

# Rose-Hulman Alumni News

By Matthew Fouts 30 July, 2011

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Matthew Fouts has been an entrepreneur for years. That is impressive considering that he's only 23 years old.

The Terre Haute native and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology graduate has already started two business enterprises: Rose-Learning, an one-on-one tutoring service, and Fouts Ventures, a website and software development. That came while he was completing an engineering physics degree.



*Prof-Desk Development Team: Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology graduate Matt Fouts (right) founded the Prof-desk online learning management system with Indiana State University graduate Tabitha Russell (marketing vice president) and Rose-Hulman senior Matt McGhehey (financial officer).*

Now Fouts, along with partners Matt McGhehey, Tabitha Russell and Rose Haft, have launched the online learning management system Prof-desk and have taken their entrepreneurial dreams to California in hopes of tapping into financial resources and valuable business contacts.

Prof-desk ([www.prof-desk.com](http://www.prof-desk.com)) provides students with over 400 educational resources, including online educational games, access to grades and assignments, and a homework forum. The software also allows student-users to seek help from teachers and classmates, and collaborate with students at other schools. Teachers can post assignments, track student progress and interact with parents as well as students.

"It's a course-management software," explains Fouts, Prof-desk's chief executive officer. "It's based online and students can see their grades in real-time."

Online learning management systems, such as Blackboard, already exist. However, Prof-desk differs from such options in several key areas. The most obvious difference is cost.

"Ours is free to use for all schools," Fouts says. He says that the system, developed with funding from Fouts Ventures, will use advertising to generate revenue rather than charging users for services.

"It's our mantra to innovate a free online learning resource for every student, and, as a result we'll help struggling school districts whose technology and education budgets continually get cut," Fouts stated in a recent press release.

Prof-desk also incorporates a social media that's lacking in other learning management systems.

"(Prof-desk) has been called Blackboard meets Facebook," McGhehey explains. "The ability for schools to interact seamlessly and instantly through the internet is a big step forward for the students and the school administrations. Students, teachers and parents will be able to interact in ways they haven't before, which is beneficial to all of them."

Fouts adds, "Our real-time chat is advanced because it features screen sharing as well as file-sharing capabilities."

The website features group interaction as well as a newsfeed-type feature where users can interact individually.

"Prof-desk offers a way to make learning fun for the teachers as well as the students," Russell notes. The Terre Haute native and Indiana State University graduate student joined the Prof-desk team as vice president of marketing because she thinks it is a tool whose time has come. "I believe in it and I really do think it's a great idea considering how technology is advancing today," she says.

Fouts states, "The reason I like Prof-desk for struggling students is that it's a good way for teachers and students to keep track of the grades," allowing fewer students to fall through the cracks.

Another advantage, McGhehey notes, is that the system offers a place for kids to gain experience working with online software.

"We had to ensure that students or outsiders do not have access to teachers' gradebooks, while maintaining that students could access their grades," Fouts explains. "We also had to look at the security of information being sent from our servers and the web browser to an individual computer, so someone doesn't hijack grades."

McGhehey, the company's chief financial officer and a senior chemical engineering major, states, "We spent a lot of long nights on the security system to make sure the system was completely secure."

Fouts, McGhehey and Russell have relocated to the Los Angeles area, where they will be opening a retail shop for Fouts Ventures, and continuing to do website and software development for individuals and companies all over the U.S. Haft, a 2008 physics graduate, is assisting the team as chief technology officer. They plan to grow the business in order to generate necessary funds to get Prof-desk off the ground, and into the marketplace.

"Hopefully this time next year we'll have Prof-desk officially in schools," Fouts says.

Although the young entrepreneurs are heading west to follow their dream, they say that in the long term, they plan to return to Indiana and that Prof-desk's corporate headquarters will remain in Terre Haute. Russell says it's very important to her that the company's success benefits local students as well as the local economy. "Remember your roots and where you came from," she adds.

<http://www.rose-hulman.edu/news/alumni/california-dreaming.aspx>

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