a new experience for us.” As the meetings went along, it was clear to each of them that this was more than just a meeting; this was a job interview. Plaxo representatives made it clear that they wanted to maintain what the men had developed and they wanted each man to come to work at Plaxo on the very same project that they had developed. “Everything was above board. They weren’t trying to steal our idea or use it for something other than what we had designed it for.” The men reflect back on that day they each were offered a job. “It was funny.... We had talked about what the next step was for HipCal, but we never dreamed about this happening.” The men realized that the offer was a good fit and agreed to the offer.

Soon after graduation, the men loaded up their cars and drove out to California. They developed a daily blog of their trip west so that friends and family could read about their trip experiences. “The funniest experience was when Chris hit a dead deer that was in the middle of the road – it was dark and we’re driving and all of a sudden there’s this big thing in the middle of the road. After we ran over it, we stopped and realized it was a dead deer that had been hit before,” Pete states. They all agree that the greatest experience on their travels was when they stayed in a four star Las Vegas hotel for \$13 per night per person.

“The folks at Plaxo thought we were cool because we were fraternity men who developed this calendar system and we were travelling from the east coast to the west coast on this great American road trip; now they just call us ‘the kids’,” Garret says. “It doesn’t feel like work, we are all close friends who get to work together on the same project,” Glenn offers. “They (Plaxo) never tried to split us apart.”

Comcast has just recently purchased Plaxo, but has already assured the men that nothing will change. “They’ve told us do what you need to do,” states Pete. Four of the men have decided to stay with Comcast but are interested in developing a new project. Tawheed moved back to New York to be closer to family and manage a hedge fund.

When asked what they would tell graduating seniors who are interested in being entrepreneurs, they each respond differently, but agree with each other. Chris says, “Starting a website is affordable, but we were very lucky.” Glenn thinks for a moment and replies, “Take a risk; we did something and it worked out for the best.” Garret takes a different tact, “Lead a normal life; don’t let work consume you. Do the



best you can at your job, but also make sure you make time to socialize with others.” Pete ends by saying, “Just do what makes you happy.”

They all admit that they work very hard and put in long hours. However, it’s doing something they enjoy. Each has found a girlfriend who makes sure that they don’t work all of the time. In their off time they like to surf, hike, and just hang out with each other.

When asked about how their experiences in Alpha Chi Rho prepared them for their careers, they all agree on one thing. “Being a leader in our chapter (each was an officer) helped us learn how to deal with people and problems. Fraternity life translates well into the life working in a start-up company – if you do something good, you see the results and learn how your actions can improve something.”

In 2005, HipCal was listed as one of the Top 50 new websites by PC World.

The men end the interview by offering to help other Alpha Chi Rho brothers. “If we can help any brother with information on jobs on the west coast or the high tech industry, please let them know they can contact us.”

