



EUROPE November 14, 2006, 1:07PM EST

Europe's Best Young Entrepreneurs

BusinessWeek.com's first annual contest waded through some Internet click-tricks to turn up a fascinating and diverse group of go-getters

by [Andy Reinhardt](#)

It may not have had the glitz and glamour of the annual Eurovision Song Contest, but BusinessWeek.com's first annual Best Young European Entrepreneurs competition elicited a similar nail-biting desire to win among its participants—and a bit of patriotism from the public.

Now, at last, it is time to reveal the winners. The contest began last summer, when we asked readers of the Europe and Small Biz channels on BusinessWeek.com to suggest young business-owners to be included in a survey. The only criteria were that the candidates had to be European, 25-years-old or younger, and running the show.

When the nominations closed on Oct. 1, we had a collection of fascinating and diverse entrepreneurs. Their ages go from 21 to 25, though one of them started his first company when he was 13 and another joined the family business at 15. Their innovative startups run the gamut from Web sites and consumer products companies to an events management firm and an importer of drip irrigation systems.

THE ODYSSEY BEGINS

Interviews with the nominees produced terrific tales of serendipity, opportunity, setbacks, and strategy shifts. We put the stories of these 16 young men running 15 companies—no qualifying women were nominated by our readers—into an article (see BusinessWeek.com, 10/9/06, "[Europe's Young Entrepreneurs](#)") and a slide show that allowed viewers to vote for their favorite candidate (see BusinessWeek.com, 10/9/06, "[Bright Ideas from Young European Minds](#)").

The voting began. For a few weeks, it was fairly orderly, as two or three candidates jockeyed for position in the standings. We encouraged the nominees to solicit support from their friends and clients. Three of the entrepreneurs, who run Web-based businesses, added "buttons" on their Web sites that allowed customers to cast a vote in their favor. Though the contest rules don't ban this, some of the nominees who run regular businesses expressed concern that online vote solicitations could give Web business owners an unfair advantage.

Then things went wacky. Automated voting scripts, or "robots," began casting huge numbers of votes for certain candidates. In the last four days of the tally, more than a million votes a day were piling in for one nominee, who saw his total in the standings surge to 99% while the rest of the candidates slid down to zero.

BATTLING BACK THE ROBOTS

Fortunately, technology came to the rescue. Once the polling closed on Nov. 1, we went to work analyzing

the more than 4.3 million votes cast. As planned, we eliminated multiple votes from the same Internet Protocol (IP) address, which meant, in layman's terms, that we counted only one vote per person.

Poof! The deleterious effects of the robot scripts were wiped away, and we were left with 8,807 good votes. The entrepreneurs had succeeded in attracting plenty of attention from real readers—and all of them pulled in plenty of support.

The leader (drum roll) was the Netherlands' Ben Woldring, who got nearly a quarter of the filtered votes. No question, Woldring's business, www.bencom.nl, has earned customer loyalty. A collection of eight shopping comparison sites, it is used by thousands of Dutch men and women to search for the best deals on mobile phone services, broadband connections, and home utilities. Woldring put a "vote for me" button on his sites, and was no doubt helped by extensive press coverage in the Netherlands.

INDIAN CULTURE ONLINE

Running a Web site wasn't a prerequisite to success, though. The runner-up was England's James Gibson, with just under 19% of the vote, who invented a clever new way to dispense trash bags from the bottom of the garbage pail. In third place, with 12.8% of the votes: Lars Duursma, another Dutchman, who runs a successful consultancy that teaches debate and communications skills to politicians and business people.

Close behind, the No. 4 winner was another Web business, Desitouch.com, and its British founder, Karm Singh. A popular destination site for online Indian music and movies, it has attracted an audience from Britain to Bollywood. Singh put a "vote for me" button on his site.

Voters also took a shine to Germany's Marvin Dominic Andrä and his Bagpax Cargo Systems, which sells a series of plush plastic trunk-liners that protect car interiors from dirty payloads. Rounding out the top ranks, nearly 8% of readers voted for Julien Genestoux and his French student job-finding site, Jobetudiant.net. Genestoux was one of the three Web-based business owners who solicited votes on his own site.

In the end, the votes don't really matter. All of the nominees deserve recognition—and many of them have received it already thanks to the contest and a volley of local press coverage. Some entrepreneurs came out on top, but all of them merit equal praise and encouragement for having the courage and sense of adventure to launch their own businesses at such a young age.

Congratulations to all the participants—and best of luck going forward.

To view a slide show of the winners, [click here](#).

[Reinhardt](#) is Europe channel editor for BusinessWeek.com.

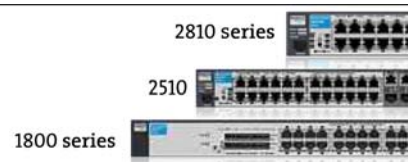
Copyright 2000-2006 by The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc. All rights reserved.

The McGraw-Hill Companies



Introducing ProCurve's newest Switches

▶ Get up to \$750 cash back now



EUROPE'S BEST YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS



No. 5

Marvin Dominic Andrä

www.bagpax.com
Saarbrücken, Germany
Age: 24

Like most inventions, Marvin Dominic Andrä's "a-ha" moment came from a real-life experience. Asked by his father to take some garden clippings to the dump, Andrä was startled while driving by a spider that climbed out of the load and nearly got on his face. Had he been an arachnophobe, Andrä says, he might have crashed the car.

Thus was born BagPax, a series of padded liners that fit in the truck or back of a car and protect it from messy payloads—whether dirty children's toys, sandy beach togs, or bug-laden compost. "Germans like clean cars," says Andrä, who has sold hundreds of the patent-pending BagPax, which cost from \$38 to \$62, over the Internet and through German auto shops. Big contracts are on the horizon.



Andrä, an economics graduate from Saarbrücken University, set up BagPax from the beginning as a "virtual" company, with suppliers and partners in Turkey and Poland and a call center in Karlsruhe. For now, the trunk liners are only sold in Germany, but "it could work elsewhere, too," Andrä says. Spoken like a true entrepreneur.

[Read the story](#)

[Reader comments](#)

[More Slide Shows](#)