**M-Lab Project Proposals, Fall 2013**

1. **Canary Telehealth – Call Center Strategy for Startup Remote Healthcare Business (healthcare, call center technology, finance, operations),** [www.canarytelehealth.com](http://www.canarytelehealth.com)

**Business:** Canary Telehealth is a startup operating in the exciting and emerging telehealth sector – which is widely anticipated to have a substantial impact on reducing healthcare costs while improving quality and access. Canary provides remote patient monitoring services to help people with chronic conditions better manage their condition to avoid hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and complications such as blindness and amputation.

Specifically, Canary supplies wireless monitors (e.g., blood pressure cuffs, weight scales) to designated individuals. Their measurements are automatically transmitted to a secure online portal where our nurses monitor and intervene when necessary – coaching and guiding the individual and alerting their physician or family members.

We serve payers (insurance companies, large employers, government programs) and providers (hospitals, physician practices, and home health agencies) who seek to reduce costs while improving health outcomes.

**Project Description:** Canary nurses remotely monitor vital signs from a call center via an online portal. We must identify the optimal way to provide the call center – buy vs. build vs. outsource. Specifically, we must identify the pros and cons of acquiring an existing call center, gradually ramping up our own call center staff or outsourcing to existing call centers.

The project will entail:

* Conducting an industry analysis of the call center industry overall, and medical call centers in particular
* Evaluating the acquisition landscape (ie, are there apt to be a fair amount of acquisition targets)
* Developing a high-level financial model to evaluate the P&L implications of the alternatives
* Ultimately, students may provide a point of view on the optimal approach (this final point is good consulting practice for the students, however the above analysis with an assessment of the alternatives sans a final recommendation would still be highly valuable and a successful project)

**Deliverable:** A perspective on the alternative approaches to activating a call center, ideally with a recommendation on optimal alternative.

**Additional Consideration:** My professional background is management consulting - ~4 years with McKinsey & Company and 10 years with The Cambridge Group where I focused on growth strategy. As such, I have substantial experience structuring and managing consulting projects. Students with an interest in consulting may appreciate exposure to project structuring commonly used in the consulting industry.

Overall, this project would be of value to students with an interest in entrepreneurship, corporate development, M&A, private equity or consulting.

1. **Check Please! – Business Plan** **to Increase Revenue of Check Please! Brand (marketing, brand, strategy, entertainment),** [www.checkplease.tv](http://www.checkplease.tv)

**Business:** Check, Please! began as a local television show in Chicago in 2001 where real people recommend and review their favorite restaurants. The show has become a beloved brand in Chicago and has expanded to five additional cities including San Francisco, Miami, Seattle, Phoenix and Kansas City. In addition to the TV series that airs on PBS affiliates, Check, Please! also has robust websites in each market, has an online eblast and affiliated website called the Check, Please! Planner in Chicago (with the possibility of going national), creates and holds events like the Check, Please! Farm to Table Festival in Michigan as well as several "Taste Of Check, Please! fundraising events.  We have limited merchandise like caps and T-shirts.

Check, Please! LLC is the owner of the trademark and company and creates license agreements for the show to be created and broadcast in the additional cities.  Check, Please! is a diverse, authentic, trusted brand that is widely known in Chicago and beyond. Our goal is to increase revenue while not significantly diluting the brand.

**Project description:** Check, Please! would like a business plan to address several questions:

* How does Check, Please! creatively leverage the brand to increase revenue?
* How can Check, Please! create a national product instead of, or in addition to, multiple local products?
* What "offshoots" can Check, Please! create (memberships, deals, publications, merchandise).
* Can Check, Please! find a major partner to increase expansion?
* Can Check, Please! create a compelling business plan to raise funds?

1. **The Chicago Food Cooperative – Business Plan for Food Coop in Northern Chicago (sustainability, food & agribusiness, corporate strategy, marketing),** [www.chicago.coop](http://www.chicago.coop)

**Business**: Chicago Cooperative will be a big, bright, beautiful community-owned grocery store featuring organic, local, and sustainably farmed produce, meat and dairy products, seafood, canned, dried, and frozen foods, bulk foods, wine, beer and liquor, dry goods and groceries. It will offer high-quality services including true butcher service, delicious prepared foods, fresh baked goods, salad, juice and coffee bars, and will create a community hub by offering a commercial kitchen, space for workshops, classes, meetings, and performances, and a community garden.

Chicago Cooperative will provide farm-to-table transparency about food, its origins and its processes. It will educate its community about nutrition, ingredient sourcing, and methods of production, and will share information about food’s social, economic and environmental characteristics. As an employer, a neighborhood anchor and responsible citizen, Chicago Cooperative will demonstrate its active commitment to true sustainability and integrity through environmental stewardship, fair labor practices, and cooperative principles of:

* Member-owned but open to everyone
* Economically and culturally diverse
* Accessible and friendly to all modes of transportation
* Reflects members' values through mindful actions made with integrity and purpose
* More than just a grocery store; devoted to the triple bottom line: People, Planet and Profit.

**Project description:** Chicago Cooperative is looking for assistance developing a business and marketing and plan. Some preliminary marketing research has been completed, but research is still needed in the areas demographics, competitors, geographic barriers, demand for co-op goods and services, site impacts and potential other topics. This is a terrific opportunity for students who are interested in organic and local products as well as sustainable businesses and cooperative principles.

1. **Garrett Technologies, Inc. – Growth Strategy Plan: Moving from entrepreneurial to established – (healthcare, human resources, organization design)**

**Business:**  Founded 2001, Garrett Technologies is a product development company for the biomedical industry. We are located in Northbrook with approximately 35 team members. We specialize in advanced electrical/mechanical/optical engineering and embedded software development. Our expertise includes both extensive design of Class II and III medical devices and a broad development of consumer products.

**Project Description:** Our management concern is managing company growth with a drive towards professional management and resource maturity with the ability to manage operational issues effectively.

We are committed to have the resources to deliver as demand increases, to have processes for every aspect of the business, plus a well thought-out system for monitoring that the processes are working. We are interested in a plan that addresses how to best structure ourselves for growth, including marketing, human resources, quality, and client management.

**Deliverable:** Our deliverable could be a broad plan addressing numerous issues or a deeper plan on one or two areas (e. g. Human Resources, company structure, metrics and statistics), dependent on initial research.

1. **Ignite Progress – Marketing Plan to Expand Educational Services (marketing, finance, operations, education, technology),** [www.igniteprogress.com](http://www.igniteprogress.com)

**Business:** Ignite Progress provides college readiness services to primarily high school students in the form of standardized test prep, financial aid advising, admissions counseling and strengths assessments. About one third of our market is affluent communities within Chicago and the surrounding suburbs, while two thirds is schools, non-profits, churches and CBOs in under-resourced Chicago neighborhoods.

**Project Description:** This will be a marketing strategy challenge for students to solve, with a $12,000 budget. We are looking to expand significantly into several Chicago charter school networks: Noble Street charters, Chicago International charters, KIPP, LEARN, Perspectives & UNO. I would like the Kellogg team to assist us in discerning a marketing plan to effectively reach 2-3 of these networks, an operational plan for execution, and a financial allocation for how to carry that out.

**Deliverables:** As outlined above:

1. Marketing plan to reach that target audience
2. Operations plan to carry out the marketing plan
3. Financial plan to support the other two

**Kellogg article:** http://kellogg.northwestern.edu/news\_articles/2013/07152013-

start-me-up-eric-fenton-ignite-test-progress-test-prep.aspx

1. **MicroLink Devices – New Markets for Solar-Enhanced, High-Performance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (high tech, export, solar, remote monitoring),** [www.mldevices.com](http://www.mldevices.com)

**Business:** MicroLink Devices is a producer of lightweight, high-efficiency, flexible solar cells and a grower of compound semiconductor structures that are used to make transistors for the wireless communications industry. MicroLink, which is located in Niles, IL, was founded in 2000 and has been engaged in semiconductor production for the last 13 years. The company is an ISO 9001-certified manufacturer. The management and employees of MicroLink have several decades of combined experience with world-class, high-volume manufacturing operations with specific production experience in high-efficiency solar cells and high-performance transistor structures.

MicroLink has a well-established manufacturing operation with sufficient financial resources to support expansion into the foreign markets that it intends to pursue. The company, which currently has 42 employees, has annual revenue in excess of $11 million and growing. MicroLink has in process a $10 million capital expansion that was funded by a combination of retained earnings, debt, and a government grant. Additional funds for future expansion will be obtained from a mixture of equity, debt, and retained earnings. MicroLink is mostly owned by a small group of industrialists who have indicated that they are willing to provide additional equity or debt funding for projects that can provide a reasonable rate of return.

**Projcect Description:** MicroLink has developed and is bringing to market a lightweight, high-efficiency solar sheet for use in unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which are also known as drones. The solar sheet can double or triple the endurance of existing battery-powered UAVs, and may enable a new generation of ultra-long-endurance UAVs. The solar sheets may also be used to power spacecraft or may be used on the ground as a portable source of solar power.

MicroLink is very interested in investigating the foreign market for these solar cells as power sources for high performance UAVs. The specific regions of interest include Israel, India, and Eastern Europe. We are interested in all applications, including military, scientific research, resource exploration, search and rescue, transport, conservation, and others. We would like to determine the market potential, identify customers, and develop a marketing and pricing strategy for these regions.

**Deliverables:** Results of market study, as well as a pricing and marketing plan.

1. **Ogena Solutions – US Market Entry Strategy for Companion Animal Products (companion animal industry, marketing, sustainability, import),** <http://www.ogenasolutions.com>

**Business:** CCM is a Washington, DC-based asset manager investing in clean energy and real estate. Historically a real estate firm, CCM includes ownership, leasing, management and development of commercial real estate across the eastern US and Puerto Rico. In clean energy, CCM invests expansion capital into high-growth companies with a proven solution in the green building, green construction, and distributed generation sectors. The firm acts as a strategic investor, actively helping its portfolio companies scale in the real estate ecosystem. In addition, CCM seeks to accelerate the transfer of US-developed clean technologies into Latin America.

**Project Description:** Ogena Solutions a CCM portfolio company, is a leading provider of non-toxic, proprietary biocides, and disinfectants for the companion animal (ie. pet) industry in North America. Ogena’s products are a safer, more environmentally-friendly alternative to traditional disinfectants and are increasingly in demand as both biosecurity and environmental concerns become more acute. Ogena has made great strides selling its products to veterinarians and shelters. Facing high demand for its solution and many growth options, the company is currently evaluating new markets and channels for its products.

The MBA team will 1) evaluate potential market segments and 2) develop market entry strategies for the 2-3 most attractive segments. The team will conduct industry analysis, map out the competitive landscape, and develop a financial model of the opportunity for Ogena’s solution.

**Deliverable:**  Written report with a financial model, and a formal presentation to the combined Ogena and CCM teams.

1. **Personal Hermitage Productions, LLC – Marketing Strategy for Documentary Distribution (media/ entertainment industry, social media, marketing)**, [www.personalhermitage.com](http://www.personalhermitage.com)

**Business:** Personal Hermitage Productions LLC (PHP) produces independent documentaries as well as short films for clients. PHP also offers screenings and workshops in media literacy, media activism, video production, social media, online journalism and curriculum-based topics. Since its foundation in March 2012, PHP has produced two feature-length documentary films. Additionally, PHP distributes the catalogue of nonprofit Beyondmedia Education, which contains approximately fifteen films. Past PHP films typically focused on youth and women’s issues. Our most current film focuses on global health. Markets we currently serve are educational and faith-based organizations, as well as healthcare and nonprofit audiences.

**Project Description:** PHP is seeking assistance in identifying markets and distributing our newest film, Brink of Survival. Typically, we have distributed films through festival screenings and DVD sales. For Brink of Survival, we hope to find additional ways of marketing and distributing the film (online, using social media outlets to reach potential markets, etc.). We are looking for strategies and tools to create visibility, acquire customers, and increase distribution of our films.

**Deliverable:** A market research report and social media strategy.

1. **Pictricks – Market Entry Strategy for Photo Editing Services (strategy, marketing, operations, start-up, photography),** [www.pictricks.com](http://www.pictricks.com)

**Business** – Founded in 2013, PicTricks.com is an online platform that allows customers to upload less-than-perfect photographs to be edited by one of a team of professional digital artists. The digital artist performs electronic edits, modifications, and restorations to the image according to customer specifications. Specifications are indicated via a basket of complimentary, pre-defined options such as “Adjust brightness”, “Remove wrinkles”, etc. Additionally, special service pre-defined options such as “Digital makeup”, “Photo restoration”, etc. incorporate an upcharge ranging from $3.00 to $20.00. The retouched photograph is returned electronically to the customer within twenty-four hours.

**Project Description:**

Corporate Strategy – The largest question we are attempting to answer is, “How to we engage a B2B market that is currently serviced by in-house design departments?” We know of customers who outsource to editing services overseas. We think that we can offer a higher level of service by using US-based contractors.

Marketing Strategy – Once we have a market-entry strategy defined, we would like to design an actionable strategy to engage potential B2B clientele, show them how PicTricks can be of value to them, and ultimately, bring them on as recurring customers.

Operating Strategy – We currently assign work based on availability and average rating. Design editors are anonymous to our clients. We would like to investigate an operational workflow for corporate clientele with an assigned “concierge” graphic designer or team of designers for each company.

**Deliverable**: A comprehensive market-entry strategy for medium to large-sized corporate users of photo editing services.

1. **Traffic Cast – Marketing Plan for Traffic Monitoring System (high tech, wireless/Bluetooth, marketing),** [www.trafficcast.com](http://www.trafficcast.com)

**Business:** TrafficCast provides innovative technology and sophisticated data analysis for real-time and predictive traffic information that enhances and enables high performing location-based and dynamic navigation services. TrafficCast has two business divisions; the BlueTOAD™ division (which is the focus for the MLab Project) makes a Bluetooth sensor used to measure speed, travel time, and origin/destination information along road segments. BlueTOAD™ is currently the market leader in the Bluetooth detection space in the United States.

**Project Description:** Help to develop a marketing strategy for the BlueTOAD™ product, including:

* Develop comprehensive marketing plan
* Extend reach beyond distributor model
* Increase market presence
* Determine the proper balance between R&D and industry trends
* Stay ahead of competition
* Brand “BlueTOAD”
* Build customer loyalty

**Deliverables:**

* Targeting & Segmentation
* Primary market research
* Use of Web & social media
* Messaging
* Collateral material

1. **Zipcar – One-way Mobility Market Assessment (marketing, personal transportation, sustainability),** [www.Zipcar.com](http://www.Zipcar.com)

**Business:** Zipcar was founded in 2000 in Cambridge MA; at the time the “sharing economy” did not exist and the company was founded amid strong skepticism that the model could work. Over the last 13 years Zipcar has grown globally and was purchased by the Avis Budget Group in early 2013. Zipcar continues to pioneer new service offerings and show a strong commitment to a world with fewer cars. As such, despite being part of a larger company, Zipcar still feels like an early stage company as we pioneer into new mobility solutions that do not exist today.

Overview:

Zipcar is a global membership-based carsharing company providing access to vehicles to its members billable by the hour or day. As of July 2013, the company had more than than 810,000 members and offers nearly 10,000 vehicles throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain and Austria, making Zipcar the world's leading car sharing network. The vehicle network includes a full range of vehicles from Honda civics, electric vehicles, to Zipvans for moving and BMWs/Mercedes for special occasions or business use cases.

Product/technology:

Members can reserve Zipcars online or by phone at any time, immediately or up to a year in advance. Zipcar members have automated access to Zipcars using an access card which works with the car's technology to unlock the door, where the keys are already located inside. Zipcar also offers an iPhone or Android application that allows members to honk the horn to locate a Zipcar and unlock the doors. The value proposition of Zipcar is “wheels when you want them”. In an effort to take more cars off the road, Zipcar provides its members with a viable alternative to car ownership.

Business lines & pricing:

There are three “business lines” at Zipcar which are divided by business segments: University, Zipcar for Business and Consumer. The product is fundamentally the same for all three groups but pricing and cost of membership are different for all three. For all business lines however, Zipcar charges a one-time application fee, an annual fee, and a reservation charge. Gas, parking, insurance, and maintenance are included in the price.

**Project description:** In the past five years, the car-sharing space has seen a number of new entrants and competitors (both direct and indirect). These include other car rental car companies with analogous offerings, automobile OEMs launching one way services (Daimler’s Car2Go, BMW’s Drive Now), and a new crop of mobility on demand solutions (e.g., Uber, Halo, Lyft). With a growing number of entrants, consumers have more choices than ever before on which solution best fits an individual trip need. Given the recency of some of these new entrants, we would like to create a fresher and global fact base (focus is North America and Europe) around each entrant as well as insight from the consumer perspective around how different trips are segmented across the options.

**Phase 1A: Align on list of companies to pursue for this project (initial 1-2 weeks)**

* Compile a short-list of companies to research for the remainder of this project and current geographic footprint (include companies that were historically active but are no longer offering a mobility service). Please note: a list of companies will also be provided to the team from the Zipcar team as a starting point

**Phase 1B: Development of a one-way mobility services fact base and deep dive on 1-2 relevant competitors**

* Basic fact base development: Compile basic information on each (exact list to be agreed upon ahead of time): size, funding (if at VC phase), geographic footprint, volume of trips, IP filings, summary of recent press releases, POV on growth strategy, any publically available utilization or financial performance, partnerships
* Regulatory advantages: Investigate the financial benefits (if any) that any of these companies may benefit from as a result of government contracts or regulatory environment (e.g. Car2Go benefits from green legislation in Europe)
* Social sentiment analysis: Use free social monitoring tools to paint landscape on social feedback/sentiment on different services; identify which questions consumers are using, negative and positive feedback and deliver a social media insights analysis
* Market strategy assessment: Catalog marketing activities for companies of interest including benchmarking pricing, any marketing activities and media spend that is publically available
* Consumer perspective: Conduct consumer interviews and quick consumer survey (optional) to gage satisfaction and understand how different trip types / use cases are allocated across different services

**Phase 2: Synthesis**

* Execute a SWOT analysis (as it relates to Zipcar) of 2-3 companies to be agreed upon with the Zipcar team at the beginning of phase 2 pending outcome of phase 1B
* Use consumer interviews / research to help add qualitative layer to SWOT
* Provide POV on where Zipcar is likely to win and any areas of unmet demand
* Create a mobility services tracking dashboard that can be handed over to the Zipcar team that tracks key data points from competitive intelligence that can be used to track companies of interest on an ongoing basis after the project is complete

**Deliverables:**

Phase 1A: List of mobility services to focus on for the remainder of the project.

Phase 1B: Fact base with outputs of analysis from project description

Phase 2: SWOT analysis and final strategic POV