

The Road to the Showcase: Searching for Indiana's Most Investable Companies

The Innovation Showcase is Indiana's largest curated event for entrepreneurs, investors, and supporters of the state's vibrant ecosystem and includes a pitch competition with up to 20 startups representing a spectrum of industries. As a board member of the [Venture Club of Indiana](#), I've personally been involved with the Showcase for seven years. While this year's event isn't until August 22, my fellow Venture Club board member, attorney and chair of the Showcase pitch competition, [Travis Stegemoller](#), has spent the last six months crisscrossing the state in a search for Indiana's most investable companies. I recently had coffee with Travis to learn more about "The Road to the Showcase."



Ben Pidgeon,
VisionTech

BP: I hear you and [Aaron Gillum](#) (Venture Club President) have been putting lots of miles on your cars on something called "Road to the Showcase." What's that all about?

TS: You heard right; I've put at least 1,000 miles on mine on the Venture Club's pitch company selection process. Two years ago, we took a look at how pitch companies are selected for The Innovation Showcase. At that time, most were from the Indianapolis area. As the Venture Club of *Indiana*, we realized we had to do a better job getting startups across the state represented in the Showcase and connecting them with venture capitalists. So we created the Road to the Showcase, where we hold pitch competitions in nine cities across the state. The

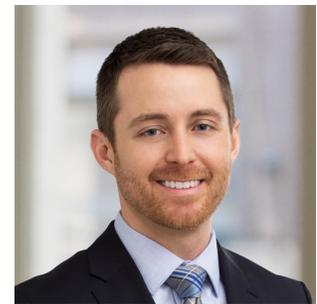
winners of each go on to compete at [The Innovation Showcase](#) in Indianapolis in August.

BP: Where all have you been?

TS: We kicked off in South Bend at Notre Dame's [IDEA Center](#) in April and from there went to Hammond, Evansville, New Albany, Lafayette, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Terre Haute. We're wrapping up in Muncie at an event called the Innovation Connector July 24. I've been to nearly every Road to the Showcase event. I think Aaron's been to all of them.

BP: How did you pull this nine-city tour?

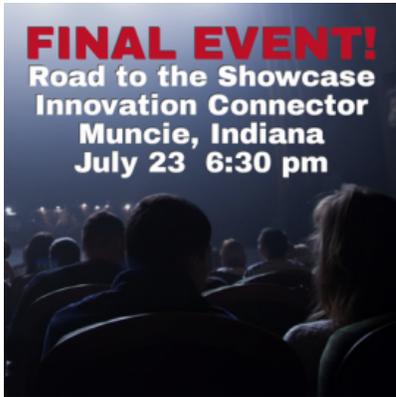
TS: Sounds like a logistical nightmare, right? Actually, it's been great thanks to some wonderful partners. Elevate Ventures has been deeply involved from the start and offered the services of their entrepreneurs in residence to connect us with local stakeholders around the state. In some cases, we joined existing pitch events like "The Big Sell" in Hammond sponsored by Purdue University Northwest. One of our Venture Club board members, Nick Arnett, was instrumental starting The Blaze pitch event in Fort Wayne, which was co-hosted by the Venture Club, Start Fort Wayne and Founders Spark. All of the events are volunteer-driven and we had no shortage of help. I encourage you to [visit our website](#) for details on the Road to the Showcase events and hosting venues.



Travis Stegemoller,
Barnes & Thornburg

BP: What kind of turnout did you have at the Road to the Showcase events?

TS: First, I want to thank our local partners. Each city rallied around their event and really invested in the success of their local startups. There was great involvement in recruiting and coaching startups, finding qualified judges and inviting people to just come and experience it all. It's been amazing. The overall turnout was great everywhere, but I have to give a shout out to Fort Wayne with over 100 attendees and to Evansville, which had tremendous enthusiasm.



In terms of the startups, the overall quality has been impressive. We had the opportunity to see pitch companies across many industries, including software, hardware, consumer, medical devices, and life sciences. Most were considered true startups, but were in the process of scaling their business.”

BP: What were the criteria for selecting the winners to go on to The Innovation Showcase Pitch?

TS: The Venture Club has developed a judging rubric that rates each company on their product, scalability, traction, and management team. Our goal is to identify the most investable companies. Our hope was to find two per city. We anticipate having up to 20 pitch companies at The Innovation Showcase

pitch competition on August 22. We’re still finalizing the list, but it will be a highly competitive event.

BP: Any surprises on the Road to the Showcase?

TS: Two things: how much fun I had meeting people across the state who are truly passionate about encouraging and supporting entrepreneurs and secondly, just how barren I-69 is between Evansville and Indy. Nothing for 1.5 hours, not even a McDonalds!

BP: That’s harsh.

TS: Right?

The Venture Club of Indiana invites you to attend The Innovation Showcase, Thursday, August 22, 11:30 am-7:30 pm at The Center in Indianapolis. [Register here](#). If you would like to become an Innovation Showcase sponsor, find information [here](#). See you in August!