



Reliving the adventure

One year on and the winners of our Venture Candy competition are still going strong. After pocketing a prize package including £50,000 worth of Metro advertising, hosted IT and communications from Outsourcery, marketing and branding help, a PA service and membership of The Hub business club, we revisited the winners to find out how their

businesses have fared. The competition, which was shortlisted by top businessmen and women and voted for by Metro readers, recognised new, innovative start-ups in five categories – Fashion & Interiors, Green, Design & Technology, Health & Beauty and Food & Drink. Here are the favourites, as voted for by you, 12 months on.

Food & Drink

Graze.com

Graze.com caught the attention of Venture Candy judges and won 78 per cent of the public vote last year in the Food & Drink category. The company helps deskbound snackers make healthy, organic choices by delivering boxes of healthy snacks to the home and workplace.

Employees stuck on industrial estates or city workers who find it difficult to get out of the office can order everything from olives to flapjacks online. The Graze team sources, boxes and delivers the snacks across the country to ensure quality control, and charges £3.49 a box including delivery.

Before Venture Candy, Graze.com delivered 50,000 boxes a week. A year later, that figure has risen to 115,000, while the long-term goal is to expand globally and deliver 1 million boxes a week.

Ben Jones, 29 (pictured), who set up the business with six school friends, says: 'We hadn't done any newspaper advertising before Venture Candy because we weren't sure how it would fit with our business. Winning the prize was perfect because it



allowed us to try out advertising for free and we were really pleased with the result. We came up with a concept to explain what we do and it worked well in Metro because we target people who are on the go and may find it difficult to grab a healthy snack. We are very proud of what we do and we felt very honoured to have been chosen above such strong competition.'

Health & Beauty



Smilepod Limited

Smilepod is a high-street dentist offering cleaning, whitening and straightening services while using the convenient, drop-in model of a hairdresser or beauty parlour.

The first Smilepod studio opened in Covent Garden, London, two years ago and it has recently won investment from a venture capitalist firm in order to expand. Co-founder Mike Hutter, 50, believes winning such a big competition assisted in securing the investment.

There are now another two Smilepod studios – one in the City, near Bank, and another in Canary Place, in the heart of Canary Wharf. Hutter (pictured) says: 'Thanks to the credibility given to the company after

winning an award from Metro, we were able to get a foot in the door with investors and have been able to expand the company. We are hoping to open more studios across London and then we want to take the concept nationwide.

'Everyone dreads going to the dentist but they don't dread going to the hairdressers. I studied that idea before we opened up and have tried to make going to the dentist an enjoyable, convenient experience, offering the services people want. Metro readers fit perfectly with our target audience. We are about to use our prize to have a big advertising push during May, which is really exciting.'

Green

Econogo

It was a close call in the green category last year but Econogo – the business behind the Yogo electric scooter – fought off stiff competition to come in at No.1 in the vote.

The Yogo is the first electric scooter to feature a removable battery that lasts for 40 miles and can be charged in 25 minutes in your home.

James South, 29 (pictured), says he saw massive demand for the scooters following the publicity generated by Venture Candy and is currently looking for investment to further expand the company.

He adds: 'We completely sold out of the scooters last year and there is currently a waiting list for this



summer's stock. We are currently looking for investors to help expand the company. Venture Candy gave us a great boost and we are yet to use the full extent of our prize – we still have all of the free advertising to use, so it's really positive.'

Fashion & Interiors

A Suit That Fits.com

A company that specialises in affordable, tailor-made suits, designed online and hand-crafted in Nepal, was the creation of school friends Warren Bennett and David Hathiramani (pictured) and won the Fashion & Interiors section of last year's awards.

A Suit That Fits.com had shops in 22 locations after winning Venture Candy but has since expanded to 30 shops – and expects to open a further 11 in 2011.

Hathiramani says: 'We were ecstatic when we won Venture Candy. It was a huge pat on the back for all our staff and customers who have supported us over the past few years.'

'We have seen big growth over the last year and our prize has allowed us to

work with the marketing team at Metro to reach out to potential customers who are a perfect fit for our product. We previously didn't do very much marketing in newspapers at all.

'We make sure that we support our workers in Nepal – they are paid 50 per cent more than other tailors in the region, so we are always able to attract the best talent and provide a quality product for a fraction of the price of a tailor-made suit in this country.'



Design & Technology

FreshMax Shirts

Former Manchester University students Oliver Van Emden and Bradley Rose (pictured) took home the title of best Design & Technology product last year with their invention of the shirt that doesn't show sweat patches.

FreshMax Shirts was eight-and-a-half years in the design and manufacturing process before the duo were able to successfully market the product. Since winning, their company, Lighttext Limited has gone global, selling to countries across the world via the website freshmaxshirts.com.

'We have had a fantastic reaction to the product in the last year,' Van Emden says. 'We launched our website just after the competition and we're now selling our shirts online to customers in more than 20 countries.'



'We're also really excited because the shirts will shortly appear on the shelves of a well-known UK high-street retailer, although we still can't say too much about that. We're also speaking to potential partners across the globe to distribute the shirts even further. Venture Candy has really helped us market the product.'