

SOCIAL NETWORKING ACROSS THE SUPPLY CHAIN

AN INTERVIEW WITH EVE ABBOTT AND ZOE EVANS FROM CROWDGLUE

Eve discovered early on in her career working as a supply chain manager in the manufacturing industry that the most time-consuming work manufacturing companies were faced with was keeping up with the hundreds of emails from partners and clients every day.

"During those years from 2010 to 2016, I knew that reading and responding to emails consumed most of the time of my employees , and every time someone left our company the valuable information just disappeared. Despite being able to distinguish the problem we had, I had no idea how to solve it. On top of that working for a small manufacturing company meant that we didn't have a lot of resources to come up with a solution ourselves," Eve commented.

In 2016, Eve happened to run into an old friend, Zoe, from university while taking the subway to work and very soon into their short conversation about work life, Eve saw potential in combining their know-how to solve an industry-wide problem.

"In short, Zoe told me about her career working as a social media content provider for a large corporation and how the rise of social media forced the company to reshape their way of communicating with customers and partners. She also explained that social media provided them with new tools for both exchanging information quickly as well as building customer and partner relationships. That's exactly the type of communication we needed; easy, fast and secure." Eve explained.

For Zoe, the fact that she was talking about a potential business idea came as a surprise.

"Well, I didn't know at that time I was talking about a solution to Eve's problem. I mean, I was just catching up with an old friend. And just before I was getting off the subway Eve asked me if I was keen on doing a project together and I said yes. That's where our entrepreneurial story started, in the subway. What a place to start a business, right?" Zoe laughed.

Soon after that Eve and Zoe met and started to plan how they could combine their knowledge and know-how into solving Eve's problem. They came up with a solution.

"We decided to start a business of our own that would enhance sharing information between different companies with the logic of social media. So, basically the idea was to create a b2b social network for manufacturing companies. We built a cloud-based collaboration platform where manufacturing companies can connect with their partners and clients and also search for new ones. We decided to offer tools for quick communication, such as chatting, commenting and sharing posts as well as provide a safe platform for sharing documents and other material." Zoe continued.

"We officially founded our company, Crowdglue, here in the UK in January 2017. When we started it was important to get a wide variety of users. Collaboration software is a highly competitive market, but within two years our platform grew rapidly and currently we have over 700 users ranging from microbusinesses to big corporations across 30 countries within the manufacturing industry." Eve explained.

Even though they compete in a highly competitive market, they have managed to position themselves well with a strong focus on a niche industry.

"With Eve we understood that B2C companies selling directly to consumers relied more and more on social networking for effective communication and collaboration. Yet, B2B companies selling to businesses were clearly lagging behind their B2C colleagues, especially in the manufacturing industry where everything works around networking. One reason for this was that there was no other industry-specific tool built around connecting companies like Facebook connecting individuals. That's why we built one ourselves." Eve continued to explain.

Currently Crowdglue is focusing on internationalizing their business and with that in mind they signed up for Technoli's accelerator program in the fall of 2018.

During this past year (2019) we have increased our revenue from 100 000 euros to 300 000 euros and the number of employees from 4 to 8. We were also able to attract Tim Rodgers a creative full-stack developer to join as a co-founder in January. Our strong growth in sales was supported by our participation in Technoli's 4-month accelerator program. The program really helped us to grow internationally." Zoe commented.

As we all know Technoli is a major player in the global tech field offering a wide range of computer software. As a part of their accelerator program, they offer the participants free software, services, mentoring, training and a wide networking possibilities with potential investors, partners and customers. The participation in the program also serves as a positive reference, which helps increase the credibility of a startup.

It is not only the startup that gains from the program. The program enables Technoli to find suitable partners for collaboration and it offers them an easy way to market their software products, which are for example, used by Crowdglue in their platform.

"In terms of growth we really benefited from the program. We were introduced to high profile tech executives of which two of them have joined us as investors, advisers and board members. We also got proper legal advice for free and we made sure our patents were sufficient for other markets outside our own," Zoe added.

"We also have a lot to give to Technoli in the sense that we have incorporated their software into our platform, and all of our customers and partners using our platform use their products as well. Technoli's products are widely used globally and they are considered as an industry standard in the manufacturing industry and, therefore, it was logical for us to use their software. However, it is important to note that we are not bound to their software by no means. We don't have such an agreement. Yet, they have the most widely used software." Zoe explained.

Crowdglue has now gone through the Technoli's accelerator program and both parties see the benefits in continuing collaboration. They are looking into how they can provide more value to their mutual manufacturing customers. They are now looking for experts in startup-corporate collaboration.

"We are now looking for experts in startup-corporate collaboration to plan our future collaboration with Technoli. We need experts to work in our startup, and Technoli is looking for experts to work on the corporate side." Zoe ended.

