

Moving things your way, meet Porta Delivery

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Edward Spence, Founder of Porta Delivery, about moving your items without breaking the bank, finding customers and taking action.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching Porta Delivery?

I've always had in my head I wanted to launch a business one day, I have in my phone a list of various business ideas I've noted down over the years - Just looking again now I can see 'Web based proctoring service for people sitting online exams' and 'an app that tells you which pubs get the sun when in London' - hmhhh

Porta Delivery came about at the start of 2023 when I recalled trying to buy a second-hand bike off ebay. It was great but the only problem is the seller was in Newcastle, and I lived in London. I looked at various courier solutions but all were more expensive than the bike itself... I had the thought that if only someone making that trip could drive it down for me. Porta Delivery idea was born! I'm sure many have had the same thought - It helped that I'd studied a French carpooling business called Blablacar so had some insight into peer-to-peer marketplaces of this type.

Over the first few weeks and months, I found myself getting more and more into the idea... Researching similar companies, looking at market

potential, putting together an outline strategy etc. It coincided with the birth of our second child, so I used many of the sleepless nights to problem solve in my head and then jot down any progress I'd made the next day - In hindsight it was probably too much time spent analysing and strategising but I enjoyed it and it got me more and more obsessed with the idea.

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

Porta Delivery is a crowdsourced delivery business. We aim to connect people who need things moving with people going that way anyway. The main benefits being a lower price for the customers combined with lower emissions. The driver earns money from a trip that they were doing regardless, so a win for your pocket, a win for the planet and a win for the driver.

There are around 6 people currently working on the business, a mix of full time and contractors. We're looking to expand as we get towards the end of the year.

Reaching customers is always the big challenge, and because we have a two sided platform we need to build the driver side too. It's a bit of chicken and egg as you need both sides for the system to operate fully but we're making good progress. There's this holy grail 'critical mass' that we're pushing to get to when both sides of the platform are large enough to transact smoothly, and we're actually not too far away.

In terms of finding customers we adopt the 'test and iterate' philosophy where we place small bets across a whole range of marketing channels and see what lands. So far, we're seeing paid ads working OK but are a bit

expensive, although price is decreasing as we improve conversion. Facebook groups are also a real hotbed of relevant users for us, there's groups for almost everything from driver jobs, side hustle ideas to people buying and selling furniture! We're also starting to get some traction amongst blogs as well as google organic traffic, and even word-of-mouth is beginning to yield good results too - so exciting times

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

We were running in stealth mode for most of 2023 and then officially launched towards the end of the year, but have evolved a lot over the last year. The main difference is the speed of just getting stuff done. We spent a lot of time at the start analysing and strategising - no surprises given my consulting background! But what we found quite quickly is most assumptions and hypotheses you make are way off the mark and the only way to find stuff out is to try, even if you're not quite ready yet.

Stuff behaves in an often much more non-linear and inefficient way than people generally think, at least at the small scale. For example at one point we kept raising prices, spending less on marketing and our sales kept increasing!

The initial focus was on building something very simple from a tech standpoint, but over time we've actually got some pretty 'smart' logic going on in the platform. As we grow and develop we see lots of potential to improve the matching algorithm which will become a bigger and bigger part and where we see we can build a real competitive point of difference.

Tell us about the working culture at Porta

Delivery

We have a small close-knit team and engage very regularly. We probably adhere closest to the lean startup approach where you start with the problem and work to build a minimum viable product as quickly as possible to test your solution out. We want our team to test things out and 'fail fast' so that really guides how we work together and engage; highly collaborative, open minded and ultra fast learning.

How are you funded?

Personal savings and family input is keeping us going for the moment. We're running pretty lean and managing to get alot done with not too much.

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

Pricing has been a big challenge for us from the start. Moving your stuff around typically requires a whole host of inputs; from, to, size, weight, help available etc. all of which impact pricing. With very little data to go on it's hard to get this right PLUS we're keen to make the booking process as simple as possible so we don't want to ask for 8 or so different data points - a fine balance to tread.

To overcome this, we've built a new 'bidding feature', to sit alongside our 'fixed price' feature. This has the benefit of not needing as much information from the customer to place the order but also allows us to understand the market better and see how various items are priced. Our hypothesis is that over-time the data we gather from the bidding platform will drastically help us improve the pricing of the fixed price side.

How does Porta Delivery answer an unmet need?

The need is 'how can I get my item X from Y to Z without breaking the bank' - There currently aren't options available that enable you to do this affordably and for minimal emissions impact, particularly over longer distances.

What's in store for the future?

We need to grow the platform, so we're trying our dandiest to make this so. We'll also need to raise funding around the end of the year, so thoughts will switch to this post summertime - watch this space

We do genuinely believe this is something that just 'needs to exist' as the inefficiency at the moment with all the empty vehicle space is a massive waste and needs putting to use. Our vision for 10 years time is to get people into the habit of checking our app before they set-off on a trip to see if they can save some money as well as helping someone out.

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

Action yields answers... Most people's ingoing hypotheses are probably wrong , so take action quickly to work out what's right and don't kid yourself that a hypothesis or assumption is anything more than that.

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

by at the moment?

Nothing too wild to be honest - I have two young kids that keep me busy outside of Porta Delivery life. Besides that, I find running as much as possible energises me and is where i do my best thinking!

I'm also a big manifester - I try to visualise what I want to succeed and steps necessary to get there, and go through this in my head over and over again continually improving the process.

Work-life balance is manageable at the moment. I worked in consulting for a number of years so am familiar with late nights and deadlines. Whilst there's lots to do at Porta Delivery at the moment the main difference to being a founder is not necessarily being at your computer late into the evening it's how all encompassing it is. It's constantly at the front of mind, but you know what - I really enjoy it and love thinking through problems, be it in the shower or trying to rock my one year old to sleep - a welcome distraction in fact!

Edward Spence is the Founder of *Porta Delivery*.