6 hrs ago

Startup pitch: TeamRunner simplifies group sports team travel

Pity the soccer mom. And the hockey mom, the basketball mom, and the lacrosse mom. She has to drive hundreds or thousands of miles a year, hauling children to sports practices, matches, and competitions.

The problem is multiplied for the parents and coaches of young people who are competitive at the regional and national level in a variety of sports.

Enter, Team Runner, which strives to solve this problem by streamlining the process of travel for group sports and competitions.

Founded in 2012, TeamRunner has raised a half-million in seed funding. Some of the largest sports associations and sport leagues in the US have signed on as partners. Thus far, travel has been booked through the platform for 270,000 team members.

The tool has a B2B side. About 150 hotels have signed up so far, including some properties that are members of large national brands, such as Marriott, Hilton, and Wyndham. According to Teresa Karcher, sales manager at the DoubleTree by Hilton Santa Ana-Orange County Airport:

> "TeamRunner has the most sophisticated reporting tools on the market, every user at each level (tournament director, team manager, parent, hotel sales manager,) has his or her own dashboard where they can monitor in real-time all activities and data, related to their role."

The startup has plans to expand its platform, which is bilingual in English and Spanish (along with most of its customer service representatives), to include merchandising, retail, entertainment, and more, via its

commission-based system.

A Q&A with co-founder and VP of Marketing, Colette Kuhnsman:

Tell us how you founded the company, why and what made you decide to jump in and create the business.

The idea for TeamRunner stemmed from personal experience with the complexities of booking group sports travel. I met Ziad Tleimat because our sons played on the same soccer team for many years.

Ziad had been a soccer coach and software executive was frustrated with many of the challenges around sports team travel.

He came to me with the thought of creating a technology solution. Having experienced many of the same issues booking and managing team travel myself, I knew he was on to something.

After much research it became clear that a solution didn't exist for a 'one-stop travel shop' for sports teams, but an opportunity to create one did.

We brought on another co-founder, David Anderson, and with his Oracle database technical support experience and our combined professional backgrounds in software, technology startups, business, and marketing, TeamRunner was born.

Size of the team, names of founders, management roles and key personnel?

The team (8 Full Time & 5 Part Time) is made up of seasoned professionals with many years of experience and expertise in software development, marketing, hospitality industry, sports team management and business development for startups.

Ziad Tleimat – founder and CEO; David Anderson – founder and VP; Engineering – Colette Kuhnsman; founder and VP marketing; Wael Chatila – CTO; Scott Leber – corporate development.

Funding arrangements?

We have already raised $500K in seed funding. We are actively seeking to raise Series A financing.

Estimation of market size?

Immediate addressable market: Youth and collegiate sports team travel is $22.5 billion.

Competition?

There is no true direct competitor that provides all that TeamRunner is creating for this market. There are various hotel booking platforms as well as tournament and registration development groups.

Revenue model and strategy for profitability?

We utilize a combination of commission, transaction, and fee based models.

What problem does the business solve?

The current model is an antiquated manual process. It is very time consuming, and is an inefficient & ineffective communication method between the participants. TeamRunner provides:
1) Teams with a one stop shop for hotels, restaurants and soon much more
2) Sports organizations receive assistance providing services to teams that increase participation and satisfaction while improving revenue streams
3) Businesses are given visibility and communication modes for incoming teams

How did the initial idea evolve and were there changes/any pivots along the way in the early stages?

Though the initial idea has stayed pretty consistent our methods of implementation have evolved. We made modifications based on the amount of control our customers required.

We also altered the system to be able to handle much more complex tournament styles than initially expected.

Why should people or companies use the business?

TeamRunner provides a better user experience by saving time, money and providing new communication and reporting features that enhance business profitability.

What is the strategy for raising awareness and the customer/user acquisition (apart from PR)?

We have a top down approach to our sales which has proven very effective. We also have built some valuable partnerships that will assist with growth.

Where do you see the company in three years time and what specific challenges do you anticipate having to overcome?

We will have at least 5 more revenue producing/customer enhancing modules, over one million users and over 20 million in revenue.

What is wrong with the travel, tourism and hospitality industry that it requires a startup like yours to help it out?

There are limited options for group travelers and in sport team travel in particular there is a lack of visibility and communication between all the participants. It requires the application of technology that focuses on improving the user experience and financial and reporting system for the sports organizations, the teams and the businesses.

What other technology company (in or outside of travel) would you consider yourselves most closely aligned to in terms of culture and style… and why?

Priceline because they view travel as a whole experience and that is similar to what we are providing in our space

Which company would be the best fit to buy your startup?

We are currently focused on building our brand but I am sure we would be a good match for any large travel provider.

Describe your startup in three words?

Team – Travel – Technology

Tnooz view:

> This is one of those business ideas that seem obviously solid. But it's still early days. TeamRunner will have to hustle before a serious competitor comes along.

> Execution matters. Many hotel managers face vendor fatigue, having to deal with too many portals and extranets. TeamRunner's product will need to be simple to use and deliver a recognizable value for each property.

Is its portal as easy to use as the ones offered by companies like Groupize? Does it help with the reporting functions in as clear a fashion as Travefy or Expensify? Are the communications tools TripIt-worthy? Time will tell.

There's a potential for this site to go viral, as parents sitting in the stands at venues chat with each other and share the tools they use to book sports travel.

The site says it works with more than 40 sports organizations and one of the largest US soccer associations. So that means there's hope for the soccer mom, overwhelmed with her travel obligations.

We're cheering on TeamRunner.

About the Writer :: Sean O'Neill

Sean O'Neill is a New Jersey-based reporter for Tnooz. He's also a regular contributor to BBC Travel.

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Comments

I think that it's quite easy to scale solution beyond children team sports to other similar verticals. Travelling groups of musicians or artists is first thing that comes in mind.
Good luck.

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