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CALS NYS Internship Program 2015
StartFast Venture Accelerator & the Greater Syracuse Community

Biography

- Originally from CA but currently residing in Syracuse, NY
- Interested in economic and community development, both domestically and internationally
- Excited to contribute to improving socioeconomic conditions in my new home city

Learning Action Plan

Professional Goals
- Learn about entrepreneurship and the tech industry
- Gain workplace confidence and competence
- Develop marketing and market research skills
- Better understand community development processes

Personal Goals
- Gain confidence
- Gain clearer sense of purpose
- Better understand Syracuse and what makes the community special

Community Profile

- Fifth largest city in NYS, with metropolitan population of 720,000
- Home to 9 institutions of higher education
- Proportion of population aged 19-24 higher than state average
- Historic shifts in industry leave Syracuse in a position to redefine its economy, having most recently transitioned away from manufacturing
- Now, health care, higher education, and service industries are top employers
- Large push to revitalize city and develop its high tech industry, with over $1.2 billion in related development investments

Host Profile

Founded in 2012, StartFast Venture Accelerator invites 5 companies from an international pool of 2,000 applicants to Syracuse each summer to accelerate their growth over a three month period. By providing companies with seed capital, working space, interns, mentorship, and networking and investment opportunities, StartFast not only helps participating companies develop rapidly, but also introduces them to the Syracuse and Upstate entrepreneurial scenes, often leading to them deciding to stay in the area. It is part of a broader initiative spearheaded by regional organizations, like Upstate Venture Connect, to redefine Upstate New York as a hub for tech entrepreneurship.

Internship Responsibilities

Worked with three companies on a wide variety of tasks:
- Created and maintained company Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts.
- Analyzed social media data to refine marketing strategy.
- Launched four online marketing campaigns using Google AdWords and Facebook Ads.
- Designed web pages for A/B testing. Researched markets, regulatory and intellectual property environments, venture capital funds, and government grants.
- Drafted and successfully submitted legal exemption request.
- Conducted customer surveys and outreach (web and cold calls) to assess market and inform pricing strategy.
- Drafted press release and maintained press relations.

Community Engagement

For my community engagement project, I worked with my internship host, Nasir Ali, and Upstate Venture Connect on a project aimed at better serving and retaining entrepreneurial students in Upstate New York. Recognizing the over 500,000 college students in the region as a key regional asset and the economic development challenges presented by their tendency to leave the region upon graduation, my project entailed assessing where and why a disconnect exists between entrepreneurial students and local communities and organizations.

My task:
- Carried out interviews with 20 students from 7 distinct collegiate entrepreneurship programs in NYS
- Attended regional entrepreneurship conferences and networking events
- Generate to be distributed to regional stakeholders, entrepreneurial organizations, and universities including the following key deliverables:
  1. Student Profile: What is the typical entrepreneurial student? How can they best be reached and communicated to?
  2. Successes: Where is the Upstate community succeeding in providing for and retaining young entrepreneurs?
  3. Challenges and Recommendations: Where can resources be improved to better incentivize retention and eventual attraction of young entrepreneurs?

Next Steps:
Next year’s CALS NYS intern would work with UVC and other community partners to take decisive action steps based on the community’s reception of the proposals I offer them.