

Patch: Financing the Entrepreneurial Business

Abstract

Heading into Old Street Tube station in London on a chilly January day, Freddie's mind was racing with ideas. He had just come out from another meeting with Forward Partners, a well-known, London-based venture capital firm, and it was clear the conversation had gone well. The team at Forward Partners understood his vision and saw value in the opportunity he had identified: a personalised solution to the urban gardening market. Moreover, Forward Partners brings a unique value proposition, with a team of in-house technical and marketing experts that work closely with the entrepreneurs. But is that the right fit for him?

The roots of the opportunity

About a year earlier – spring time to be exact – Freddie Blackett had got engaged and moved in with his fiancée, into her two-bedroom flat that she had decorated with great taste. Eager to put his stamp on what was her place, Freddie soon saw an opportunity in the bare concrete balcony. “Surely, I can turn it into an urban garden that we could be proud of?” he thought to himself. It soon dawned on him, however, that this was going to be far easier said than done. He knew very little about plants. What would work best in a small north-facing balcony? Where might he find help and plants? An online search turned up little in the way of advice and he was not keen to spend hours travelling to one of the big garden centres on the outskirts of town. In the end, he opted for some plants from a nearby supermarket which, not surprisingly, died within weeks.

He noticed that many of his friends shared similar experiences: “I don't know what I'm buying – I hope it doesn't require much upkeep!”; “I don't know what would look good or even what might grow on my balcony”; and “I don't have time to go to the garden centre.” The opportunity ultimately crystallised in his head during a drive up to Oxford with his fiancée, when the two quizzed each other about possible business ideas. Here is a real pain point, Freddie thought to himself. He decided to solve the problems of access and knowledge that many house-proud urban dwellers encounter. The immediate goal is to develop a modern solution for people who live in a London flat (target age group 22-44 years old) who want to transform their balconies, roof terraces and windowsills with personalised garden and outdoor products. He spent the next few weeks developing the idea, now codenamed 'Patch'. As a marketing professional, he researched the topic thoroughly and often leveraged the resources of the Business and IP Centre at the British Library.

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