



# GLOBAL INNOVATOR COMPETITION

## *Our Winners' Stories of Success, from the Ground Up*

**Interview with Jase Wilson, CEO of Neighbor.ly, Winner of the 2014 Global Innovator Competition**  
About Neighbor.ly: <http://neighbor.ly/>

### **1. How did you start? Was it like Apple's beginnings in a garage?**

Over breakfast sandwiches at YJ's Third World Snackbar in downtown Kansas City, Missouri. Conversation between a municipal bond trader and me, a civic technologist. We wondered why there wasn't a LendingClub or a Kickstarter for the way cities pay for things? So we decided to build it.

### **2. Personally, what kept you and your team going? What business ethics did you rely on to keep moving forward?**

This is a problem worth solving and we're the right team to do it. So we have to do it. This is a hidden problem that takes money from things like playgrounds and schools from our nation's places. When we solve it, those types of life-enriching amenities increase. Deep motivation.

### **3. What were the hard times like?**

Necessary.

### **4. When did you get your break? What did it feel like?**

We get breaks almost every day and expect them as part of moving in the right direction.

### **5. From day 1 to today, what have you accomplished at Neighbor.ly, and how does it feel?**

To date we've set the stage to rewire the way people invest in places, and the way places finance things that matter. It feels like we're doing what we're supposed to do.

### **6. What are your expectations for the future - your big ideas for Neighbor.ly's future?**

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**Interview with Bobby Voicu, CEO of MavenHut, Winner of the 2013 Global Innovator Competition**  
About MavenHut: <http://www.mavenhut.com/>

### **1. How did you start? Was it like Apple's beginnings in a garage?**

We started MavenHut at an accelerator in Dublin (Startup Bootcamp). It wasn't really a garage, but it was an old studio (I think even U2 recorded there at some moment in time). It was just the three co-founders working on the crazy idea of taking simple games to real time multiplayer.

### **2. Personally, what kept you and your team going? What business ethics did you rely on to keep moving forward?**

First of all, we really liked what we were doing. This kept us going even when the future looked a little bit grim. The most important thing we've had, when it comes to business, is to assume responsibility and always deliver on what we said we would (all three co-founders). This allowed us to move really fast, get things moving and get traction early on in the life of the company.

### **3. What were the hard times like?**

Three guys working in an apartment in Dublin, freezing (Irish people don't really believe in central heating). Then, in the summer, the same three guys working in a small room in Bucharest, without AC, at 40 degrees Celsius. And, in between, trying to get an investment in gaming in the worst possible moment, when Facebook and Zynga IPO-ed.

### **4. When did you get your break? What did it feel like?**

We got our first investment round six months after starting the company, when we already showed proof of traction and everything started to pull together. We received a message from the lawyers at about 1am Bucharest time telling us "All signatures are in." And all I could do was send an email to my co-founders letting them know "Christmas has come early this year!" while thinking "I can hardly wait to go to sleep" (we got the investment early November).

While it's a good feeling when it happens, you start to understand that now you need to prove that the trust your investors put in you wasn't misplaced.

### **5. From day 1 to today, what have you accomplished at MavenHut, and how does it feel?**

We are growing a great company that employs about 20 people right now, two years after starting it. It feels great most of the time, difficult sometimes, exciting and provoking all the time.

It also shows that gaming is a great industry, one in which people from a country known mostly for vampires, without knowing anybody in the industry or without support, can still grow and build something awesome.

### **6. What are your expectations for the future - your big ideas for MavenHut's future?**

Well, I wouldn't mind growing at the same pace. And our big ideas are actually not that big: make MavenHut the company you really want to go to in the morning, in terms of people, feeling and what we work on. If that happens, it will be easy to keep growing.

## **Interview with Gary Ziegler, CEO of eThor, Winner of the 2012 Global Innovator Competition**

About eThor: <http://ethor.com/>

### **1. How did you start? Was it like Apple's beginnings in a garage?**

Initially I started a consulting firm in 2003 focusing on building custom online ordering integration. When I wrote the code for the first system we launched, I did so from my parents' basement. Shortly after I moved into my own place and worked from home for a number of years. In 2010 we decided to build a scalable product that was a POS integration platform. We raised our first seed round of financing and moved to an office. The rest is history.

### **2. Personally, what kept you and your team going? What business ethics did you rely on to keep moving forward?**

For me, I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur. Once I found my big idea there was no turning back. We know there is a huge need for the service we provide and once we gain enough distribution of our product we believe it will change how the world transacts.

I've always believed in being honest and up front with people. If you aren't, it's just a matter of time until people find out that you aren't trustworthy and they won't work with you. It is short sighted to be dishonest and untrustworthy.

### **3. What were the hard times like?**

In the beginning, it's just you locked in a room trying to make something out of nothing. Most people don't believe you can do it, but there's always a few that do and they will help you.

After the initial stages, I thought that the bigger we got and the more successful we got, the easier it would be...but I learned the hard way that it only gets harder. As you grow, you need to deal with more issues like employees, customers, partners, investors and so forth. We've had to deal with running out of money, losing key staff, and poor hiring decisions. Even in the good times it's never easy.

#### **4. When did you get your break? What did it feel like?**

We have had a number of big wins. We won a few other competitions before GTS, but GTS was one of the events that got us the most recognition. Beyond that, having Mark Cuban invest was a big moment as well. That said, we haven't "made it" yet so I feel like our big break is still to come.

#### **5. From day 1 to today, what have you accomplished at eThor and how does it feel?**

We've gone from a simple idea to a full product that is growing like crazy. The need for what we provide is immense, and we continue to see more and more developers sign up for our service every day. It feels great to know that we are solving such a huge problem in the industry and we are excited to see where it goes.

#### **6. What are your expectations for the future - your big ideas for eThor's future?**

Our expectations based on our recent progress is that we will have both large companies, as well as upstart entrepreneurs using our system to make their software better and more effective. Eventually, we see our software being a key piece of the puzzle in the \$15 trillion online to offline industry.

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