

Innovation focus

Sprint to the finish line

Vaud students gain invaluable experience in real-life Design Sprint process

The Vaud Board of Higher Education (DGES) teamed up with MassChallenge Switzerland, a nonprofit accelerator for promising startups, to offer students from Vaud Institutions of Higher Education (HES and HEP) a unique opportunity to participate in a 5-day Design Sprint. Two startups, Brave Foods and Liquid Logical, seized the occasion to benefit from this process, which was guided by Stephane Cruchon of Design Sprint SA in Lausanne.

First developed by Jake Knapp and the UX specialists of Google Ventures, Design Sprint is a proven system to accelerate the process to design, prototype and test a product, strategy or any business idea in just five days. Each day is dedicated to a step of the process: understand; diverge (a.k.a. sketch); converge (a.k.a. decide); prototype; and test with a target audience. The process has been successfully used by both disruptive start-ups and Fortune 500 companies to launch new or redesigned products, solve problems, align vision or win new markets.

Fourteen students from a broad spectrum of fields were selected for the event at the MassChallenge site in Renens in September 2019. The program was specifically for Bachelor's students without previous innovation experience. Bringing challenging and fresh perspectives, they worked alongside entrepreneurs under the guidance of Cruchon, a UX Designer who fulfills the role of "Sprintmaster" during the sessions.

Interdisciplinary teamwork

A key part of the selection process for student team members was to bring in different perspectives, including those from fields not typically seen as being associated with entrepreneurial ventures – for example, two nursing students, two social worker and two radiology technologist students took part. Many of the students say they gained new appreciation for how divergent perspectives are important to good design.

"The complementarity that comes from an interdisciplinary team is fundamental," said Aline. "[It] enables us all to each bring our own skills for mutual benefit."

For Switi, the week's most impactful take-home was, "Working together in a team made up of various professions that have – you'd think – little in common with, to reach a common goal, building a project starting at zero and getting to the production of a real prototype."

Entrepreneurs in action

It was an eye-opener for the students to realize how much work happens before any entrepreneur becomes an “overnight sensation”.

“The week and the work with Liquid Logical have made me aware of the amount of work that goes into such a project,” said Paola, one of the participants.

“I now better understand all that’s behind a start-up, the huge amount of work the CEOs put in, challenges, risks, innovation and so forth,” agreed Myriam. “I was able to see that by being organized and exchanging ideas, it is possible to innovate in any field.”

Concrete outcomes

Liquid Logical’s Design Sprint resulted in a prototype for a new, complete website to publicly present the technology and its applications. “[Design Sprint] is a set format which works for some of the best companies around the world,” said Liquid Logical CEO Timothy Popov. “Seeing the student get engaged with my company was really cool as well as getting to know the students themselves.”

The Design Sprint team that worked with Brave Foods tested specific products in the works to better identify target audiences and ultimately reach new clientele. Brave Foods CEO Ladislav Beuzelin said he was impressed with “the energy and ideas the students were putting into the Design Sprint and into a company they did not know a few hours before the start of the Design Sprint.”

High five!

Like sports teams, Design Sprint teams high five each other after each milestone. More than a Silicon Valley habit, the high five is an act integrated into Design Sprint. At first it might seem silly, but high fives reinforce both teamwork and concentration. How does raising your hand and hitting the palms of your teammates do this? When you’re not concentrated – not observing what your teammate is doing – your high five can slip awkwardly to the side of

Two stand-out startups

Liquid Logical

Liquid Logical, one of MassChallenge Switzerland’s top 12 finalists in their 2019 accelerator program, has developed and patented a technology that heats water using the exact amount of energy, water and time required. The UK-based company says the tankless solution can significantly decrease environmental impact by reducing water waste and CO₂ emissions.

Brave Foods

Brave Foods, based in Lausanne, has created a line of snack products called SMOWL, a “delicious and balanced” mix of superfoods. The snack’s distinction is that while it is a 100% organic and gluten-free source of protein and fiber, it is convenient and easily portable. Somewhere between a smoothie and a muesli, SMOWL comes in closeable pouches.

their hands. Instead, you must focus: You look at your teammate, you connect with their hand and you connect with *them*. Together you create an encouraging clap that says, “We did it!” It’s a statement of good collaborative design. How much does this matter? Several student participants said the high fives were the most memorable element of the week.

masschallenge.org/programs-switzerland

www.design-sprint.com

liquidlogical.com

www.smowl.ch