

Find the best young talent – for any job with UniTaskr

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Joseph Black, cofounder of UniTaskr about building a platform that provides students with opportunities to build up work experience relative to the specific industry they want to work in.

In 2015 when my cofounder Oli and I were studying at university, we witnessed first hand what many of our friends and peers were experiencing. Firstly, many found it difficult to begin their career after university due to a lack of experience they needed to go into their sector of choice. Secondly, we saw many people make the decision to actually leave university because they simply couldn't afford the cost of living. For us, this felt like a pivotal flaw in the current education to employment gap and ultimately, we wanted to change that. We wanted to make an impactful difference in order to ensure that no student had to go through what we saw whilst at university, providing students with more opportunities for work during their university experience.

We've just launched UniTaskr Pro, a new function to allow businesses to access a previously untapped pool of enthusiastic and able student talent for part or full-time work.

This new function is connecting students up to sought-after companies like Spotify for internships, part time work and even full time work. At a tough time, we're helping them get a foot in the door and potentially a career going before they have left college or university.

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

The core of what *UniTaskr* is today stands the same. We continue to strive for students to have greater opportunities to gain work experience and financial freedom during their time at university. However, this has evolved since we first launched. It took time to establish the best route forward. Initially when we launched, our business was called UniDosh, which was essentially a student-to-student tasking platform. However, after trying to get students to trade off the platform, we found that whilst students are hungry to earn money and receptive to taking on tasks, they equally didn't have the disposable income to actively post continual tasks. At this point we decided to open up a buying side of the platform, so anyone from a household or from a business could harness our student platform by posting jobs for them to do.

Fast forward to today, the majority of students on the platform have been acquired from the sole success of our internal social media marketing agency, SHOUT. This idea to create an agency derived from our initial struggle to acquire new users. After trying everything from SEO to working with external marketing agencies, we decided to post a job on the platform asking 50 students to shout us out. We figured that in a best case scenario it would do something from a marketing standpoint; worst case, we'd give students the opportunity to earn some money on the platform. After posting this task, overnight we went semi-viral, which opened our eyes to how we could further replicate this success. In theory, what we did was step into the rapidly increasing movement of the nano-influencer (someone with between 500-5,000 followers). Building an agency to work with students as marketers has enabled us to build a level of authenticity, trust and engagement which we had never seen prior. We have been able to build a range of brand partnerships on a B2B level whilst running a highly detailed stack of upper marketing support from organic user-generated content, TikTok ads and other paid performance platforms. Ultimately, we have now been able to drive our product up to both the No.1 Lifestyle App and No.1 Business App on the app store now with over 270,000 users.

How has the business evolved since its

launch? When was this?

The business has developed massively. It was just Oli and I for a long time. Interestingly, we were able to keep staff costs low in our early years because we had a student work force at our fingertips, so we very much lived by the product which we intended on selling. We were able to utilise the students on our platform, using our product to task them with anything we needed from logo design to branding and marketing support. This enabled us to grow at a much faster rate given that we didn't have the funds to build a full-time team. During COVID was when we saw exponential growth, leveraging the platform to help young people continue to earn money when hospitality was closed. Today, we are now a full-time team of 20 employees, who are split between the UK and the US, where we launched just over three months ago.

Tell us about the working culture at UniTaskr

The culture is really strong. There's not necessarily one way of doing things. For Oli and I, having been young founders when we launched the company, there was no set way to implement great culture. We always pay close attention to how our team are feeling, the things that they want to pursue and understand what works for them, to create the best and most productive work environment we can. For example, we have an open door policy and work from home 4 days a week if our team wish. It's not about setting up high value events and doing crazy out of budget socials. Sometimes, it's the small things which can really make a difference for the culture of the team like having a BBQ, doing a sports day and end of week brainstorm. Outside of socials, we tie in a lot of team meetings and we have a 'beers and ideas' session on the last Friday of every month ensuring that we regularly have opportunities to give everyone a voice, and a space for us to listen.

How are you funded?

Initially we raised funding around family and friends which allowed us to build out the initial UniDosh MVP, following which we were able to secure further investment to see us to the point we're at now. Over the coming months we plan on going out for a larger fundraise, to really scale up our operations both in the UK and the US with new and exciting products coming out over the coming year.

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

When we launched UniDosh we tried for 3-4 years to get the product trading. As I mentioned before, it didn't necessarily work because we noticed a crucial flaw: students were wanting to earn money but didn't want to spend it. At that point we had practically run out of funding and weren't technical (at the time) so we needed to seek out someone who could help us grow, coming into the company as a technical co-founder. We wanted them to help us rebuild elements of the app that we could get back to market. However, we brought on someone who perhaps wasn't the best fit for us at the time. I think this decision led us down a bit of a rabbit hole. After spending 9 months rebuilding the product we basically went dark with our previous user base and it took us a year longer than anticipated to get back to market. Unfortunately, in that time frame we lost every single user who we had spent four years trying to build up. In September 2019 we started from scratch and I guess this time it was from a position of experience, so while it was difficult to start again having spent 4 years working on the initial product, we did overcome it and we may not have been where we are today were it not for that scenario.

How does Unitaskr answer an unmet need?

From a student perspective we have a platform which will provide them with opportunities to build up work experience relative to the specific industry they'd like to venture into after university. On the other hand, it equally provides students with financial independence around their studies. This prevents students from having to take non-flexible jobs such as bar shifts, which don't add value to their degree and more often than not get in the way of their studies. The marketing career path is a great example, most agencies require a minimum two years experience to be able to get a job, even at an entry level. Whereas, with UniTaskr students are able to build up this experience throughout their studies whilst helping to finance their studies at the same time. This is incredibly important today as students are also having to grapple with the hardships of the cost of living crisis and UniTaskr allows students to become their own boss working their own hours at a rate which works for them. Time and time again I have conversations with people – for example I had a conversation with a journalist who was once a blogger on the platform (actually number 82 on the platform!). Following her graduation, due to the experience she acquired through UniTaskr amongst other experiences, it enabled her to go into the job of her dreams. Perhaps without having UniTaskr this may not have been possible.

It is also important to acknowledge that UniTaskr can allow businesses of all sizes to tap into our growing student-force of hard working and driven individuals, especially in the current economic climate. Whether businesses are looking to fill junior positions or even fill internal gaps through tasking and providing odd jobs, it's a great way of helping businesses through this time. In this way, UniTaskr also meets an unmet need for businesses as well as students because it provides them with a network of thousands of career driven students looking for part time work and post-graduate careers.

What's in store for the future?

An awful lot! We're only just getting started! We're seeing incredible growth on the platform signing anywhere up to 1000 new students a day, sometimes more. We recently launched in the US which has pretty much caught up with the UK both from a revenue and daily active user perspective, which is great to see. We have a range of new products coming out both across the UniTaskr direct jobs network and SHOUT as an agency platform, which harnesses our influencer network. So there is a lot of stuff to watch out for.

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

I would say that taking that first step is often the hardest part, it's not to say every idea is going to work, but the experience you can generate from even an idea which doesn't work out is substantial. I think make sure to do a great deal of research prior to taking that first step to mitigate any risk of failure, or at least minimize your risk. In terms of one of my greatest lessons, learning when to pivot is so important. I know a lot of founders hold their ideas very close to their heart and this is natural because it's your baby, but you may have to take the smallest side step when something isn't working, and that could be the difference between impending failure and success. If you perceive something to be a failure you can also use this to caveat and go on to do something even better - it's just about taking these learnings on board and going on to do the next best thing.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules

you're living by at the moment?

That's a good question, it's easy to get yourself down when things don't go your way but it's important to remember that perhaps if something didn't go your way, there is a reason for that and that reason may mean that there is a bigger and better door ready to be opened nearby. Keeping a healthy lifestyle is important to me, both physically and mentally. I like to surround myself with like minded people, and being in a positive environment. It's good to be around people who build you up and not knock you down! Finally, I try to always keep a good level of communication with everyone both in my personal and professional life. I think communication is key beyond everything; it's so important for example to have difficult conversations earlier on in order to prevent even harder conversations down the line.

Joseph Black is the cofounder of *UniTaskr*.

Article by JOSEPH BLACK