# Sir Richard Branson's Backing Sealed With a (Box)hug and a (mi)Pic at Pitch to Rich 2014

**Thursday 15 May, 2014**

Box-by-box storage business wins Start Up Award with doorstep delivery promise

MiPic wins Innovation Award helping artists & photographers make money from their smartphones

Public vote for 'People's Award' split between two finalists called Carl Thomas

An app enabling people to sell their smartphone photos and a novel storage business caught the imagination of Sir Richard Branson and a panel of judges with their 90-second pitches at Virgin Media Pioneers Pitch to Rich 2014 to win a prize package of investment and mentoring.

Igor Rubets, 36, founder of Boxhug won the Start Up Award, presented in partnership with Virgin StartUp, for businesses in their first 12 months of trading and Carl Thomas, 30, founder of miPic won the Innovation Award for his successfully-trading, small technology business – with winning pitches at the Branson family home in Oxfordshire.

Igor sealed his pitch by hugging each of the judges sparking a reciprocal group hug from Sir Richard when the winners were announced with Innovation Award winner, Carl Thomas of miPic marking his crowning moment with an on-stage selfie alongside Sir Richard and the panel of judges.

The pair beat more than 400 other businesses to reach the final of the nationwide search for Britain's best new entrepreneurs and seized the opportunity to share their ideas with Sir Richard and a prestigious judging panel of British entrepreneurs, consisting of Nick Jenkins, founder of Moonpig; Holly Tucker, co-founder of Not on the High Street; Peter Williams, co-founder of Jack Wills and Dina Toki-O, up and coming digital influencer and fashion Youtuber.

An additional 'People's Award' voted for by viewers of the live stream of the event on Virgin.com resulted in a draw between miPic and another Carl Thomas, 31, founder of Audiowings which are smart headphones which wirelessly connect directly to platforms like Spotify.

Boxhug offers storage services by the box – sending, collecting and returning your stuff to your doorstep ensuring people never need to visit a storage unit again and only pay for the space they use.

Boxhug founder Igor Rubets said: “The experience has changed my life. Two weeks ago I couldn't hold a microphone and now I've pitched to Sir Richard. We are going to work even harder to build a brilliant business not just in the UK but across the world that will really help people.”

MiPic is a social platform for people to make money from the photography and images in their smartphones with founder Carl Thomas, originally from Merseyside presented Sir Richard with a framed iPad sketch of the first Virgin Galactic spaceship which he'd bought through the site from a friend. And the volume of traffic to the miPic website when the win was announced temporarily crashed their service.

MiPic founder Carl Thomas said: “It was a fantastic experience and all the working at home in evenings and weekends has all been worth it. Our goal to help people make money from their art and pictures is succeeding. Being judged by one of the most successful entrepreneurs of our generation makes all the risks of starting up alone in business seem worth it. I am proud of miPic's recognition and want to seize this priceless opportunity.”

Sir Richard Branson, Pioneer-At-Large of Virgin Media Pioneers and founder of the Virgin Group, said: “The success of Virgin has been born out of disrupting the natural order to see what good can be done by doing business differently. This year, Pitch to Rich has showcased even more innovative businesses and it has been wonderful to meet the bright minds behind these ideas. The winners really stood out for their ingenious businesses. I've all sorts of stuff lying around which could really benefit from Boxhug's storage service and miPic is an impressive way of creating art dealers out of all of us. I am delighted to help champion their vision.

Audiowings founder Carl Thomas, joint People's Award winner, said: “The award is a real validation of what we are doing from people who could potentially be purchasers of our headphones. And it was really good to meet the judges and pick their brains on the challenges they faced and overcame.”

## Media:




## Related Sectors:

Business & Finance :: Consumer Technology ::

## Related Keywords:

Sir Richard Branson ::

## Scan Me:

Peter Kelly, Managing Director of Virgin Media Business who presented the People's Award, said: “Innovation is the lifeblood of UK plc and Pitch to Rich is a great example of how we are fostering new ideas and entrepreneurialism. The calibre of the entries was incredibly high – and demonstrated by the fact we had a tie for the 'People's Choice' award. It's been a great pleasure to be involved today and I look forward to seeing how our winners evolve and succeed.”

Missed it? All the finalist pitches from #Pitch2Rich can be seen on www.virginmediapioneers.com.

Nick Jenkins, founder of Moonpig, said: “The calibre of finalists was outstanding, and Box Hug is a great way to make self-storage more affordable, manageable and convenient for everyone.”

Holly Tucker, co-founder of Not on the High Street, said: “In terms of the current climate, it's never been harder for start-ups trying to set up a business with high overheads, taxes and so forth. And so with a competition such as Pitch to Rich, it's a much needed chance to shine a light on raw talent. It's invaluable exposure to possibly finding further investment.”

Peter Williams, co-founder of Jack Wills, said: “I find it personally inspirational, meeting people who are starting up their own businesses, irrespective of what the business is. All the finalists have the potential to succeed. You can't put a price on this sort of networking opportunity for a new company. I wish I'd had the chance to pitch to Sir Richard!”

Dina Toki-O, fashion Youtuber, said: “MiPic is an amazing platform for current photographers, who may be struggling to find exposure; particularly on personal social media platforms.”

Finalists in the Start Up Award were:

Igor Rubets, 36, founder of Boxhug which offers First Class Storage by the box; collecting, safely storing and returning customers' belongings from their doorstep.(@Boxhug)

Lettija Lee, 30, founder of London-based start-up PecoPoncho, a brand of plantable, disposable rain ponchos. (@PecoPoncho)

Carl Thomas, 31, founder of Audiowings, a business which is developing premium headphones that wirelessly connect directly to platforms like Spotify via 3G. (@Audiowings)

Finalists in the Innovation Award were:

Jamie Grant, 28, founder of Lines, the first snowsports app that utilises motion sensors in smartphones.(@ChooseYourLine)

Chris Thorpe, 45, former chief technology officer for Moshi Monsters and founder of I Can Make, a business which sells fun educational content for people to make on 3D printers. (@IcanMakeHQ)

Carl Thomas, 30, who runs miPic, a social platform for mobile artographers to share images and sell art to a global audience earning money for free. (@miPic_app)

Prizes:

The winning prize package for each award included £5,000 of investment plus mentoring, including legal, branding and marketing advice, as well as a significant networking and profile raising opportunities.

The Innovation Award winner, Carl Thomas of miPic has also won free enrolment to the Accelerator Academy – an established 12-week, high-growth training and mentoring programme for ambitious digital entrepreneurs. All finalists have already earned an HP laptop worth £500 to help them manage their businesses.

Last year's Pitch to Rich competition was won by brothers Joshua and John Okungbaiye, founders ofHigh Spirit, which makes theft-proof rucksacks and now count Rita Ora among their customers.

To enter, or to find out more about Virgin Media Pioneers, go to www.virginmediapioneers.com or on Twitter @VMPioneers #Pitch2Rich or Facebook @VirginMediaPioneers.

- Ends -

Notes to Editors: About Virgin Media Pioneers

Virgin Media Pioneers was formed by Virgin Media in 2010 as an online community for young entrepreneurs. 6,000 members now interact, using videos and blogging to create a peer-to-peer support and mentoring service.

Virgin Media Pioneers also offers original content including the Pioneers TV series targeted at early-stage entrepreneurs as well as connecting people from all walks of life who are passionate about business across a range of industries – from fashion to digital to catering.

Regular free events and unique opportunities are also held, such as the annual Trade Mission, which in 2013 took 5 early-stage tech businesses to New York to explore expanding their British businesses abroad and secure partners and support.

For more information, go to www.virginmediapioneers.com.

About Virgin Media

Virgin Media is the first provider of all four broadband, TV, mobile phone and home phone services in the UK.

The company's cable network – the result of multi-billion pound private investment – delivers ultrafast broadband to over half of all UK homes, with speeds of up to 152Mb, as well as market leading connectivity to thousands of public and private sector organisations across the country.

Virgin Media has developed the most advanced interactive television service, bringing together broadcast TV, thousands of hours of on demand programming and the best of the web in a single set-top box powered by TiVo. The company was the first to offer HD TV and 3D on demand to millions of British households.

The world's first virtual mobile network was launched by Virgin Media and it is also one of the largest fixed-line home phone providers in the country.

Virgin Media is a part of Liberty Global plc, the world's largest international cable company. Together Virgin Media and Liberty Global serve 25 million customers across 14 countries, helping connect people to the digital world and enabling them to discover and experience its endless possibilities.

## Company Contact:

_

**Pressat Wire**

E. support[@]pressat.co.uk

View Online

**Additional Assets:**

**Newsroom:** Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
**https://www.wire.pressat.co.uk**