

M&T Summer Fellowship 2012  
Patrick Wingo

My summer in Silicon Valley was certainly an interesting one. I was originally hired to live in a “hacker house,” working on a startup called MealSnapper, which did augmented reality on restaurant menus, allowing you to see more details on food and order from your phone. I did data scraping for the company for a week to two weeks, but it was eventually decided that none of the 9 interns were needed at the company, and only two of the original twelve employees stayed on; I was not among those two.

Because all of us were let go very suddenly, the founders, members of Y Combinator, sent out an email to the entire YC list with our names and descriptions. Within days, my mailbox was filled with about a hundred inquisitions, all asking “are you still looking for a job?” Despite the excitement of interest from startups, it was still especially difficult because it meant rushing from place to place, doing technical interview after technical interview. It meant meeting dozens of valley entrepreneurs, and getting to understand how they ran their companies as best I could in the hour or two scheduled for the interview. It meant a stressful, packed week where, every day, I was tested as an engineer.

So eventually I found a place that seemed to be a good mutual fit, a startup from YCW’12, called PlanGrid. They did blueprints on the iPad, along with all the necessary versioning and annotations, and features that construction engineers and managers could need. It was definitely a great experience, and it forced me to become technical: building their admin website, and incorporating data analytics reports into that website. I essentially created an interface to their database through which they could support their users, upgrade them through the various stages of their freemium model, and understand the characteristics and attributes of their customers, as well as likelihood of converting them to premium from free.

I think that my experience provided insight on my plans and goals in the future, as I learned a few important things: embrace risk, as there is really only the possibility of upside, considering that there is a lot to fall back on with the Penn and M&T network, as well as the skills acquired in school and outside of it; picking the right people is more important than picking the right idea; engineering is really hard, and it takes a lot of work, but that’s an advantage- hard work will make you a better engineer, giving your product barriers to entry through technical difficulty; be an engineer and always try to be technical, because it is easy to branch away from, but hard to branch into. The summer helped me to choose my future path in tech as an engineer or technical co-founder.