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Posted on 06/22/2015

StartupBus Day 4: Judging begins

This was it. All the buspreneurs from across North America were reunited at Studio 615 in Nashville for the last two days of the StartupBus journey. It was the moment of truth: finals.

Each team made their pitch to Elias (founder of StartupBus), Ricky, and Cole (National Directors of StartupBus), but only 15 projects would make it to semifinals. Meanwhile, the other teams were still working on their projects in another room. We watched the pitches in the other room projected on a wall with a mixture of excitement and stress. It was definitely a competition in some ways – but we were "competing" against friends. When a team was done with their pitch, they would return to laughter and cheers from the others in the main room. We all supported each other. Luckily for me, our team was the first to pitch so we didn't have to stress out waiting for our turn.

> A quiet crowd of #buspreneurs is listening quietly listening to their fellows pitch! All supporting each other :) pic.twitter.com/muuwSPR28f
>
> — Nicolas Grenié (@picsoung) June 7, 2015

> Judges of the first round @TheStartupBus are about to announce the semi-finalists #startupbus pic.twitter.com/EFKcOLwEVX
>
> — Nicolas Grenié (@picsoung) June 7, 2015

At the end of the afternoon, they announced the teams selected for semifinals – and we were one of them! We were so happy to be part of it, and we had only 15 minutes to prepare before going on stage to pitch for semifinals. At about the same time, someone in Nashville placed an order on our app. Since we had launched our product the day before we had started to see orders come up. Most of them were from friends or people on the other side of the country, so we couldn't make the deliveries. But this one was in Nashville, and it turned out to be just around the corner from the venue! We had to go, now!

While my team was busy prepping for our semifinals pitch, I packed our delivery in a spare lunchbox, wrote a nice thank-you note and decorated it with one of our lovely stickers. Then, off we go! I jumped in the car of a previous buspreneur, a winner from last year, and we drove around the block to deliver our first real order. It went very smoothly. We even made it in enough time to take pictures and include them in our slides. *That* showed real traction. We knew the judges love seeing this kind of traction and having tangible facts to support our ideas, so this would mean major points for us! Our first client was really surprised by the delivery – he didn't even see the car pulling over in front of his house. We had succeeded in our mission of being fast and discreet! Definitely a win. He posted on Reddit to testify that we were legit. :)

> Don't freak out if you see people running in circle and talking by themself… It's ok they are preping for #startupbus pitch @TheStartupBus
>
> — Nicolas Grenié (@picsoung) June 7, 2015

Our pitch at semifinals went really well, but the most interesting part was watching the other teams since it was our first opportunity to hear what some of them had been working on. Some of my favorites were PillyPod, a device to help elderly people keep track of their medication schedules, and BlockMafia from our friends on the Florida bus, a real life Monopoly game where you buy buildings and make your friends pay if they step foot into one of them. I was also really impressed by the projects that came out of the first ever MakerBus. It had come from Chicago and stopped in TechShops at night to develop prototypes. They'd built sensor toys, a display incrusted in a mirror, a proximity sensor for your car, and the pill tracker – all while on the road. While other teams were pushing code to the cloud, they'd actually been testing and iterating on physical products.

Just before the end of the day, a panel of judges (ex-buspreneurs) announced the 5 finalists: Pizzafy, PillyPod, ReflectMe, Razly, and Screet.

We were so happy to be part of the final list, and we felt good about our progress. We had a working prototype, some interest from users, and a pitch ready. That night, we decided to take a break from the StartupBus madness to enjoy a night of country music in Nashville and get some rest. The final day would be very intense.

