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5-2015

### Expand your business, quickly

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#### Citation

Singapore Management University. Expand your business, quickly. (2015).

Available at: <https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/pers/104>

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# Expand your business, quickly

Published:

27 May 2015



*Like-minded team members, one key decision maker and the passion for the business have helped a serial entrepreneur grow his fourth business venture by leaps and bounds*

CEO & Cofounder of HotelQuickly Tomas Laboutka scaled his mobile app business in the hospitality sector from zero to 15 countries in 24 months. Today, the company has nine offices and 90 employees worldwide.

The serial entrepreneur, who founded three ventures over the past six years, cites the following as success factors for his business expansion:

- Be passionate about the ‘why’ of the business
- Keep the core elements of his product in-house, and
- Set up a team with the ultimate key decision maker.

## The ‘why’ of a start-up

Loubtka’s mobile application enables travellers to book and enjoy hotel offers at the last minute. Rather than working on an online model, the mobile app offers private transactions between the hotel and traveller.

“We ask hotels that we have curated for unoccupied rooms, which is on average 35% of the total number of rooms. We offer these available rooms to consumers through the mobile phone application only,” says Toubtka.

“The deal is among the hotel, you and me. No one else sees it. As the deal is so last minute and exclusive for members only, the offers are guaranteed better than anything offered online. The ‘why’ of the app is to enable people to travel last minute and as they want.”

These closed deals also encourage hotel owners to release unoccupied rooms at a discount in a private and exclusive manner that does not affect their brand image not resulting in value negatively.

## **Staying power**

Unlike the popular notion that a start-up offers the easiest way to generate income while having the freedom and flexibility to make things happen, as well as grow staff strength and talent, Loubtka says an entrepreneur often faces naysayers and needs passion and commitment to the business.

“If I tell you any idea, business-educated people are able to analyse it to death in five minutes. They are able to see through it and come up with so many questions that are going to stop you from doing anything and kill the idea immediately,” he says.

“The moment you see something that you are passionate about and you understand why you want to do it, imagine yourself sticking to the idea and problem intensively for as long as you can, and marry that problem. If you can image that, just go. You are going to solve all other problems.”

However, he cautions against being distracted with more business ideas and opportunities that may do more harm than good.

“You can’t do several things at once, have side jobs and work on little projects. I can guarantee you that you will never succeed. It is not the idea that matters but the execution. When you split the execution, you will not only spread the work but switch costs in the projects. The lack of focus and passion is going to cost you so much that the project is not going to happen,” says Loubtka.

“The serial entrepreneur is not one who has seven businesses that he is building at the same time. It is the idea of doing one thing and doing it really well.”

## **Keep core business elements in-house**

Riding on the trend of more Asians owning smart phones, as well as the ease of online shopping and mobile commerce, Loubtka created a mobile app and ensured the core of the business stays in-house, after having a negative experience of outsourcing the initial mobile app design to a third party company.

“The first design draft of my app was unexciting. I was trying to bootstrap and build a product to show to the investors, as well as marketing and public relations people. Sales and marketing would typically be important to the business and it would be easy to just outsource the design of the app. But it is a bad decision by design.

“The moment you do something, you understand why and how you do your business, identify the core, which is how you solve a problem for your customer. We are a very tech-based company. The app is the face, while the business intelligence, backend, the connectivity with the hotels and ensuring price competitiveness are the core of my business that should not be outsourced.

“If not, I am outsourcing the heart of the company that will be beating somewhere else. The vendor, who works on weekdays, is never going to care that the server is down on Saturday at 2am. He is going to pick up the phone to inform me on Monday; this does not work.”

## **Team set-up**

Setting up a business is never a solo undertaking. Like-minded specialists, talents and passionate people are needed to make a start-up work. To keep the core of the business in-house, Loubtka roped in a friend to become his company's co-founder and chief technology officer.

"You have a certain vision and problem to solve. You are never to do it alone. You are going to have people who are as passionate about the business as you are," he says.

When people join the company and the team grows, Loubtka stresses the importance of having one person making the final decision, although anyone can participate in problem solving. This person ensures a task gets done and does not fall through the cracks.

"This plain advice is surprisingly not practiced in many start-ups. Having the key ultimate responsible person brings clarity and transparency to the company. You will know what I am doing and I will know what you are doing. If I do not achieve my goals, it's ok and you will help me out," says Loubtka.

"This is a healthy way of achieving goals. You break up the goals across departments and employees and everyone will start chasing them. The moment you can see through the system, the faster you can scale your business. The people can execute their goals independently, encourage team collaboration to find solutions, care for one another and track progress."

"You understand yourself and know what you do. When I meet people, I will ask them what they like and aim to understand them better. I will find out what motivates them and find areas where I can connect with what they enjoy to what I do," Loubtka says on hiring staff with desirable traits, such as entrepreneurship.

"If I can build that bridge, I do not have to convince them to join my company because they want to do it. I'll just show the direction where it would fit them and to what I do. When the staff and the company have the same 'why', the whole team is not going to throw in the towel on the business."