

Middlebury Alum to Appear on ABC's 'Shark Tank'

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- MIDDLEBURY, Vt. – Cam MacKugler, founder of the start-up gardening company Seedsheet, will appear on ABC's hit reality show, *Shark Tank*, on Friday, April 7, at 9 p.m. (EST). The show gives entrepreneurs a chance to pitch their business ideas to a panel of celebrity tycoons looking for investment opportunities.

MacKugler, who graduated from Middlebury in 2009 with a degree in studio art and architecture, designed a product to simplify gardening and make it accessible—even to those who live in urban areas. Seedsheets, which are manufactured in Middlebury, contain dissolvable pouches of seeds embedded in a weed-blocking fabric that can simply be laid over soil and watered to produce a variety of fresh produce. His company is currently focused on container-garden sheets, but plans to expand to larger garden sheets in the future.

Shark Tank mixes excitement, tension, and humor as the “sharks” listen to a short pitch, then grill contestants with skeptical questions about their business plans. The tables can turn quickly, though, when a contestant presents a great business idea that sets the sharks on each other, vying to cut the best deal. Offers, when they come, typically include some combination of cash, equity, or royalties in the new business. Now in its 8th season, the show says it has surpassed \$100 million in deals made with entrepreneurs.

For contestants, it's all about the pitch, and MacKugler says he worked on his extensively before appearing on the show. In his initial practice videos, he was startled by how “dull” he looked on camera, but he eventually learned how to convey his genuine excitement to a TV audience. A successful pitch meant not only aiming for a great deal, but also being entertaining enough to assure airing before ABC's 10 million *Shark Tank* viewers.

“I studied the typical investments that each shark makes, the type of companies and industries they have affinities for, typical deal structures they propose, and as much background information on each person as possible,” said MacKugler. Unlike more traditional pitches to investor or venture funds, he noted, *Shark Tank* has a massive library of previous pitches, which makes research a lot easier.

Seedsheet was hatched in 2015, with support from the Middlebury College-affiliated Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies. Over its short life, the company has shown promise, winning a couple of Vermont business start-up competitions and completing a successful Kickstarter campaign. MacKugler says his early success led to angel investors and eventually to a 2016 contract with national chain Home Depot.

“The complete and utter destruction of my perception of scale is what is so exciting right now,” mused MacKugler. “I was ecstatic after Kickstarter where we raised \$30,000 from 300 backers; I was jubilant as we shipped products to 50 Home Depot stores across the country, and I was deliriously caffeinated as we sold 1,500 Seedsheets during a two-week long agriculture fair. Now I



On the set of ABC's *Shark Tank*, Mark Cuban tries rolling out a Seedsheet as inventor Cam MacKugler '09 (right) looks on.

am about to demonstrate my products in front of over 10 million people, 16 times the population of Vermont!”

Seedsheet will host a viewing party, open to the public, on Friday, April 7, starting at 8:50 p.m. at Two Brothers Tavern in Middlebury.