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## WKU students advance in entrepreneurship contest

By DON SERGENT [dsergent@bgdailynews.com](mailto:dsergent@bgdailynews.com) 43 min ago

It's the season of survive and advance, and two Western Kentucky University students have done just that, reaching what amounts to the national finals for entrepreneurship students.

Kyla Ball, who completed her WKU studies in December, and Allie McCreery, who will graduate in May, created a product called Swatched that has landed them in the Schulze Entrepreneurship Challenge alongside competitors from such bluebloods as Auburn, Northeastern and Princeton universities.

A video about their product – a container designed to help women on the go better organize their cosmetics – helped the two WKU entrepreneurship students stand out from an original field of more than 100 applicants and reach the field of 25 finalists who will compete April 11-13 in Minneapolis for a total of \$250,000 in prize money.

The Swatched product contains foundation, concealer, bronzer, blush, highlighter and mascara in a thin container smaller than a cellphone.

"It was Kyla's idea," McCreery said. "Being on the go a lot, she has found herself without her makeup. I liked her idea and saw potential in it, so I joined her."

McCreery said the Swatched container can simplify the packing of cosmetics and also eliminate concerns about airport security.

"This eliminates the bulky makeup bag," she said. "Depending on the size of the bag, it can be an issue with airport security."

In addition to coming up with the concept, Ball and McCreery used computer software to design the product and have been able to create some prototypes with a 3-D printer.

With help from WKU Visiting Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Pedro Tonhozi de Oliveira, the duo fine-tuned the product and created the seven-minute video that earned them a spot in the Minneapolis competition that was started by Best Buy founder Richard Schulze.

"I saw the potential they have," Oliveira said. "We try to get them from good to great."



McCreery said Oliveira's guidance was a big factor in helping prepare the business plan for Swatched.

"Our product and our understanding of markets has evolved tremendously," she said. "Dr. Oliveira helped us with the financial end and with understanding what we want our target market to be."

That guidance has helped Ball and McCreery advance to a competition that carries a \$75,000 grand prize and a \$40,000 prize for second place. The three-day event also includes prizes for an innovation challenge and an "elevator pitch" contest.

"It seems surreal that it's actually happening," McCreery said.

The budding entrepreneur said this isn't just an academic exercise.

"Eventually, we'd like to get it (Swatched) going, depending on how the Schulze competition goes," McCreery said. "It's definitely something we hope to accomplish within the next year or two."

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