

# My Start-Up Life



**W**hen his acceptance letter from Claremont McKenna College arrived, Ben Casnocha's high school counselor called him aside. "Listen," he told the young entrepreneur, who was in the middle of writing a book and running his second company, "Usually I say there is no such thing as a perfect fit, but in this case I'm wrong. This," he said, "is a perfect fit."

Casnocha joins CMC this fall in the footsteps of father David '73, a partner at a San Francisco law firm. But the youngest Casnocha, who founded the e-government software company Comcate, Inc., as a high school sophomore, says the College was always his top choice for a liberal arts education—not a presumptive. Why? Leadership. Curriculum. Location. The blending of a small campus with university-sized benefits—not to mention incontrovertible social and academic advantages living in the greater Los Angeles area.

Casnocha's book, *My Start-Up Life: What a (Very) Young CEO Learned on His Journey Through Silicon Valley*, was released in May, with a *New York Times* book review calling it a publication "very much worth reading to gain insight into the mind, manners and ambitions of an American entrepreneur from whom we will almost undoubtedly be hearing again throughout the first half of this century."

The young author started his first company, Comcate, at age 14. And his blog (<http://ben.casnocha.com/>), a systematic collection of musings, bookmarks, intellectual heroes, and book reviews, was named one of the top-25 in Silicon Valley by the *San Jose Business Journal*.

"I am trying to live a life of intellectual pursuit but also engagement with the real world," says Casnocha, thanking parents who "never forced me to color inside the lines."

As a kid, his entrepreneurial itches were scratched selling gum and pens to brothers and friends. Today, his motivations and influences appear endless.

During a recent break from a book-signing tour and speaking engagements, Casnocha let us peek into his life:

*What time did you get up today?*

**7:15 a.m.**

*What woke you?*

**Alarm clock. It's been a crazy week of NYC media stuff for my book!**

*What was the most important order of business?*

**I had a bunch of meetings, a couple of calls, and an evening party. Two of the meetings were pretty casual, with people I know virtually, but hadn't spent time with in-person. The cocktail party was full of people from the publishing world.**

*Who holds the No. 1 spot on your speed dial?*

**No single person. It just depends on what's going on.**

*Ballpark: How many e-mails do you send a day?*

**I send and receive about 200 legitimate e-mails daily, and my spam filter gets a few hundred. Thanks to my mobile device, I am processing e-mail all day, every day.**

*Tell us what Web site you can't live without...*

**Many. I use an RSS reader to track about 500 feeds, of which about 50 are "high priority." Some of these are news Web sites, some are blogs by people important to my life.**

*What was the last word you looked up?*

**Prudential. I heard someone use it in a sentence the other day and I thought about how I never use it in my speech. I'm researching how it's most commonly used.**

*You'll be in Southern California soon for book signings. What is your favorite thing to do here?*

**Some of my company's best clients are in Southern California, like the cities of Pomona and Beverly Hills, and Orange County. I love the weather and the laid back but focused nature of most of the people. And I'll be working on my tan, of course.**

*If you had just three words to describe your book*

**...In a sentence, it's the story of my own entrepreneurship, written in a way that can aid and inspire other entrepreneurs to start their own businesses, or simply become CEO of their own lives.**

*Fair enough. Whose writing just blows you away?*

**Some favorites are David Foster Wallace (a creative writing professor at Pomona College), Jonathan Franzen, and Michael Lewis.**

*If you could brainstorm with a handful of people—anyone, any field—whom would you pick?*

**Richard Posner, Steve Jobs, Rick Warren, Oprah Winfrey, David Brooks. All over dinner at In-N-Out Burger.**

*What will you pack for college this fall?*

**Traveling overseas for three months, I learned that as long as I have my computer, the Internet, and plenty of books, I have everything I need. I have little need for most anything else.**

*What would you name this first chapter of your life?*

**My Start-Up Life.**

—Alissa Sandford