

# COVID-19: Dr Vivian Chan, CEO and co-founder of Sparrho

Sparrho curates, aggregates, and summarises the latest in scientific research, with over 60M pieces collected to date. Maddyness spoke with Dr Vivian Chan, CEO and co-founder to understand how they have coped during lockdown and to understand what the future holds.

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[Maddyness] What is the biggest professional challenge for you today?

[Dr Vivian Chan] The biggest professional challenge in this environment has been learning how to lean into change and successfully run the business. It's been a learning curve that no one was prepared for; how do you extend runway while driving growth when the rest of the world is on pause? It's been an interesting obstacle, but we've navigated successfully, and I'm proud of my team for facing the challenge head-on and working tirelessly these past few months.

On a strategic and operational level, we've made significant changes to ensure success for now and in the future, which in some ways, is a positive move. Interestingly, due to COVID-19 and the world's interest in science, our raison

d'être seems more apparent and critical. What we're seeing is a paradigm shift as it relates to the consumption and interest in science and research. People are increasingly curious and want to access science more now.

## Is remote working a new thing for you?

No, we've had remote flexibility before COVID-19. However, full-time remote during lockdown is slightly different. Luckily, because we had the infrastructure and technology in place, the past three months have been relatively smooth for our fully remote team. We've adapted quickly to a more agile way of working.

## How do you keep your employees happy?

Clear communication and positivity! Being transparent as a leader and manager cannot be underestimated. Right now, everyone is going through uncertain times, and as a leader, it's crucial that I provide clarity and directness and positivity which could provide a sense of stability.

## As a leader, what do you do to successfully manage your mental resilience amid lockdown?

I am doubling down on self-care. Since we're all working from home, it is very easy to blur the barrier between work and home, which can be troubling for your mental health. I've taken active steps to introduce new activities into my schedule, like doing more yoga in the morning and after work; this acts as a mental wind down for the day, and it's been working well for the past few months.

## What changes have you made to keep your business running?

Being laser-focused on objectives and keeping the team lean to extend our runway and future.

# What have you implemented to stay competitive?

Taking this time to work on product development has helped with diversifying our buyer personas. COVID-19 gave us space to look at our business and sales prospects to understand how we can help SMEs and Enterprises. This summer, Sparrho is launching our Science as Service due to the rise in demand from Marketers who are keen to leverage objective and easy-to-read science in their digital communications.

We've also launched a COVID-19 newsletter series to celebrate the scientists working on COVID-19 as well as disseminate the latest scientific research related to the virus. We've seen incredible uptake in this series, which validates our belief that there is broad consumer interest in accessing the latest scientific research in an easily digestible and engaging format.

# What advice would you give startup founders to keep managing costs and cash flow efficiently during a crisis?

During a crisis is when competitive startups are born. Founders need to be open to change and understanding what's happening around you on a macro level. In my opinion, it's never been more important to avoid tunnel vision. Take the time to understand how you can future-proof your business, refine your long-term purpose, and discover possible new routes to market.

# What do you think of the support packages for startups offered by the government?

I was very heartened to see the government's support for startups. Given how critical this ecosystem is to the economy and driving innovation, the government must continue to protect and invest its acceleration and future.

# Do you feel confident in your business

# post-COVID?

Yes, we have already begun to realise new opportunities across different markets and industries. We're seeing increased interest in our product, both on the Enterprise and SME level, and the need to access factual information backed by scientific research.

## Are there any changes in society/economy that you think will help you?

I think the move to fully remote working will drastically alter the nature of business and accessing talent from all over the world. The ability to build a truly global team will present opportunities to scale faster.

*Dr Vivian Chan is the Founder & CEO of Sparrho, a tool to rectify the inherent barriers within the scientific ecosystem.*

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