



## EVENTS

# Fun and Games (and Science) Make For Perfect Pitch

Launch event mixes education, fun and toys

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Calacanis, LAUNCH

Yep, the hair was memorable.

Eric Gradman's perky orange mohawk signaled that the edtech business pitch he and his colleague, Brent Bushnell, were going to do would be a different twist on this year's [LAUNCH Education & Kids event](#), an edtech pitch fest held in Mountain View and hosted by investor, Jason Calcanas.

Twenty companies pitched. Seven took home top marks. Three may even get some funding: During the event, [Calcanas announced he was raising a \\$10 million fund to](#)

[invest startups](#). (Only a few will be explicitly 'edtech.'") He picked three companies of those presenting and pledged that--pending due diligence--he would invest.

But back to that hair.

The company that Gradman and Bushnell presented is called [STEAM Carnival](#). That's a delightful play on words: STEAM, of course, is "STEM" (Science, Technology Engineering and Math) with "Art" thrown in. STEAM Carnival is creating its own-Makesque carnival, complete with "Milk Bottle Ring Toss (with Ignition), Laser Maze Limbo and other wacky games. In June, [they raised \\$103K via Kickstarter in 34 days](#). They are planning a "state-of-the-art" big tent affair in LA and San Francisco in early 2014. And there's a bit of seriousness, too: STEAM Carnival aims to inspire kids to go into science. It also hopes to make money in part by selling the equivalent of "Maker" kits for building contraptions.

When the dust settled at LAUNCH, STEAM Carnival snagged the titles (both ) of "best presentation" and "audience favorite," in part by demo'g a contraction that uses others ...

A couple of thoughts on the other top presentations:

**Most impactful: (CK-12 Foundation):** Founder and executive director Neeru Khosla has worked tirelessly since 2007 to create high-quality, open source textbooks and educational tools that could be made available for free to students. After her presentation, the judges (which included EdSurge), agreed that Khosla's work is potentially a real game changer, especially in the shadow of expensive traditional textbook publishing giants.

Other companies getting top marks were:



**Best design:** [LocoMotive Labs](#) developing games for learning math, reading, telling time and so on for special needs students.

**Best Hardware:** Roominate tied with Linkbot. [Roominate](#) offers "kits" that girls (especially around age 6) use to build imaginative houses. [Linkbot](#), which raised \$45K via Kickstarter in June, lets you create and program modular robots.

**Best Technology:** [GuitarBots](#), created by a Finnish company with an awesome technical team, inspires you learn to play an instrument (first a guitar, eventually far more) by embedding game-play mechanics into scales drills and so on.

**Best in Show:** [Kidaptive](#) supports "smart" storytelling via iPads and includes embedded assessments.

There were no specific prizes but Calacanis announced that his newly created LAUNCH Fund will consider investing in three companies (pending due diligence). They are: LocoMotive Labs, STEAM Carnival and Kidaptive, pending due diligence.

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