

Meet Zencargo, the digital freight forwarder startup

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Alex Hersham, Co-Founder and CEO of Zencargo, about helping organisation to make smarter supply chain decisions, launching in a coffee shop, and building a world for smarter trade.

What was the catalyst for launching Zencargo?

From the very start, we wanted to build a global business with technology at its core. We wanted our business to work with “future commerce brands”, brands that were keenly aware of the challenges in inventory management that their international customer base would bring. Zencargo was born to meet those needs. I had previously built an asset-owning business that went on to become one of the largest beneficial owners of small to medium-sized container ships. Since then I’ve always found it fascinating how supply chains could be used to understand the world. By the time we were playing around with the idea of building a business together, Richard was already deep in the imports and exports business. It was only natural that our work would start in the logistics sector.

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

Zencargo is a digital freight forwarder enabling organisations, from FTSE 100 businesses to fast-growing startups, to make smarter supply chain decisions through real-time data and analytics.

We work with businesses of varying sizes to move sea, air and road cargo with greater efficiency and accuracy and help improve the sustainability of their logistics operations.

We've built lasting relationships with customers like SLG Brands, Swoon Furniture, Ribble and Huel, who came to us looking for ways to modernise their supply chains and supported them in making their supply chains their competitive edge.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

We launched Zencargo at the start of 2017. It was about nine months into operations that we really began adding value to the ecosystem. We had already won various customers, but this was when we really started integrating our services into the workflows of our customers to grow with their businesses.

Tell us about the working culture at Zencargo?

As with many startups, Zencargo started in a coffee shop. We've moved offices

several times since then, but a lot of our early hires are still working with us and the camaraderie of building Zencargo together stayed. Our work fundamentally is about elevating people – elevating the supply chain professionals we work with to be strategic partners to their commercial director or CFO in driving the business forward. That culture is echoed internally, and everyone at Zencargo is equally committed to elevating the rest of the team so they can excel in their part.

How are you funded?

We have to date raised a total of £42M from investors including Digital+ Partners, HV Capital, and others.

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

The challenge initially was in navigating our way through this enormous industry and finding where to focus Zencargo's strengths on. The supply chain industry is extremely wide-ranging. Companies with different products have supply chains that look completely different, and they experience pain points that are entirely separate from anyone else's.

A few months into launching, we realised we could be doing much more if we chose to serve particular verticals and move away from the rest.

We were interested in fostering long-term strategic partnerships with our customers, and the shift we made to focus on supply chain optimisation has allowed us to do exactly that.

How does Zencargo answer an unmet need?

Over the past decade, the world has witnessed an unprecedented level of

supply chain disruption, from extreme weather events to the ongoing aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Traditional freight forwarding methods are no longer fit for purpose in a trade environment that must be adaptable and sustainable.

Through Zencargo's freight forwarding and comprehensive, real-time overview of the status of each shipment, businesses understand where all their inventory is, where it needs to go, and what needs to happen to get it there. Since Zencargo's technology platform connects directly with global transportation markets and manufacturers, customers can see a full digital picture of the freight environment, helping them make improvements and transport cargo more efficiently.

What's in store for the future?

Our goal has always been to build a world with smarter trade. For us, smarter trade happens when customers are able to make informed decisions by leveraging all of the available data. It happens when companies are able to build long-term strategies with their customers because they're not spending most of the energy putting out fires. To this end, we have built Zencargo to be the single point of contact for our customers to interact with for all of their supply chain needs. We help our customers understand what's happening in their supply chain in real time, and most importantly understand what they can do with all the information available to them. The supply chain industry is as big as it is historic, and Zencargo is but one of many players that are tackling the challenges of the ecosystem. We are able to provide visibility in all areas of the supply chain through the many partnerships we've formed with these companies that excel in their own verticals, such areas as IoT, customs, and carbon tracking. We'll likely keep adding partners to our ecosystem to truly service all of our customers' needs.

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

Appreciate the flat wins. Great things happen when building your business but there are a lot of challenges, too. If you can end the day where you started, and if you can make up for something bad that's happened during that day, that is a flat win. Flat wins will always be an important part of building a business.

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

I try to work smart and make time for my family. My answer doesn't make for a good Instagram reel ☹️

Alex Hersham is Co-Founder and CEO at [Zencargo](#).

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