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## PLUGGED IN

## Austin entrepreneurs get a crash-course in how to succeed

 By [Tim Eaton](#)  
 AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Monday, June 29, 2009

Five Austin entrepreneurs are spending a week each summer for the next three years at a MIT-affiliated program that counts Michael Dell and AOL founder Ted Leonsis among its most famous alumni.

The program, once grandiosely called MIT Birthing of Giants, is a collaboration of MIT's Enterprise Forum and the Entrepreneurs' Organization. It has a more modest name now: the EO/MIT Entrepreneurial Master's Program. But it has maintained the same goal: to help under-40 entrepreneurs become giant success stories.

Sixty people from around the world are accepted into the program each year. In this year's class, Austin had more participants than any other city; Atlanta was next with four.

One of the participants, Justin Corsbie, the 32-year-old founder of Synthetic Pictures, said it makes sense that Austin would be so well-represented. After all, he said, Austin has always been one of the nation's most entrepreneurial places.

"I think there are a lot of independently minded people in Austin," said Corsbie, whose clients have included Wal-Mart, DreamWorks and Southwest Airlines. "People don't want to just follow the herd. They want to create their own path."

Corsbie's Austin classmates include: Julie Jumonville, 36, and Lisa Williamson, 42, founders of UpSpring Baby, which markets items for mothers and babies such as kits to test breast milk for alcohol and a product that helps teach toddlers to walk; Ronnie Romman, who with his brother Sami founded hookah manufacturer and wholesaler Romman Inc.; and Tim Miller, 36, the president and CEO of Intelligent Logistics, a Round Rock-based provider of freight transportation services.

The participants had to meet certain qualifications for the competitive program in suburban Boston. For example, the entrepreneurs must run companies with at least \$1 million in revenue. The cost of the program is about \$3,900 a year.

The program is a crash course of sorts; sessions start at 9 a.m. and run well into the night, covering topics such as management, finance and marketing. The faculty is made up of authors, business leaders and professors from MIT, Harvard and Babson College.

Corsbie said that after the first session he's still digesting the flood of information.

But he said the program has inspired him to better track productivity and sales to fine-tune the business he started at age 25 with \$500.

"We're going to know where the bottlenecks are," he said.

Since 2002, Miller, a native of Bastrop, has grown his company so much that last year it landed at No. 434 on Inc. magazine's annual ranking of the nation's 500 fastest-growing private companies.

But he admitted that there is always more to learn. And after going through the first session, Miller said he wants to quantify everything and leave fewer decisions to his gut.

"You want to make decisions with data. You think you have the right amount of data? Double it, and add 20 percent," he said. "I'm

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still going to trust my gut, but I'm going to make sure I have the data."

Jumonville, UpSpring Baby's chief innovation officer, said she left the first week of the program with a better understanding of the importance of focusing her business.

Jumonville said UpSpring Baby, which raised \$4 million in venture capital in March and is planning to expand into China and India, is now in the process of creating a team to help her define the company's core values and culture.


She said UpSpring has had issues in the past with taking on responsibilities that weren't in line with the company's mission. She and Williamson going forward will "say 'no' more and honor yeses," she said.

Williamson, the company's chief customer officer, said: "It's a great all-encompassing program that helps you look at your company's health from all angles."

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