

VentureBeat

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We are happy to announce the finalists for Who's Got Game? startup competition at the [GamesBeat 09 game conference](#).

A group of esteemed judges reviewed applications from more than 50 video game and virtual world startups before deciding upon seven finalists to present at GamesBeat 09 on March 24.

“The ingenuity in evidence here — blending games, social memes, and inspired engineering — is a great reminder that creativity and opportunity don't take a back seat in a recession.” Jamil Moledina, Outreach Director, EA Partners, and moderator of the startup competition at GamesBeat 09.

Our criteria was based on the degree of innovation, potential for business success, and freshness. The finalists in alphabetical order are:

[Akoha](#) – This company takes the alternate reality game genre and turns it toward good causes. Players can play the game in the physical world with mobile, web, and other media such as playing cards. They conduct missions with friends and strangers. The mission goals can be kind or charitable acts in the real world. You just might be able to do good at the same time you're having fun.

[Exponential Entertainment](#) – This company comes with a veteran team that includes the architects of Scene It?, a DVD movie quiz game that has generated more than \$500 million in sales. Exponential is now creating social games on a variety of game platforms that entertain people through immersive, movie-based games. Called HollywoodPlayer, these games will incorporate scenes from popular movies and attract consumers with loyalty programs and social networking. Their goal is to crack the age-old problem of how to make movie games that aren't boring.

[Gamboler](#) – Raising money is still pretty tough for game developers. Gamboler hopes to link budding indie game teams with crowd-sourced investment funds. It's sort of like Kiva — which raises \$25 micro-loans from consumers — meets the Independent Games Festival, which features bright new game talent. Vetted developers pitch their ideas to the Gamboler community, which rates the risk factors for the teams and then opens up the chance for micro-investments in the companies. It is aimed at those with small teams working on iPhone, Flash or downloadable games.

[RocketOn](#) – This company is helping to pioneer parallel virtual worlds. It seems to add a parallel layer on top of ordinary web sites that allows users to “walk” across the sites with virtual characters, or avatars. You can use your avatar to explore the web and see things that others don't. You can, for instance, chat with friends while visiting web sites, make

new friends, and explore virtual places. The company is working with partners who are implementing the technology, which gives users a new web-browsing experience.

SnipClip – This German company lets consumers engage in a social game where they collect virtual items related to their favorite stars. They can trade and exchange these items with friends. SnipClip lets media brands, sports franchise, and bands form deeper relationships with their fans and sell them virtual goods. Among the things fans can collect and trade are short video snippets of their favorite stars.

SuperSecret – This San Francisco company is one of many making a virtual world for kids. **But SuperSecret has a well-conceived “meta game”** where kids get to learn what it’s like to grow up from age 10 to age 18. While it remains focused on safe and appropriate experiences, the game rewards kids in a unique way. They can play any of 35 already-popular casual mini games. That lets them earn points that allow their avatars to “age up,” which in turn lets kids unlock more privileges, like driving a car. The company has raised \$10 million, launched its site in January and already has 150,000 users.

Switch Games – It’s a social marketplace for gamers where members can trade used video games for free. They can also buy and sell games, using the automated SwitchBot service that matches buyers and sellers. Sellers can get a better deal than they can by trading in their games at the store, while buyers can get access to a big library of games at low prices without the worry of being ripped off. It’s part eBay, part Facebook.

The panel of judges included myself; Moledina; Ed Fries, CEO of Figure Prints and former head of Microsoft Game Studios; Kevin Bachus, co-founder of Microsoft’s Xbox; James Cham, associate partner at Bessemer Venture Partners, Eric Goldberg, head of Crossover Technologies; and Jay Eum, managing director at TransLink Capital.

The finalists will present on stage at GamesBeat 09. Each will get five minutes to talk about their company. The audience will select a People’s Choice winner, while our panel of judges will select their own favorite. At the event, the Who’s Got Game? demo session will be moderated by Moledina, while the live judges will include Bachus, Cham and Goldberg.