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Technology startups take work, owners say

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Three technology entrepreneurs told their story of filling niches Thursday during the final spring business forum at Wichita State's Center for Entrepreneurship.

Jason Opat, Jared Brickman and Brian Pettey told stories that were a little different from classic business start-ups: They went to work producing products and pieced business plans together later as they grew.

Opat, the founder and CEO of Integrated Media Group, a Wichita-based graphics and technology company tied to the feature film industry, said his business is all about evolution.

"For me, it's just about adaptation," he said. "You better learn to adapt, be willing to adjust to each new thing.

"Innovating is what's fun. That and meeting the next challenge."

And all three men said they were overwhelmed by all the work a startup creates.

"I can't stand managing, sitting in the office and working out the logistics for employees," said Pettey, the founder and CEO of Robotzone, a robotics manufacturer.

"It got to the point that I really missed what I do best — sitting in the back room tinkering with product."

Opat said workload is forcing his business to grow.

"If a task is taking too much time, then it's a job," he said. "I want to add staff. I spend too much time doing PR and marketing on the phone right now, so I need to add a person."

Entrepreneurs must begin to delegate successfully to grow their business, they said.

"The key is getting people to trust you and take a chance on you," Opat said. "Sure, I take chances on people too and sometimes people fail.

"But you have to get to a point where you can let go sometimes. And you have to make sure your staff goes home sometimes, too."

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