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### TC50 start-ups are flickering beacons of success

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It gets harder trying to spot the next big thing, especially when you can't see the start-ups for the upstarts among the hundreds of pitches being made at TechCrunch50 this week.

In the end, the judges of this tech jamboree of new ideas in search of funding chose RedBeacon – a local service started by former Google employees to hook up plumbers and painters with customers – as winner of the \$50,000 top prize.

RedBeacon's success follows that of Yammer a year ago, although the Twitter clone has yet to reach critical mass, and Mint.com, two years ago. The personal finance service announced on the opening day of TC50 that it had been bought by Intuit for \$170m.

Other favourites of the judges were Citysourced – a pothole-reporting service, Threadsy and AnyClip, who were named as the three runners-up.

Although all have their uses, none of the services struck me as likely to change the world in the way a Google or Facebook has done.

I have signed up for Threadsy, which is like TweetDeck in aggregating status updates from Twitter and Facebook, but also integrates email accounts, so users can keep track of all their messages in one window.

This unified approach is attractive, but maybe not that desirable in the browser – I prefer having a dedicated email page like Gmail with its greater functionality. Deleting messages in Threadsy did not delete them in my Gmail inbox, so the beta product clearly needs more work.

AnyClip won the admiration of the judges with its promise of “any moment from any movie ever made” and it certainly looked a slick site as quotes were typed in from *Annie Hall* and *The Big Lebowski* and the search engine produced and played the

relevant clips.

However, AnyClip admitted it had only indexed 300 movies to date and would need to win the support of all the major movie studios to succeed – no mean task.

One service that impressed me, but was met with indifference by the judges, was Crowd Fusion. This free content management system could empower thousands of amateur bloggers and transform their designs and content with its elegant structured database.

Brian Alvey, chief executive, said his open source model was imitating that of MySQL and if he could achieve the same outcome – MySQL was bought by Sun for \$1bn last year – his is likely to have been the most successful start-up on show.

On the hardware side, I liked iTwin – a double-ended USB key that someone buys, breaks in two and sends one half to a friend, relative or business associate.

When both USB keys are plugged in, files can be shared securely between two computers anywhere in the world over the internet, as if the two halves of the device are joined by an invisible cable.

This makes it easy enough for your grandmother to be able to share large files such as videos and family photo collections.

The Singapore start-up may be charging too much for the device – it wants \$99, while a Best Buy representative at the conference suggested it should sell for \$25 – \$30.

It also faces competition from an increasing number of services that make exchanging large files easier.

As well as the YouSendIt and Drop.io web services, Pogoplug allows users to plug in an external USB drive into a router, allowing themselves and others to transfer and even view and play files remotely via its website or through an iPhone app.

Seagate announced a dock for its FreeAgent external drives today that is Pogoplug-enabled, with a free one-year subscription to the service.

The DockStar has three additional USB ports allowing four drives to be connected at once. It sells for a recommended price of \$100, with the Pogoplug subscription renewable for \$30 a year.

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