



Nicholas DeCastro

Thanks to a business course taken through The Virtual High School (VHS), Nicholas DeCastro, a junior at Maynard High School in Massachusetts is already an entrepreneur.

Before he took the online course, DeCastro had been thinking about entrepreneurship as a college major, but wasn't sure if it was truly something he wanted to pursue. Although Maynard High School does not offer many business courses, students at the high school are able to take over 200 online courses through The Virtual High School to supplement the school's offerings.

"I heard about VHS from our teachers, and I heard good things from other students, so I looked through the course catalog," said DeCastro. Two courses caught his eye: *Entrepreneurship* and *International Business*. He ultimately chose the entrepreneurship course and enrolled for the Fall 2016 semester.

DeCastro's moment of truth came with the onset of the course's business planning module: it convinced him that entrepreneurship was indeed his future. "I found a confidence that I had been lacking," he said. "It finally clicked: I can do this!"

One month after beginning the entrepreneurship course, DeCastro had a brainstorm: why not create an actual business? When all was said and done: his real-world venture was the creation and sale of an online game.

"To be honest, I had no clue how to make an app," DeCastro admitted. "For example, I learned it should be called a

'game,' not an application, which was a misconception on my part." He researched what was already offered on the market and devised an outer-space/alien game called Liberation.

Due to the timing of his decision, DeCastro simultaneously created a PowerPoint file for the game plot of his prospective business and a PowerPoint file for a fictional business plan as required by the VHS course. Besides the PowerPoint game plot, he also developed a sales forecast in Excel and a profitability guideline in Microsoft Word for his prospective business.

After sketching out what he wanted the game to be, DeCastro hired a designer from Macedonia through the site Upwork.com. The designer originally wanted \$1,200, but that price would have rendered the entire enterprise unprofitable. DeCastro planned to sell the game through third-party sites that would take a percentage of each purchase of the game, so he had a narrow margin for making a return on his investment. He used the negotiating skills he'd learned from his VHS course, and finally the designer agreed to \$600.

DeCastro wasn't worried about the \$600 because he'd found a coder who had agreed to take a percentage of the profit, which meant no upfront cost. "I would only be risking \$725 if this would have been the case," he said. But a couple of weeks later, that coder backed out of the deal.

"Needless to say, my day was ruined," said DeCastro. "But there is only way to react to setbacks. Dust yourself off and get back up, ready to get it done."

Three days after that setback, DeCastro found a coder in Pakistan who agreed to not only code the game, but to also help market it, all for \$300. "I was receiving a two-for-one special," DeCastro said. "This goes to show that everything happens for a reason."

DeCastro began an initial marketing campaign about 10 days before the game was completed to establish an early buzz. He used lessons learned from his course's marketing segment to develop an Instagram page called Liberation_the_app, a Facebook page, and a website, which enabled him to have a merchant account for Apple, Samsung, and the Google Play app stores. "I do wish that I had started Instagram marketing earlier, however this will serve as a learning experience," he said.

Liberation is now available for 99 cents on the Google Play Store, Apple's App store, and Samsung's Galaxy Apps store.

"Since I spent about \$1,000 in all, I'm looking to see if the return is worth it," DeCastro said. "Because if so, I have ideas for time-based games, like a game for a specific event. Or maybe a second installation of this game I'm producing right now. And then, with that money, I might actually invest in the stock market or other business ideas I've had."

After his experience with his VHS entrepreneurship course and his game, DeCastro is looking forward to enrolling in an entrepreneurship program in college. His top picks are New York University, Boston College, the University of Pennsylvania, and Villanova.

DeCastro identifies the following aspects of the VHS Entrepreneurship course as the highlights:

- Developing an organized and effective business plan to present a new business idea - The hands-on, exercise was arguably his favorite part of the course. "It was actually really fun," he said. "And it was structured but kind of laid back enough for you to fill in the gaps on your own."
- Personalized support - DeCastro also appreciated the feedback and interest of his teacher, Judith Hoffman. In fact, he involved her in his real-world endeavor. "I emailed her, saying, 'Hey, I'm interested in making a game and I was wondering what are your thoughts on it,' and she just basically helped me do both at the same time - the business in class and the business outside. So she was awesome, actually."

For more information about Nicholas DeCastro and Liberation, email: liberationtheapp@gmail.com.



At-a-Glance Facts

Origin

Began in 1996 via a U.S. Department of Education Technology Innovation Challenge Grant. Operating as a non-profit organization since 2001.

Current Cohort of Schools:

More than 600 schools

VHS Benefits

- Student-Centered, asynchronous courses
- Small class sizes
- Expanded Core and Elective Course Offerings
- Emphasis on Collaboration, College & Career Readiness
- High-Quality Teachers

Online Learning Program Offerings

- Large Advanced Placement® Catalog
- Honors & Unique Elective Courses
- Core Courses, including STEM Programs
- Gifted and Talented Offerings
- College and Career Readiness
- Summer School
- Credit Recovery Courses
- Professional Development for Educators

The Virtual High School (VHS, Inc.) is a non-profit global collaborative of schools committed to expanding educational opportunities for students and educators.

