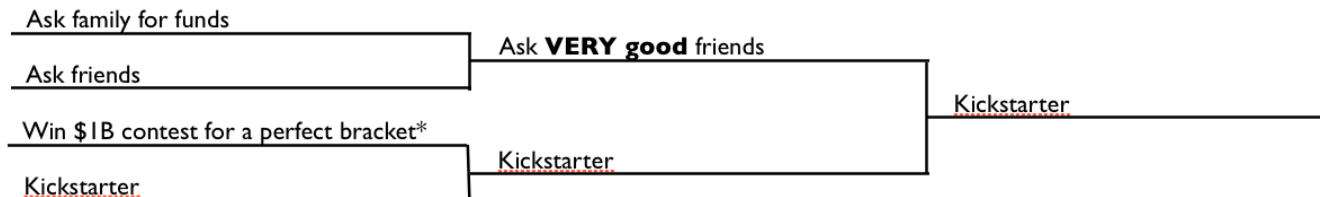


## Maybe March Madness isn't so crazy after all.

Put the hoopla of the NCAA tourney to work for you.

We're not saying that watching the teams advance through the [NCAA college basketball tournament](#) is *not* important. After all, March Madness is a phenomenon. [Almost 50 million Americans are participating in some kind of office pool](#) and filling out their own '[brackets](#)', and millions more will be watching tonight and tomorrow night when 16 teams get winnowed down to eight. (We all know Florida is expected to win anyway.)

But here's what you probably don't know: The theories behind the tournament have great parallels in business. Even the brackets have their place. A small startup in Oakland, CA called [Back to the Roots](#) was *game* to try this out. Here's a very simplified version of how brackets could have worked when they were deciding how to fund their newest product, the AquaFarm.



*\*A group backed by legendary investor Warren Buffett ran a contest offering \$1 billion to anyone who submitted a bracket that perfectly matched the tourney results. No one will win, Major upsets last weekend eliminated the top contenders.*

In brainstorming with Back to the Roots' co-founder Nikhil Arora, he said choosing to launch their second product on Kickstarter was a big decision. He said for them, the only way to make big decisions like that is to start broad with the entire spectrum of possibilities, and slowly start eliminating choices one by one.

"In the end, we realized Kickstarter was the smartest way to launch AquaFarm for a variety of reasons - testing demand, fundraising, creating buzz, and building a loyal, initial user base."

He also gave his advice on how the NCAA tourney rules can apply to running a business.

1. Never underestimate your opponents. Dayton beat Ohio State (a much bigger school) and advanced to this weekend's games.
2. The frenzied fans that give the tournament its March Madness nickname are a lot like your company fans. Says Arora, "What's true in basketball is true in business - the sixth man is the most crucial person in the game. Our most

loyal customers are the ones who push us to continue to innovate, challenge us to be better, and encourage us when things are tough.”

3. Start with lots of choices (or contenders) and narrow it down to something manageable. The NCAA chooses 64 teams initially and over four weeks, a winner emerges.
4. Every year, there are Cinderella teams – teams that unexpectedly achieve success in the tournament. (Mercer beat Duke earlier in the tourney.) The same holds true in business. Often the biggest winners are companies that emerge out of nowhere.
5. While things may sound complicated at first (like the whole NCAA tournament thing), they get easier to figure out once you get into it.
6. In the NCAA, some teams selected for the tourney are assured a spot, others end up not making the cut and a third group ‘the bubble teams’ could go either way. Look at everything as a ‘bubble’. Keep your options – and your mind – open!
7. The NCAA gives more points to teams who win on the road when they create the initial 64-team bracket. Often winning business requires that you travel – don’t underestimate the power of connecting in person.
8. Think of getting rid of your underachievers. Are some of your business strategies nearing retirement, or were never very good anyway? Duke went out on the first round last year and again this year. Duke has always been a powerhouse but has Coach K lost his touch?
9. Have GREAT passion for what you do! Going into the tourney, Stanford wasn’t doing so well – they lost four of their last seven games. But as soon as they hit the tourney, they started playing outstanding defense and, most importantly, they believed in themselves as a team – they started showing tremendous heart for the game.
10. Keep your team and employees happy. Kentucky has the ‘fab 5 freshmen’, and in general, very few seniors play in the NCAA. Many players leave in their freshman year now for the NBA. In business, what can you be doing to keep your best people?

In the end, it all boils down to luck sometimes and the drive to win ...whether you’re a company or a team.

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