

# San Antonio Express-News

## Strutting their stuff

AUSTIN - March 17, 2009 - In hopes of launching the next big thing, entrepreneurs travel from all over the world to attend South by Southwest Interactive.

Many think entrepreneurship is the way to pull the country out of its economic malaise.

San Antonio-based Blellow, an online marketplace for freelancers, launched here this year, and a venture capitalist already has offered to write them a \$250,000 check on the spot, said Mandi Leman, its founder and chief executive officer.

"I took his name," Leman said. "But we don't need the money right now."

Silicon Valley, Calif.-based TechCrunch wrote up a blog entry Sunday on Blellow, creating even more buzz at the show. Blellow's booth at the trade show has attracted a steady stream of visitors.

Twitter gained fame at SXSW Interactive in 2006, and this year dozens of startups hope to emulate its success. The SXSW Interactive organizers expected more than 10,000 people to attend, surpassing last year's record attendance. It attracts content developers, Web designers, bloggers, gamers, tech entrepreneurs, investors, educators and artists.

Antony McGregor Dey, chief executive of QMCodes, traveled from Melbourne, Australia, to speak at the conference about his mobile phone application that links news articles to video content by pointing the phone at a code on the printed page.

"It's a fantastic place to meet people," Dey said. "I haven't slept."

A new event, Microsoft BizSpark Accelerator, on Monday featured 20 startup companies pitching to industry experts and venture capitalists. They included ventures with names such as Thrive, YouData, Cubeless, Spawn Labs and POPCuts in the online video and audio, social networking and Web applications. Blellow got an honorable mention in the social networking applications category. San Antonio-based Rackspace Hosting also was a sponsor of the event.

"Entrepreneurship is the only thing that is going to pull us out of this mess," technology blogger Robert Scoble said.

At this year's show, Scoble has gone from reporter to entrepreneur. He quit his job with FastCompany.TV to join Rackspace and to launch a new venture called Building 43, "a place for people fanatical about the Internet."

David Oxsteen, who runs a design lab and venture capital seed fund in Los Angeles, also says entrepreneurship is the way to rebuild the United States.

“People who are not able to get jobs are starting up companies,” he said. “People who have the ability to create something are doing so.”

Chris Brogan, president of New Marketing Labs in Canton, Mass., and a social media expert, says the tools have become much more affordable, making it easier for people to launch new ventures into the marketplace.

“Marketing, development and research are less expensive,” he said.

Venture capitalists still have money to spend, but they are investing smaller amounts and they are being very selective in the types of investments they make, he said.

AT SXSW Interactive this year, Brogan likes the startup FourSquare, a mobile phone Web application that turns life into a video game. It's a friend finder, social networking tool, city guide and game bundled into one application. It's still in the development stage, but essentially, it allows people to play a fantasy game with others in their city through their phones, Brogan said.

A recession is the perfect time to launch a new company, said Kit Cooper, author of “The Art of Living” and executive director of the Best Life Practices Foundation. While some speakers at SXSW Interactive advise people to chase their dreams and to create a new company around their passion, not everyone's cut out for it, Cooper said.

“I don't think everybody has the stomach to do a business from scratch,” he said. “It depends on their threshold for pain. It's not for everyone.”