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Sears gets infusion of new ideas for online, mobile use

By Anna Marie Kukec

Hoffman Estates-based Sears Holdings Corp. announced winners of its Startup + Developer Challenge, a so-called code-a-thon where the parent of Sears and Kmart stores aims to use fresh ideas to help its online and mobile sales and improve the consumer experience.

The winner was actually inspired by childhood memories of Sears and Kmart stores. Omega Ortega developed The Chore Score app to inspire children to do their chores, make chore lists, track progress and earn rewards that can be redeemed online or in-store. The company said the app could be launched in time for the holiday shopping season.

The contest did more than gather 150 participants. It offered the ailing retailer a chance to boost its virtual offerings and connect better with customers and the Silicon Valley tech industry, where the contest was held.

Sears wants to offer more integrated retail options that bridge the online, mobile, social media and in-store shopping experience and make it convenient and rewarding to customers, said George Goley, CIO online business at Sears Holdings.

"We've been pleased with the results of the tactic, for example we're using an Android application developed in an internal hackathon for associates, which is one of the reasons we created last weekend's event. Additionally, Shop Your Way also offers a robust site for developers anywhere that provides a unique ecosystem for innovation, both for web and mobile," Goley said.

As Sears hopes to improve its online experience for consumers, here are other ideas from the competition that you may see soon:

• "Buy with Friends" that allows members to pool resources to purchase items.

• "Istagift" that provides members with last-minute gift ideas, instantly pay for them and have their purchase ready for pickup or delivery.

• "Sears 180" that allows members to start a product return from their mobile device and complete it in the store.

Surfing:Boxed launches Friday as a mobile-based wholesale delivery club with no annual membership fee. The company said it combines e-commerce and mobile gaming best practices to create a shopping app that offers savings on the items customers use every day. Boxed has seen hundreds of orders since its launch in New York City last week, the company said.

• Financial Education of America LLC in Arlington Heights has released the new program, Futurebuck, an online education course designed to teach young adults about financial, credit and debt management. Through a series

of 10 interactive videos, the program covers credit cards, student loans and money management.

• The Foreign Policy Research Institute, in collaboration with the First Division Museum at Cantigny Park in Wheaton, has released a new e-book, "American Military History: A Resource for Teachers and Students." The 258-page volume contains material presented at seven history weekends for high school teachers on American military history, including 29 essays about early America to the most recent conflicts.

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