

Meet Verifymyage, the frictionless solution for online age verification

As part of a series with Google for Startups Black Founders Fund, Maddyness spoke to Ryan Shaw, cofounder and CEO at Verifymyage about funding, plans for the future and their advice for other founders. You will meet several of the forty-strong Google cohort through this series of QFQs, which aims to amplify the voices and missions of Black Founders. We have chosen to highlight Black Founders whose business' exist in a variety of sectors and regions, exemplifying the full breadth of the UK tech sector.

We built VerifyMyAge (VMA) to solve our own age verification requirements for our e-commerce business selling on its own website and via eBay. Having evaluated available solutions it was clear that nothing in the market was viable.

Additionally as e-commerce merchants we had an acute understanding of friction, so we delivered VMA as a best-in-class frictionless solution. We are now the mandatory age verification provider for eBay in the UK and Germany.

Secondly, through VMA we were exposed to the adult entertainment industry and were shocked by the volume of CSAM material, revenge porn, and other illegal content. So we built VerifyMyContent (VMC).

Both brands sit under the VerifyMy umbrella.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Our mission is to safeguard children and society from harmful content and products on the internet.

VMA provides an age verification solution for businesses selling age-restricted products and services, whereas VMC combines identity authentication, automated and manual content moderation, complaint resolution and reporting.

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with the Google for startups Black Founders Fund?

We are incredibly proud to have been selected by Google for Startups as a recipient of its second Black Founders Fund in Europe.

The award provides access to capital, but more excitingly it also opens up global networking opportunities and the chance to access the very best of Google's people, products and practices.

Tell us about the working culture at your business?

I ask the team to continually look to raise the bar and to win at all costs. We have an aggressive mindset in that we do absolutely everything we possibly can to achieve our objectives.

We have an innovative, collaborative and incredibly hard working culture (we

save the playing hard part until after we've won!).

How are you funded?

We have raised £800K in angel funding and generate ongoing revenue from our commercial deals across both VMA and VMC.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Our industry is driven by domestic and international legislation. The biggest challenge we face is waiting for regulators to start meaningful enforcement of legislation that they have implemented.

We help overcome this by proactively lobbying regulators directly ourselves or as part of trade bodies such as the *Age Verification Providers Association*. As the leader in safety tech we also formed a ground-breaking legal partnership with Cambridgeshire & Peterborough local authority to issue Assured Advice in relation to the sale of age-restricted products and services.

How does your business answer an unmet need?

Whilst age verification products existed before VMA, we built the first solution that removed friction, maximised user choice and UX, and emphasised with both end users and businesses we partner with.

More and more regulation is coming that is designed to safeguard children. VMC is the only end-to-end solution covering identity authentication, content moderation (using both AI and human specialists), complaints resolution (allowing anyone appearing within a piece of content to request its removal), and comprehensive reporting. We are first to market and the opportunity is huge.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

I would advise founders to bootstrap for as long as possible (i.e. don't raise VC). By doing so, as a CEO you build grassroots experience across all business

functions rather than having to focus on raising money and delegating. This gives valuable insight and helps you to understand who to hire and when.

Build a business with strong economic moats e.g network effects and look for niches.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

If you can count it as a routine, then trying to organise chaos would be it! But I do make sure I include mindfulness, yoga, exercise and quality family time as much as possible.

Ryan Shaw is cofounder and CEO of [Verifymyage](#).

The Black Founders Fund aims to tackle racial inequality in venture capital funding. In 2022 40 selected Black-led startups received \$100,000 each in non-dilutive cash awards through the fund. The Black Founders Fund was first launched last year with a \$2M (£1.5M) fund – this year's fund doubled to \$4M (£3M).

Prior to the fund's launch in 2021, less than 0.25% of venture capital (VC) funding went to Black-led startups in the UK.

British tech startups make up two thirds of the 40 companies selected across Europe and are set to transform a wide range of sectors including beauty, fashion, fintech, education, construction and food/beverage, with two thirds (26) of the chosen startups based in the UK.