Testable, an app that recreates the social, competitive atmosphere of studying with friends

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Dan Nguyen and Gerard D'Onofrio (MD/MBA candidates, 2018) first discussed creating a study app in February 2015, when they were preparing for their Step 1

exam. Credit: Keith B Bratcher

Dan Nguyen and Gerard D'Onofrio (MD/MBA candidates, 2018) didn't matriculate at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School (NJMS) with the intention of becoming tech entrepreneurs. But thanks to the school's Distinction Program in Entrepreneurship and Innovation and their own hard work, that's what's happened. Their app, Testable, which offers medical students a social, competitive way to study for exams, rolled out on the iOS platform this past spring.

"The idea for Testable actually came from our experiences as medical students," Nguyen says. "Trying to learn all this information in a short period of time forces you to get creative with your study habits. One of the most effective ways for me to review is in groups with my friends. We ask each other questions because we've found that being able to explain the correct answers to each other reinforces the material."

Nguyen and D'Onofrio first discussed creating a study app in February 2015, when they were preparing for their Step 1 exam. "Like any good medical students, Dan and I were studying, going over the review books, and answering questions," explains D'Onofrio. "We developed a study method where we would throw questions at each other, and quickly recognized that there was a game-like quality to it."

The two wanted their app to recreate the social atmosphere of studying with friends. "By making it competitive," Nguyen says, "and allowing students to go head-to-head against other students, and answer real test-like questions, the app not only gives you practice, it also forces you to study actively." But a funny thing happened on the way to the App Store: med school got in the way. They became so busy that the app was put on the back burner for a few months.

In early 2016, Nguyen and D'Onofrio hired a software developer and Testable was born. Students use the app to challenge each other to games of five multiple-choice questions. "If I challenge you," D'Onofrio explains, "then we each complete our five questions on our own time. When we've both finished, we see who did better. The score, and the winner, is determined first on accuracy and then on time."

Once the game ends, students can review thorough explanations for each of their answer choices. "That's something that sets us apart," D'Onofrio adds. "Not only is our content geared toward education, but Testable encourages students to really learn the material. If you get it wrong, you don't just go to the next game without thinking about it. You have the opportunity to go over each answer until it's clear."

Testable has already been a hit with NJMS students. "We put 210 questions that were specific to the Surgery Shelf Exam into our application." D'Onofrio says. The Surgery Shelf is a National Board of Medical Examiners standardized test that medical students must pass to fulfill their third-year surgery requirement. Scoring above 90 percent merits honors for the surgery rotation. "We distributed it to all the NJMS surgery students who had a compatible device. Dan and I actually used our own app to study for the Surgery Shelf, which was really cool."

With the benefit of hindsight, the success of two hard-working [medical students](#) might seem inevitable (if not exactly easy). Still, having an idea for an app is one thing, bringing it to fruition is something else altogether. Fortunately for Nguyen and D'Onofrio, NJMS not only encourages creativity, it also offers students the opportunity to explore their ideas.

"Gerard and I are part of NJMS's Distinction Program in Entrepreneurship and Innovation," Nguyen says. "We've been very fortunate to have a great mentor in Dr. George Heinrich, the Dean of

Admissions. He was my mentor when I first thought about this idea, before we even developed it, and his advice about what the next step should be, or how to approach a certain problem, has been really valuable."

Nguyen and D'Onofrio will spend the next 12 months earning MBAs at Rutgers and developing their business. "We plan to increase Testable's medical content," D'Onofrio says. "Our long-term goal is to have almost every standardized exam on our application for easy and convenient use."

"Our experience with this app really shows how much the NJMS administration and faculty care about their students and want them to succeed," Nguyen adds. "Just the fact that they were willing to let Gerard and me take on such a big task to try to create a company and obtain a dual degree is amazing. I don't know many other medical schools that would give their students this kind of freedom."

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