

COVID-19: Interview with Ronan Finnegan, Co-Founder of SPACEbands

SPACEbands is a revolutionary product that aids and monitors social distancing in various environments. Maddyness spoke with Ronan Finnegan Co-founder to understand how two entrepreneurs went from concept to launch during lockdown and what the future holds.

The concept of SPACEbands was formulated after speaking with friends who are primary school teachers. At the time, there were rising anxieties about children returning safely to school and we realised that there had to be a solution to this issue. Within 3 weeks of concept, we had begun sampling our product. After multiple prototypes, we were left with our current device – just 6 weeks later.

Both, Harry and I, have an entrepreneurial background – so, therefore, it is not uncommon that friends reach out to us with issues or innovative ideas. SPACEbands was built at first with schools as our primary market, although we quickly realised that our product had more further scope in various markets.

Social distancing is not being implemented properly at present. Too many people are misinterpreting rules that will speed up the spread of COVID-19.

Whilst the virus itself continues to throw big challenges our way, the universal rules that have been set out to help lower the risk of infection are simple. The social distancing rules may sound simple on paper, but trying to enforce these

is a whole new issue in itself.

As we all know, the biggest threat to the economy right now is not having people in the workplace to operate as normal.

“COVID-19 has brought the world to a halt. We want to help bring the world back to normality safely.”

[Maddyness] What led you to create your startup?

[Ronan] We have been best friends for 14 years. It was a natural progression for us to create a business together. We had both had our own businesses in the past, but working together has always been a dream of ours.

No one in the UK is addressing the problems surrounding social distancing at present, we are sure we are the people to lower the risk of transmission in this country.

Our team is as follows:

Harry Kimberley-Bowen – Co-Founder: Previous experience working in start-ups in small teams to drive them to profitability. Launched his own sustainable drinks business which won Santander’s Ideas Funding Award, Harvey Goldsmith Young Entrepreneurship award and the O2 ThinkBig Award. Presented his drinks business idea in 10 Downing Street to the PM’s Business Adviser to discuss how the government can help tackle food waste on a national level.

Ronan Finnegan – Co-Founder: Previously set up 2 social enterprises and won the TalkTalk Digital Hero Award for these ideas. Digital Marketer with a wealth of experience helping businesses grow across the globe. TEDx speaker.

We both have a wide skill set, which has allowed us to do everything ourselves so far – which has helped to keep costs down. Together, we have set up our own website and e-commerce platform, set up our sales channel, created our

app to go alongside our SPACEbands and sold to a variety of customers in the UK and overseas too.

How did people around you react when you told them about your project?

We are often found throwing business concepts at friends and family, but this one really seemed to get a good reaction, it is a clear solution to a prominent problem within society at the moment.

How did you manage the financial part? Family? Savings? Crowdfunding? Bank loans?

As of yet, we are entirely self-funded. We both had savings from previous businesses. But are looking for an investment as we want to grow at a rapid rate. We are very aware of the time pressure that we are under to bring this product to market. The world is in the centre of a pandemic and we want to do all that we can to stop further transmission of COVID-19.

We cannot grow at the speed that we want to without funding.

Do you know how many times have pitched your business?

This is the first. We have only been live for 6 weeks.

Our first sale was on the 14th of July.

Was remote working a new thing for you and if so will you be adapting your work to allow more of it?

I have worked as a digital nomad for the past 7 years, working on my own businesses and helping others as a marketing consultant. Working remotely is more or less all that I know!

Harry has worked with startups since leaving university and therefore has always had to be flexible with his working day.

Working remotely suits us both very well.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID?

It is clear that social distancing will have to remain in most countries for a long time. The latest Harvard study has shown that social distancing will have to remain in some form until at least 2023. The main risk to our business is for when the world finds a vaccine to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

However, it will be a long time until a vaccine is finally found, tested, and rolled out and schools and businesses will want to have SPACEbands on hand so they

are better prepared for the next airborne disease that breaks out.

Even once a vaccine is found, tested and rolled out, people will still have anxieties around keeping a safe distance between one another, so there will still be a need for our technology.

Our technology is adaptable, and we have already been updating our firmware remotely so that we are in line with government guidelines.

For example, we started by only having a 2-metre alert distance programmed on each band, but when the government changed the guidance to 1-metre distancing, we then updated our firmware so the user can now choose between 1-metre, 2-metre or 3-metre alerts, so they're up to date with government guidance.

We will continuously adapt to the everchanging guidance and requirements in each market across the world, so SPACEbands remain totally relevant and useful.

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Article by RONAN FINNEGAN