

Multi-Platform, Mobile Education Products for Educators, Students and Parents



Karen Sorensen
CEO & Founder

About 21st Century Education

21st Century Education, Inc. is a multi-platform mobile learning company. We build high quality education products that prepare educators, students and parents for a 21st Century education paradigm.

Our core strengths stem from a deep understanding of the complex needs and evolving technology trends in public education. Our mission is to develop products and services, such as our flagship 21 Teach supports learning anywhere, anytime for anyone.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Ms. Sorensen, what is the concept at 21st Century Education?

Ms. Sorensen: The idea behind the company stems from our passionate belief that mobile devices will change how education will be delivered. Our focus on this belief helps us provide the best type of resources for teachers, students and parents to navigate new 21st century information and communication technology changes. My background experience in education fuels the idea behind teaching multi-disciplinary subjects today, where before you could just focus on one particular subject. For instance, you could just study history and that may have been good enough for you. Today, we would teach how history also applies to the environment or other areas like mathematics. We try to take a multi-disciplinary approach to each subject we provide.

CEOCFO: What are some of the fundamentals that you are providing that puts them in the 'best' category?

Ms. Sorensen: One of the best things we provide is our team, which is comprised of educators who have been in the trenches and know and believe in these concepts, and believe that education is changing. That awareness puts us ahead of everybody else. I have spent numerous hours with people that are early adaptors of mobile education. They demonstrate abilities that quickly identify how to use mobile devices to provide tactile, auditory and visual learning. We base our learning concepts around quickly initiating learning processes. That is one of the reasons why we feel our team members are our best assets. The application of our quality products is key to our success. And our team members understand how to best use and apply our products for learning and achievement.

CEOCFO: What products are available today?

Ms. Sorensen: We recently released a product called 21 Teach. It's a mobile app of free educational resources aligned to Common Core standards, which is the new state standards being established in 44 states. We have 304 educational content options that surpass Common Core standards. We provide our products through a digital library service to teachers, so they can quickly find specific high quality educational content they're looking for on smartphones and tablets. 21 Teach is easily found in the Google Play Store and on iTunes store.

CEOCFO: What will people receive with the app?

Ms. Sorensen: When teachers, tutors, students and parents access our app they can choose between grade levels and subjects. Right now, we have focused our curation on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). 21 Teach users can get a list of content by subject with descriptions and reviews before they download. You could think of 21 Teach as a library of high quality Common Core standard educational content with a Google-esk type of search engine.

CEOCFO: What is your revenue model?

Ms. Sorensen: We have a freemium business model similar to local business discover app Yelp. 100% of our curated content is free to the user, but about 75% of our educational publishers offer some type of premium content. We charge

publishers and educational developers to have a link to their content on our platform and positioning on the search engine results. Users can rate the content available on 21Teach just like on Yelp.

CEO CFO: *How has it been working out as a business venture so far?*

Ms. Sorensen: We launched about 20 days ago and have been very busy traveling through across the country trying to scale up our base of users. We are hitting the streets for face-to-face engagement at schools and district headquarters while promoting 21 Teach using social media. Our product has demonstrated strong success with schools and districts that have a high percentage of FRL (free or reduced lunch) students. The 20 million FRL students do not have computers or laptops with broadband or Wifi at home and their only access to the internet is through smart-phones or tablets. 21Teach is designed for mobile devices, ideal for schools and districts that serve this population because it allows students to have access to classroom content at home.

CEO CFO: *Are there similar concepts?*

Ms. Sorensen: Yes, there are similar concepts with an increasingly crowded space of companies curating educational content. Our advantage is 21 Teach is the only high quality Common Core content curator in the education market dedicated to mobile apps. We do not curate websites because many times websites are not mobile-friendly, especially in the education field. We stick to content available on iTunes or YouTube.

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CEO CFO: *What has been the feedback?*

Ms. Sorensen: We're very pleased. The feedback has been excellent. Of course, we did audience engagement testing before launch to ensure alignment with the needs of our target market. I was previously communications chair for the largest mobile learning group in the country for three years. As a team, we asked, what are the biggest pain points for our audience? I approached 21 Teach with that same consideration for the user and it has paid off. Teachers are really very receptive to our app. I have heard teachers say it is *exactly* what they needed. Since 2009, we've been following Common Core standards. I became an expert in this particular area of mobile, Common Core, 21st century skill development before we even sat down and started coding for this product.

CEO CFO: *What has changed in your approach and what have you learned over the last couple of years since you have been formulating the product?*

Ms. Sorensen: We came into this endeavor with such a rich background and sharp eyes that remained focused. I think that made our monetization plan, interactions with our teachers and our marketing much stronger. I think the focus factor has been the main key to our successful launch.

CEO CFO: *What do you draw on for the business side?*

Ms. Sorensen: I have an unusual background. I have a bachelor's in business and I was previously an entrepreneur. So, this is not my first time running a business. I've had some successes and some failures. I realize the most important thing is timing, especially with something that is original or a first-mover in the market, like 21 Teach. We are so lean that I would call us a scrappy startup. Because my experience in business, I can draw on that when deciding on office space or graphics and important components for which people typically will pay a ton of money. Because of my background, I know how to keep costs down. My experience ranges from being a professor of education all the way to owning my own mortgage company. 21 Teach receives the benefit of my passion combined with lessons from mistakes and successes I've experienced.

CEO CFO: *What is your two-minute take on education today?*

Ms. Sorensen: I think there are great teachers and there can be bad teachers as well as lousy teachers across the board. Unfortunately, many of those great teachers get classified with the bad teachers and that is unfair. A part of 21 Teach

helps empower those great teachers to show and shine. That goes for administrators too because there are good, bad and ugly across the board. Funding is an interesting concept. I have written about this for about 20 years. How we fund education right now has a strong political element to it that does not make for rational decision-making. We have school districts that are failing. And they are really billion-dollar a year companies, if you look at it from that standpoint. In regards to Common Core, standards represent objectives and I think everyone agrees that there needs to be learning objectives for students. The problem is that the objective too often gets politicized. I think the No Child Left Behind politics made it impossible for any district to be successful; you cannot have 100% literacy in math and English across the board. It just does not make sense. After we look at No Child Left Behind, then we can change some issues around Common Core. The new learning objectives are good, certainly better than what was previously available. We are looking at a much richer approach to curricula evaluation and having students perform better quality work.

CEOFCO: *Why pay attention to 21 Teach and 21st Century Education?*

Ms. Sorensen: We are positioning ourselves to be the leader in mobile learning education. We offer a whole new perspective that utilizes a lot of content derived from deep learning theory. We're a strong leader with a goal to be the #1 education company within this field.

CEOFCO: *Final thoughts?*

Mr. Sorensen: Thanks for your time and reaching out to learn more about 21st Century Education and 21Teach.

BIO: Karen Sorensen, is a serial entrepreneur, speaker and mobile learning startup founder living and working in Silicon Valley. At the University of Northern Colorado, she received a B.S. in Business Administration-Entrepreneurship and an M.A. in Educational Technology.

Karen is currently the founder and Chief Content Officer of 21st Century Education, a multi-platform mobile learning company that designs and develops high-quality education solutions for students, parents and educators for a 21st Century education paradigm.

She has used digital technology since the mid-90's. Karen has deep experience with mobile technologies instruction and is developing several products mobile devices. Karen works with talented teams of entrepreneurs who she personally recruits. She does all initial creative and technical work on her projects.

As a speaker and educator, Karen incorporates the methods of "guide on the side" in her presentations about P-20 education, 21st Century pedagogy, Web 3.0 technologies, and entrepreneurship. These presentations are delivered through 21st Century skills, multimedia and collaboration that engage and involve parents, community and educators.

Karen's 30-year career has been diverse; she has worked in a leadership role with educators, students, parents, community members and business leaders. She has been an educational technology adjunct faculty member, college administrator and PTO president.

Karen has owned and started businesses in the retail, finance and education sectors, utilizing cutting-edge technologies to increase efficiency. Karen has been a leader in developing community outreach, involvement and engagement for cause advocacy with a firm belief in educational reform.

In 2010, Karen was the elected Communications Chair for the International Society of Technology (ISTE-SIGML), a special interest group whose focus is on mobile learning.

Karen's systemic approach to 21st Century skills is illustrated in her model, "The 21st Century Thinker", presented at ISTE 2011. "The 21st Century Thinker" explains the systems behind expanding 21st Century skills to students in the classroom, schools and organizations. In 2014, Karen presented at ISTE, "The Flipping PD."

Karen was invited to co-produce the first m-Education (mobile) panel series for Global Mobile Internet Conference in 2013 in San Francisco.

Karen lives in Santa Clara, California with her son, a high school freshman.



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