

## **Georgetown students win at Startup Weekend Doha**

Creating a business in just over 48 hours isn't a challenge most students are faced with on their weekends, but it's one that Malek Deeb (SFS '18) and John Robling (SFS '19) took on. The two Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) students participated in the recent Startup Weekend Doha, and were awarded the top prize for their fledgling online Arabic gift store.

During the event, Deeb and Robling, along with Qatar University student Fatema Aref, created a functioning prototype and financial plan for their business idea, AhlanGifts.com. They competed against approximately 20 other teams to win QR25,000 in initial funding from event organizer Qatar Development Bank.

The event, which was held in collaboration with Hamad Bin Khalifa University, brought together industry experts and future entrepreneurs for just under three days of intensive work. After initial pitching sessions, participants dived into rapid product development, devised potential business models and finally presented their ideas to a panel of judges. Their projects were judged on their creativity, level of innovation, and the potential viability for the business in the current market.

The students' aim for Ahlan Gifts was to create an online store where customers could purchase high-quality items like oud and bukhoor, without having to navigate crowded shopping malls or hunt for items in the souks.

“Our company is about making the gift-giving process simpler. We want to stress the factor of convenience, instead of feeling overwhelmed when buying somebody an Arabian-themed gift,” explained Deeb, who is majoring in International Economics at GU-Q. “Instead of buying somebody a new watch or a purse or a pair of shoes, you can give them something that is produced within their country.”

While many of the competitors presented ideas and mockups to the judges, Deeb thinks that what set Ahlan Gifts apart was that they were able to showcase an up-and-running website with secure payment facilities, as well as a practical business model and financial forecast. “While they were listening to our pitch, they could pull out their phone and make an order if they wanted, as well as see live products in front of them,” said Deeb. “We also have a solid and realistic revenue stream, and the judges saw that.”

While the team members are full-time students and Ahlan Gifts is still in the early stages of development, the Startup Weekend event allowed them to meet and engage with collaborators who are interested in helping them take the business forward. They are currently assessing their next steps and talking to potential partners.

Startup Weekend is a global network of events designed to foster the creation of new, innovative businesses and a community of mentors, investors and sponsors who can help them grow. The initiative, which is run by Google for Entrepreneurs, has included more than 2000 events that have taken place in 150 countries.