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Offline is the New Online

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NORA ABOUSTEIT: I see three major trends in startups next year.

1. There will be many more companies started by college students and recent graduates. Students are eager to build businesses rather than getting corporate work experience first. Startups are the new Goldman Sachs.

During the past two weeks, I spoke on two panels run by universities that prepare students to become entrepreneurs. Harvard Business School's Entrepreneurship Conference and Florida International University's AVCC invited top founders, executives and VCs to share their knowledge in front of eager students who asked relevant and smart questions. And there are many more of these types of events.

I see students' LinkedIn profiles including the title "entrepreneur." It seems to be cool to be one. Millennials appear to find it much more appealing to adapt to an uncertain work schedule than to a tight corporate structure (and if you think about it, after the financial crash, one is not more secure or certain than the other, anyway).

Now, universities truly embrace failure. I learned from one of my smart and ambitious mentees Sunday morning over tea in Brooklyn that Harvard allows MBA dropouts to come back for up to five years. That is amazing. So besides a cool thing to do (one could credit Mark Zuckerberg for starting that trend), dropout risk has been reduced to zero for both sides. The dropout can return if things don't work out and help future students gain insight into real world experiences.

2. More companies start with design and implementing UX culture from the very beginning, understanding design as more than just look and feel, but as a user-friendly process (navigation, flow) that enables users to easily achieve their goals (inspiration, information, learning and shopping, among many others).

At Kollabora, I hired two designers (a web/UX and a graphic designer) in the very beginning. They work very closely with our tech team (our web/UX



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designer does front-end development as well), business development, marketing and content people. Design is not an afterthought; it is at the very center of our operation, helping all departments achieve their goals.

On a train ride back from the HBS entrepreneurship conference, co-speaker and talented designer Robert Lenne (who formerly worked at IDEO) told me that the founder Carter Cleveland's credo to be a design-led company is what attracted him to work at Art.sy. The result was a stunning websites that attracted stellar investors.

My friend Jeremy Fisher, from Wander, received submissions from more than 60 illustrators who visually expressed what his (then non-launched) product is about. It created a lot of buzz and traction and solidified his ability to raise \$1.2 million from prominent VCs.

3. Offline is the new online. More and more startups will help to reorganize and facilitate activities and experiences away from the computer.

There will be more companies that organize and empower offline activities. A few set great examples and are starting a trend: from learning a new offline skill (Skillshare, Kollabora), gaining experiences and finding orientation (SideTour, Foursquare) to matchmaking (Maker's Row, HowAboutWe).

At the same time, traditional (offline) industries will increasingly apply online tools to gain traction for their offline business (retailers, restaurants). An example is the BBQ restaurant I invested in. Its owner first used Launchrock to register potential guests, and then built a page to pre-sale brisket over the web that would then be consumed in his restaurant. Further, more post-Groupon companies will form that give offline companies access to sustainable tools that help them gain more visibility online (i.e. Small Knots, Peek).

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