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Entrepreneurs Open Up At EVMA Roundtable

Industry veterans and Marshall MBA students gather at the Los Angeles Athletic Club for a panel discussion, networking and some shared optimism

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The 7th annual EVMA Entrepreneurs' Roundtable was an evening of shared ideas and new connections, bringing together USC Marshall MBA students and more than 40 active entrepreneurs. The event, held earlier this month at the Los Angeles Athletic Club, was co-sponsored by the student-led Entrepreneur and Venture Management Association (EVMA), the USC Marshall School of Business Lloyd Greif Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, the Entrepreneurs Organization (EO) and USC IDEAs.

The event was created by EVMA members to offer aspiring entrepreneurs the opportunity to gain insight from industry veterans. Students are encouraged to ask frank, practical questions during the panel and sit down with panelists for one-on-one conversations

afterward.

While much of the evening was focused on "street level" perspectives, Intershops.com CEO and founder Robin Richards offered words of encouragement in his keynote address: "We're dreamers. We're forward thinking. We're optimists. If you have equity, and that's your bet, you're an entrepreneur," he said. "We need to manufacture a lot more of you."

Richards, who also founded and ran tech startups MP3.com and Blackboard Connect, encouraged his audience to embrace collaboration and focus on partnering with the right people. "Teams are everything. Covet teams. Covet teams and bring them in," he said. "There are people that are smarter than you about lots of things."

Noting that entrepreneurs are a stubborn, confident and resilient lot, Richards emphasized the corresponding need for flexibility and humility. "You have to be able to change your mind when you're wrong. That will save you so many great employees, it will save you so much money and, over the course of your career as an entrepreneur, it will probably save you a company or two," he said. His advice was clear: "You better rather win than be right. As soon as your ego gets in the way of victory, your ship is sinking."

Steven Mednick, a Greif Center faculty member and assistant professor of clinical entrepreneurship, moderated. "The panel was comprised of young, seasoned entrepreneurs who have learned many, many hard lessons since October 2008. As a result, they are now wiser with a realistic sense of the ecosystem around them," he said.

The panel was organized by the Entrepreneurs Organization and included David Duel (Marshall B.S. '08) from ReGreen, Adam Glickman from Condomania, Scott McCafferty with WTWH Media, Greg Bovitz, Bovitz Research Group and Jonathan Carson, Kurtzman Carson Consultants. The question and answer discussion ranged in topic from the degree to which Washington policies impacted panelists to how each panelist got his/her start.

While they had divergent opinions on some topics, the panelists agreed that the importance of trusted advisers cannot be overstated. "I would rather have one hundred thousand dollars and three great mentors than a million dollars and none at all," said Glickman. "There is no substitute for trusted advice. Mistakes are costly and trusted advice is invaluable."

02 Max Fitness Founder Karen Jashinsky (Marshall MBA '06) organized the first EVMA roundtable and was pleased to see that the event continues to create new opportunities for students to meet entrepreneurs and get exposed to different industries. "It's a just chance to get real honest advice," she said. "It's always valuable to hear from someone who has been where you are before."

Tom Tzakis (Marshall MBA '11) said the real value for him was in connecting with other entrepreneurs, both experienced and aspiring. "There is camaraderie amongst entrepreneurs that you simply don't find in other fields," he said. "It's a great event because the entrepreneurs are willing to share so much about their experiences, both good and bad."

Thirty-year-old Alexandra Mysoor is founder and CEO of Generation Orange, an online purveyor of organic products with \$40 million in annual revenue. She came to the event to mentor students, but she was surprised to find that she was able to setup five different meetings and close one deal over drinks at the roundtable. "It's funny that I went with the intent of giving back but got so much more back, in terms of money and energy," she said. "The students reminded me of the importance of sharing our story."

About the USC Marshall School of Business

Consistently ranked among the nation's premier schools, USC Marshall is internationally recognized for its emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation, social responsibility and path-breaking research. Located in the heart of Los Angeles, one of the world's leading business centers and the U.S. gateway to the Pacific Rim, Marshall offers its 5,500-plus undergraduate and graduate students a unique world view and impressive global experiential opportunities. With an alumni community spanning 90 countries, USC Marshall students join a worldwide community of thought leaders who are redefining the way business works.

