



Teachers Mark Wu and Peter Cameron were so passionate about developing a new web-based learning tool, they put down their chalk, left their jobs and formed NEXED.

Wu and Cameron (who are also parents of elementary school kids) believed technology wasn't being properly utilized in today's classrooms. Seeing the same old teaching materials used year after year, they set out to create NEXED's flagship product, Answerables.

CREATING ANSWERABLES

Described as a digital learning ecosystem, Answerables is a futuristic virtual world with alien characters that provides a learning environment for students and teachers.

Within this intergalactic setting, teachers can insert lesson plans, quizzes and other materials for math, history, geography, English... pretty much any subject for a wide range of grades. The content could come from the web, or be something the teacher has created personally,

with assignments becoming "missions". Equipped with a framework and some animated characters, NEXED was high on enthusiasm but low on budget, said Mark. They also needed game development expertise, and were on the hunt for a full-time game developer to really bring this program to life.

Through a referral from HalTech Regional Innovation Centre, NEXED checked everything off their list by partnering with Sheridan College through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) Applied Research and Commercialization (ARC) Initiative.

The ARC initiative matches small- to medium-sized companies with Sheridan faculty and students to conduct applied research, development and innovation activities that help companies become more productive, competitive and ultimately create jobs. (Funding of up to \$100,000 is matched by 50% in cash or in-kind contribution by the participating company.)

HARNESSING SHERIDAN TALENT

Applied computing students from Sheridan's Faculty of Applied Science and Technology (FAST) developed different concept games for Answerables' "math zone". A team of game developers and 3D animation artists first rolled up their sleeves and dove into a binder full of Ontario school curricula. "We had the students brainstorm with a slew of game designs," said Patrick McKenna, Sheridan's project leader, and a new faculty member teaching at FAST. "From that we picked eight games that we developed into prototypes that we integrated into Answerables.

"For the students the sky was the limit," continued Patrick. "They were able to create the games from concept through to completed prototype."

"There's a really strong sense that Sheridan wants to help your start-up become a successful business."

**- Mark Wu, Co-founder,
NEXED**

That freedom enabled the students to be creative, and their performance reinforced Mark's already positive opinion.

"Sheridan's graphic designers, game developers and artists as well as their state of the art equipment are world renowned," said Mark. "But what impressed me most was how the faculty and students went well above the technical scope of the project... Sheridan's involvement was about a lot more than the work in the lab."

NEXED also loved having access to Sheridan's Applied Research and Collaboration Centre (ARCC) at the College's Trafalgar Road campus, which proved to be a hotbed for ideas and collaboration. "We still go there to this day," said Mark. "Even though the project has wrapped up, Sheridan still gives us a lot of support."

FULL STEAM AHEAD

NEXED is charging full steam ahead and that includes hiring Patrick as the company's lead game developer. "He's had such a knowledge of the project from the ground up," said Mark. "And his skills as a game developer are top notch...it would have been very difficult to replace him." Having completed internal testing, NEXED is now ready to test Answerables with the general public, offering a sneak peek on the company's web site. Mark is confident that with Sheridan's support and Patrick coming on board, Answerables is poised to make the grade.



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NEXED

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