

Funding in fintech, a female perspective

As a female cofounder, securing funding can be a challenging battle, even in times of strong economic performance. In this article, Edyta Sliwinska, cofounder and CMO at Frost shares insights from her own experience across the past 12 months. On International Women's Day, Edyta provides tips on how female-led businesses can hurdle gender gaps within the venture capital market and tackle implicit biases to ultimately ensure they receive funding suitable to their business' needs.

Each year, International Women's Day gives us an opportunity to reflect on the great strides that women have taken in different industries across the world, and to acknowledge the growing inclusivity of modern business, while providing a moment to analyse areas where improvements can still be made. As a female founder working in Fintech, it's a day that is close to my heart and an occasion that warrants more attention than it receives.

However, in recent times it often feels like the event is used only as an opportunity to chastise the lack of diversity across different sectors, and this sometimes means overlooking the amazing work of women in these fields, who are changing the world we live in for the better. Right now, we need to give

these individuals all the support they can get, especially as they continue to battle against some difficult economic headwinds.

Difficult for all

The truth is business is currently difficult for almost everybody, regardless of gender. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the battle to secure funding. Over the past year, we've all watched as geopolitical tensions, continued fallout from the pandemic and supply-chain disruptions have created uncertainty and instability in the global economy. This has resulted in many investors becoming less forthcoming with their capital.

Now, all founders are being required to go above and beyond in order to receive the investments they so sorely need. Certainly, there's a strong case to be made that this task is harder for women, who are massively underrepresented in the venture capital world, but what's demonstrable beyond any doubt is that it's easy for nobody right now. Thankfully, I do believe there are steps we can all take to ease the process.

Adapting to the times

Ever since I moved to the UK in 2006, I knew my dream was to build a business that improved the lives of others. *My company, Frost, was born out of this ambition.* Alongside my cofounder, Pawel Oltuszyk, we have endeavoured to create a company that addresses the long-standing pain points that everyday customers feel when looking to find the best prices on the services they most need.

A year ago, that alone would probably have been enough to secure investment, but the world of venture capital is different now. More than ever, startups require strong business models that can be monetized immediately and must ensure that the valuations they seek can withstand investor scrutiny. If you're like me and are working through this moment in your business journey then you'll know that although challenging, it's an achievable task.

Finding the right approach

With the right approach, it's still possible to build businesses that engender strong interest from venture capital companies. Put strong business fundamentals at the core of what you do, while not forgetting the importance of a wider purpose. It's important to remember that investors will always be keeping an eye on your bottom line, but having a broader purpose still means a lot and can help to differentiate your business from the rest of the pack.

Another key is to surround yourself with like-minded individuals, and to work with a team that's committed to the same goal, and that is willing to be honest with its appraisal of your business offering in light of changing market conditions. This atmosphere helps to breed businesses that can pass muster with venture capital firms and that can stand up to the rigour of investors when evaluating the feasibility of investments.

Building your own network

I think this latter point is incredibly important for women, especially in fields where they are underrepresented. Running a business can be incredibly lonely at the best of times, but when you work in a sector that looks very different from you then it becomes even more difficult. Having an amazing team ready to support you, and to help you when you're struggling can make all the difference.

The advent of social media and easier forms of communication have allowed business leaders to create their own networks. For women, who have historically found themselves excluded from industries dominated by a 'boys club' this is of the utmost importance. If you feel there's no audience to pitch your product, then create one for yourself by connecting with as many people as possible either online, or through networking events.

Preserving your passion

With these guiding principles, founders of all genders can achieve great things. While we're clearly in a downturn, the cream will still rise to the top and attract investment. Specifically, I do think there's a significant appetite right now for new women-led startups, and we're seeing a lot of businesses coming to the fore that fit this description. Ultimately, a great idea is a great idea regardless of who it comes from.

Above anything else, it's essential to be passionate about the business you're building, and to ensure that this passion is evident to everyone who interacts with your company, be that investors, or your users. That's what we've been able to do with Frost, and it's made a massive difference as we've worked through a very successful funding round. It's this experience that gives me confidence that the future of women in Fintech remains bright.

Edyta Sliwinska is cofounder and CMO at *Frost*.

