

Student companies compete in same market

By **STEPHANIE YANG**
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With the end of the school year approaching, Northwestern's two student-run storage companies are bringing their services to a close, each optimistic in its business prospects and performance.

Launched on May 6, BoxCo. entered the student storage market this spring against several contenders including Campus Solutions, the only other student-run storage company, which was founded in 2007.

Prateek Janardhan (WCAS '12), co-founder and CEO of BoxCo., said the founders thought the storage market would offer exposure because Campus Solutions was the only student-run player in the business.

"At the core, these two services are the same... but there are differences in they ways in which they do them," he said.

Janardhan said some unique services BoxCo. offered included giving a final price to the customer at the time of storage pick up. Customers were also allowed to pay on the spot and could use credit cards.

"All these things were to make our customers' lives easier," Janardhan said.

He said he considers BoxCo.'s first year in business a success, based on two main metrics. One of those measurements Janardhan said is the number of customers. He said a company's customers reflect how compelling its proposition is and how effectively the company marketed that proposition. Janardhan said BoxCo. set a goal of 300 customers for its first year and surpassed that goal by the end of the school year.

"As a new company, we did not know how many to (customers) to expect," he said. "Our goal was to offer excellent service to every one of our customers."

The next metric, Janardhan said, is customer service. He said BoxCo. sent a feedback form to customers, and found the response "overwhelmingly positive."

"It was a fairly challenging few months," Janardhan said. "The challenge next year will be reflecting on everything we've done this year."

Ren Wang (WCAS '09), founder and CEO of

Campus Solutions, said he is interested to see what happens in the student storage market next year. He said Campus Solutions will not make any drastic changes to the service.

"We always make tweaks and adjustments every single year," he said. "We definitely know where we are going."

Wang said, in contrast, BoxCo. will need time to learn more about the business. He said last year 95% of customers gave Campus Solutions five out of five stars for its service. Wang said Campus Solutions currently has over 800 confirmed customers, and is still receiving orders from students who have not yet left Evanston.

Despite this, Campus Solution's business last year surpassed 1,000 customers, Wang said, and this year the number decreased about 20%.

"Obviously (BoxCo.) got some customers. It's pretty much inevitable," Wang said. "We still have about 80% of the market, we're not very worried... We know what we are doing

and we did it well."

Wang also said Campus Solutions did not lose any customers to BoxCo. this year. Instead, he said the two companies split business of the freshman class between them.

Janardhan said until now, the market had been essentially made up of all national competitors.

"Coming in as another student competition will lead to a lot of innovation in this market," Janardhan said. "I think we've already taken a lead on that."

He said the student body became more aware of summer storage this year because of the increased amount of storage companies.

Sarah Freishtat, a Medill senior, said she saw some changes in Campus Solutions this year, which she had used previously.

"They were a lot more accommodating with times to pick up boxes and times to drop off supplies," she said.

She said she thinks the competition will

force companies to work around customers' schedules and will increase convenience. She also said another change might be price, which she has heard many people complain about.

Communication sophomore Mercy Yang said she hopes the competition will create more storage options and even potentially lead to another storage company.

"I thought it was definitely necessary for there to be more than one (storage company) on campus," Yang said.

Wang said many positive results come from having BoxCo. as a direct competitor. He said how well Campus Solutions does is only one aspect of the business.

"It's going to challenge us to grow," Wang said. "(The company experience)'s truly a unique experience, and having this competition is going to give (the students) that much more out of it."

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