

Meet Patch, your new neighbourhood space for work, community, and events

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Freddie Fforde, Founder and CEO of Patch about creating opportunities for "work near home", increasing employee engagement with social impact and creating an inclusive work-life balance.

The idea for Patch was born from my experience of growing up in a single parent household and seeing the sacrifices my mother made in order to raise a young child. I saw that people are often unfairly disadvantaged by their access to opportunity. This frustration was compounded when I met another mother in a previous job who was going through all the same challenges, a generation on. I realised that there are so many talented people juggling childcare, work and other family commitments but find a long commute into a central city office a barrier.

Tell me about the business – what it is,

what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers?

Our mission is to create opportunities for people, work and community on every UK street. It's a simple bet on the belief that people are wonderful when they come together, you just need to provide them the space. I am passionate about the 'work near home' movement as a force for good – helping combat loneliness, revive our high streets and create better community, connection and wellbeing.

We work with a range of organisations from government departments to private real estate companies to identify the ideal 'Patch' location. We look at a range of factors to spot a neighbourhood that will most benefit from our unique blend of community and work spaces. We like to think of each Patch as a 'lighthouse' for local life. We can often totally reinvigorate an empty high street by bringing people together under one roof.

Meeting customers is straightforward – we go to where they are. We're present on high streets. Our locations are big, bright and open. You can see inside, through the glass. It's more like a shop – designed to draw people in – rather than an office design which can feel like an invite-only environment. Part of the role of the site teams is to be outward facing, engaging in outreach to new and different groups to help bring them in.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

We opened our first location in November 2021, and since then, it's just exploded. We opened a second and third site this year, and have plans currently under wraps for more to open in 2024. We've learned a lot about the events space and public community side, experimenting with retail, local community groups, hosting gigs (and the BBC!), launching a very successful podcast studio, our own beer and now running our own Christmas Makers Market too!

Tell us about the working culture at Patch

Our recent employee engagement work has indicated that our staff are excited about the social impact we have for communities, as well as the investment we

make in personal development. I make it very clear that people are the most important part of the business, and in particular, the teams who lead our sites day-to-day. The best feedback, ideas and overall experience for our members will always come from those closest to the action. We build everything from this starting point. We also try to be very transparent, with business performance and our objectives and key results, as well as ensuring that everyone who joins has a meaningful equity stake in the business.

How are you funded?

We are funded by private investors, including JamJar, Active partners and a long list of extremely supportive angel investors including founders and CEOs of some of the high street's best known brands such as *Innocent Drinks*, *PureGym* and *Coco di Mama*. We worked very hard in the first round to meet a 30% female investor threshold (still probably the hardest thing I've tried to achieve at Patch), and have a range of ages and expertise that ensure our diverse customer base is reflected as much as possible at investor level.

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

My biggest challenge has been scaling operations to multiple sites, whilst retaining the authenticity of our experience. It's been far more successful than I first thought it might be, but it relies on lots of attention and work every day, particularly in empowering the local site teams.

How does Patch answer an unmet need?

We are the front door to opportunity on every high street, and bring a more balanced way of life near to where people live. We call this 'work near home' – not just a desk but a community of people and events. Offices in city centres grew out of factory methods of working; we no longer need to come together five days a week. This has never supported a balanced lifestyle, for our children, mental health, physical health or our communities.

What's in store for the future?

We'd love to be on every high street, and are excited about what being online could look like for our network of networks of 50m+ talented people in the UK who don't live in our major cities.

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

Take real time to understand what you want to achieve, and why. Work on that, and only that. Don't compromise or try to justify something that isn't really you.

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

The most important thing in managing balance in my life is my wife. Investing in time with her and things that matter to us is the foundation on which I can draw energy and support when I need it. Part of the sacrifice of entrepreneurship is time for your friends and family, which I try not to fall into, but I protect my home life – which includes our dog – with a pretty firm boundary. Occasionally, I still manage to run around kicking a football on a Sunday but the recovery seems to be taking a lot longer than it used to!

Freddie Fforde is the Founder and CEO of *Patch*.

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