

Meet Fana, integrating charitable giving into everyday spending

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Robin Yan, CEO of Fana about making philanthropy a part of daily life, problem-solving and being a 'radical optimist.'

The inspiration for *Fana* emerged from the rising trend of 'round up your purchase' donation tools at checkouts. While these were gaining popularity, I noticed a significant gap: the lack of a system to track and acknowledge individual contributions. Donating felt impersonal, unseen and unacknowledged.

Our goal was to transform this experience, making charitable giving personal, trackable, and rewarding. We wanted to give donors a sense of true participation and tangible impact, turning the act of giving into an engaging and fulfilling aspect of daily life.

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

Fana operates as a dual-faceted fintech platform, encompassing both a consumer product (the Fana Card) and a B2B merchant product (an

eCommerce wallet). The Fana Card is a debit card that gives impact to everyday spending, while our eCommerce wallet allows merchants to integrate charitable giving into their transaction process, aligning CSR with their customer loyalty.

Our mission is to make philanthropy an effortless part of daily life for consumers and a value-adding proposition for businesses. We partner with a diverse range of charities and brands. Our differentiator lies in our three-sided marketplace between consumers, merchants and charities. In this way, we also provide a curated next-gen charity experience that's an alternative to traditional charitable giving.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

We initially started as a rewards wallet for e-commerce merchants, offering a platform where merchants allow their customers to direct ESG spending towards causes they cared about. This approach provided consumers with a say in how their transactions contributed to social and environmental responsibilities.

As we progressed, we recognised an emerging need for a more direct consumer product. This led to the development of the Fana Card, which allowed us to tie our vision together. The Fana Card allows consumers to make a direct impact with their everyday purchases, turning transactions into charitable contributions.

This expansion from a B2B focus to encompassing a consumer-facing product has really broadened our scope and impact. It's enabled us to create a more cohesive ecosystem where consumers and businesses collectively contribute to charitable causes.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

Constant problem-solving. Every day presents a new set of challenges, and there's a certain thrill in analysing how each problem gives me an opportunity to learn and grow. You have complete autonomy – there's no playbook or set path to follow – which is both daunting and exhilarating. It's what makes the journey of building a company so enjoyable. It's about embracing the process, learning from each hurdle, and taking pleasure in the path of trying to create something truly impactful.

Which founders or businesses do you see as being the most inspirational?

Obviously the legendary technology leaders that everyone knows about. Beyond that, I'm particularly interested in those who have successfully integrated social responsibility into how they conduct business and life – for example Yvon Chouinard at Patagonia or Lewis Hamilton. Additionally the founders of innovative charities such as Scott Harrison at charity: water are revolutionary in their approach, demonstrating how creativity and transparency can make philanthropy resonate with the younger generation. And let's not forget leaders in creative fields such as art, gaming, filmmaking and writing – whose attention to detail and precision in making beautiful products really resonate with me. If we can only capture just a small part of each!

What has been your biggest business fail?

We were a bit too product-focused from the outset. While we dedicated extensive effort to developing a robust fintech solution for the non-profit sector, we underestimated the effort and resources required to perfect distribution. Through trial and error, we learned that no matter the quality of your product, finding customers to test ideas with and establishing effective distribution channels is more important. Engaging with the market, understanding customer needs, and testing our product in real-world scenarios proved to be as crucial as the product itself. This shift in strategy taught us the importance of balancing product innovation with strong marketing and distribution efforts.

What are the things you're really good at as a leader?

I think one of my core strengths is being a 'rational optimist.' This approach involves tackling challenges and opportunities with a mix of positivity and practicality. Amidst the many different situations we encounter – both good and bad – my focus is on maintaining a clear vision of what's possible and inspiring my team towards that goal. I'm driven by the goal to stay grounded in the realities of our business environment, recognising and addressing the very real challenges we face, while finding joy in the small positive steps it takes to get to where we need to be

Which areas do you need to improve on?

I definitely have a tendency to procrastinate. I think many founders can relate to the fact that building a business, especially early on, is largely about handling mountains of mundane and administrative tasks, interspersed with moments of extreme joy. I often find myself delaying important but less exciting tasks in favour of more engaging work. This habit can lead to this treadmill of anxiety that results in me completing these tasks last minute or late, which I later realise could have been addressed much earlier. It's a tough habit to break, but I'm committed to improving in this area!

What's in store for the future of the business?

Right now, we're focusing on enhancing our consumer offerings. In Q1, we're introducing new features like a community pool and charity streams, which are designed to heighten user engagement and deepen the impact of their contributions.

Later in the year, our emphasis will shift towards better integrating our B2B product suite with the Fana Card. This will create a more cohesive experience for all our platform users – consumers, merchants, and nonprofits and will mean that each of them will start seeing increased value from their interaction with Fana, whether it's through streamlined transactions, more impactful donations, or stronger community engagement.

These developments are just the start – we'll continue to work hard to innovate and expand our platform's capabilities to create a more impactful and integrated ecosystem for charitable giving.

What advice would you give to other founders or future founders?

Stay true to your vision but remain adaptable. While it's necessary to have a clear vision, being flexible and open to change is equally important. Embrace the grind. Building a business is always harder than what you imagine, and anyone suggesting a quick path to success is lying to you. So, be prepared to engage in the less glamorous aspects of running a business. And surround yourself with people who share your passion and drive, and who can contribute diverse perspectives and skills. You'll need the best and most diverse support system you can get.

And finally, a more personal question! We like to ask everyone we interview about their daily routine and the rules they live by. Is it up at 4am for yoga, or something a little more traditional?

My day begins just before 6 am. I start with a 30-minute electronics-free period, dedicated to reading. This time is crucial for clearing my mind and drawing inspiration from diverse, non-traditional sources.

I'll then spend about 30 minutes going through emails to get a head start on the day. With two teenagers at home, mornings are also about being there for their routine, which always adds a bit of excitement to the start of my day.

I'm someone who prefers going to a physical workplace. Most of our team comes in three times a week, so I'll try and get some exercise on the days where it's a bit quieter. Otherwise, my workday involves being in the office, rotating between team based and solo work. It's a mixture of sales / strategy / marketing / product and lots and lots of admin!

I enjoy cooking and it's my way to unwind, so several nights a week, I try to get home early enough to do a quick meal. If not cooking, I spend some time catching up with my girls before bedtime, followed by a check-in with the wife.

I'm an early-to-bed person, so evenings out are pretty limited. Instead, I'll try and put in a couple more hours of work before calling it a night.

Rinse and repeat!

Robin Yan is the CEO of [*Fana*](#).