



**BUSINESS MONDAY**

## Holder of a Guinness World Record in math finds new challenge in startup trenches

**BY NANCY DAHLBERG**  
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**Company name:** Viera Academy

**Headquarters:** Miami Beach

**Concept:** By providing a free college-prep platform, Viera Academy democratizes the path to and through college.

**Story:** In his spare time, this startup founder defends his Guinness World Record in mental calculations. But running his startup gives his brain a daily workout.

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To escape Cuba in 2007, Yusnier Viera, a professor in Havana making barely \$20 a month, put his ingenuity to work. He had a natural ability for math and believed that with hard work, he could win the Guinness World Record for mental calculation. Known as the “Human Calendar” — ask him what day of the week some random date was many years ago, and he can tell you instantly — Yusnier knew competing globally in competitions could give him the opening to defect. It worked.

Next, he put his ingenuity to work building an educational business in the Miami area.

In 2015, his small team launched Hectoc, a math game for IOS and Android. It became part of a three-game portfolio of math games geared to younger children, part of his former company called “Matemática Picante” (Spicy Math). In 2016, Spicy Math evolved into Viera Academy, an online gamified college-prep platform.

Viera recruited his co-founder, Carlos Raúl García, who studied computer science at the University of Havana, as a tutor while with Spicy Math. Raúl, now Viera Academy’s chief operations officer, created one of the games.

Viera Academy is on a mission to simplify the college preparation process through its online platform offering learning games and tutoring services. Today, the revenue-generating Viera Academy has more than 5,500 online users — up 3,000 since January — and more than 50 tutors. The business model includes several revenue streams. For consumers, in addition to a free version there is a premium version of its product, which for about \$60 annually offers access to all its tests and games for college prep. Viera also gets a cut of fees charged by Viera Academy-certified tutors.

Viera Academy offers products and services for schools. Viera Academy has acquired its first large customer, a private school in South Florida, and it offers an after-school tutoring program. The six-figure deal gives the team the supercharge it needs at this stage of the young company, Viera said.

Together with organic growth among consumers, Viera believes the deal with the school and ones that follow could help Viera Academy draw 40,000 students by the end of the year.

Yusier Viera’s fame as a world record holder has brought valuable press coverage, including on Ellen DeGeneres’ show. He and Viera team members visit schools regularly to entertain and inspire students. Viera is also a mathematics professor at Miami Dade College, where he successfully reclaimed the Guinness World Record for mental calendar calculation on Jan. 27.

Yusnier Viera at "The Ellen Show"



**Founded:** January 2017

**Website / Social:** <https://viera.academy>; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/viera.academy>; Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/vieraacademyofficial>

**Management Team:** Yusnier Viera (CEO); Carlos Raúl Garcia (COO); Yamel Barroso (chief marketing officer).

**No. of employees:** Six

**Financing:** \$130,000 funded by the founders. The company is potentially looking for a seed round of financing.

**Recent milestones:** Finalized partnership agreement with URBE university, a prestigious institution from Venezuela that recently expanded operations to Miami, to launch a Test Preparation Center in Doral. The preparation center is focused on SAT, ACT and tutoring for K-12 (Online and In-Person). Viera Academy was selected for eMerge Americas Startup Showcase and most recently for 500 Startups' first Founders Bootcamp. In 2017, Viera Academy was also a finalist in a national WeWork Creators competition, which provided free work space for a year. The company previously participated in the StartUP FIU accelerator.

**Biggest startup challenge:** Scale its business-to-business distribution model to reach at least 10 schools by the end of 2018. Obtain the capital, either through fund-raising or organic revenue, to grow the marketing and customer support team.

**Next steps:** "Our main milestones include selling our After School Tutoring Program to at least 10 schools and grow our user base up to 40,000 students by the end of current year," Viera said. The company will also continue to work on strengthening its value proposition, focused primarily on "The Viera Method," and optimizing customer retention and its referrals rate.

**Advisor's view:** "I like the quality and the authenticity of the founders. They have a unique background based on their personal achievements. And they are hustlers — a very important entrepreneurial trait," said Leandro Finol, director of Platform.Miami, who is on Viera Academy's advisory board. "We are aligned on the mission of the organization: to help everyone to try to attend the best possible college and achieve their full potential. It is a big idea with a potentially huge impact."

Finol said the team has already proved "The Viera Method," what Finol calls their secret sauce on how to improve 200 points in the SAT. The team has also shown the B2B model can bring revenue right away. The startup should continue to improve and simplify the user experience on the platform, as well as build an intuitive app in the next 90 days, Finol said. Finol connected the team with Nearpod co-founder Felipe Sommer and the ed-tech company's product team and they are getting incredible feedback. Sommer is now also on Viera Academy's board of advisors.

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