Gimlet Media

Most famously known for its series’ *Serial* and *StartUp*, Gimlet Media is a media network for high-quality narrative podcasts. The company was founded in 2014 by now CEO Alex Blumberg with his debut podcast, *StartUp*. To date, the network hosts five podcast shows.

**Red flags:**

The ‘About Us’ page is limited and vague. It directs the reader to a series of podcasts explaining more about the company, yet an investor or user may not want to listen to multiple, 25- minute podcasts to find out basic information.

There already exists a handful of successful podcast networks out there, such as Relay FM and Superego.

These particular kind of podcasts are competing with hundreds of good shows, which means that the barrier to entry is lower.

Gimlet faces the audience growth challenge. Although the podcast space is growing in popularity, it has been reported that only 17% of Americans listen to podcasts at all.

**Takeaways:**

Gimlet has proven that podcasting has the potential to foster new kind of programming that may not have taken off in the traditional radio space.

Gimlet’s shows attract four million users a month.

Just in its first season, *Serial* was downloaded over 80 million times. So too, *StartUp* remains on the iTunes top charts.

Gimlet takes an integrated approach to podcasting; they create a collection of own owned- and- operated shows, while investing a good deal in getting to know and engage their listener base.

The company raised 1.5 Million dollars from four major investors in seed funding upon its launch in November 2014.

Flatiron School

The Flatiron School trains driven individuals in web and mobile development in the hopes for a future career as a software developer. People of all professional backgrounds are accepted into the program which consists of an intensive 12 week training in iOS and Web development. Founded in 2012, the school has two locations, one in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn, and has expanded its programming to include part-time courses, corporate training and a pre-collage program for High School students.

**Takeaways:**

In 2013, it was reported that 100% of the school’s graduates secured jobs post-graduation. After the 12 week program, students net starting salaries of $70,000 and up.

In 2014, the school received 5.5 million dollars in investment in a round led by Charles River Ventures and Matrix Partners.

The school offers a fellowship which is funded entirely by New York’s City Department of Small Business Services, for 18-26 year olds who do not have a college degree.

Founders, Avi Flaumbaum and Harvard Business School Grad, Adam Enbar, say that the most compelling aspect of their school is their approach to teaching. Intertwined in their computer-science courses are history lessons and storytelling techniques. They hope to master and perfect the pedagogy of technology before expanding into other major cities.

Enbar calls his school, “The Ivy League of Vocational Schools”.

**Red Flags:**

After almost three years, the business is still in its seed stage and will be a challenge to scale.

There already exists plenty of online courses for potential developers, two of which can be found on SkillShare and General Assembly. There are also over 100 technology camps in the United States for high school students such as iD Tech Inc.

Only 10% of applicants are admitted into the 12 week program.

The website’s press links are outdated. The site does not include any articles written in 2015.

Mind My Business:

Part of the data business, Vizalytics Technology, Mind My Business is a mobile-app for shopkeepers which sends business- specific notifications that than helps the business predict external changes, avoid fines, and operate most efficiently. Information from government and public data are collected and organized into relevant insights for users. The App was initially created to provide support for local and/or small businesses by providing them with correct and potentially “life-saving” information. Available in NYC, and soon to be launched in San Francisco and Chicago.

**Takeaways:**

Mind my Business deals with the tedious, dirty work of navigating a wide range of specific information, leaving more time for a business to focus on other aspects of their development such as customer growth.

Aside from sorting through mass online data, upon its release the company went door-to-door to businesses and asked what information would find helpful to them.

The App won the 2014 “Best Moble App” award at NYC’s BigApps competition.

Mind my Business is the only App on the market that is hyper targeted towards helping small and immigrant businesses succeed.

The company is working on Spanish and Chinese language additions of the App.

**Red flags:**

Users have complained that the reports are too vague and do not get to the heart of the matter.

Despite the fact that for the first month services are free, $40 per month is a hefty price for any mobile App.

The mother company, Vizalytics Technology, only raised $100,000 in their first round of investment in August 2014.

PIPs rewards

PIPs rewards (Positive Impact Points) is a gamified web app that rewards citizens for conscious behaviors that make a social impact regarding health, the environment, and ones community. PIP’s can be earned from virtually any mindful, “positive impact” decisions, from deciding to ride a bike to work one day to donating an old couch. The virtual currency can then be redeemed for socially beneficial goods and services or as a donation, all options which are listed on the website.

**Takeaways**:

PIPs is the only rewards system that drives loyalty and sales for multiple partners.

The PIPs platform gives incentive to all socially good behaviors, not just recycling or donating to a cause.

Aside from the PIPs reward system, the platform provides numerous gamified actions to engage users such as trivia quizzes, unlocking bonus PIP’s and joining group challenges. These engagement opportunities are curated for each individual user.

Rewards are a true and tried model for businesses; customer spending is 46% higher when there is a reward incentive involved. The social good aspect to PIP’s specific strategy helps as well.

PIP’s is not only beneficial to users, but to partners as well. This is especially valuable where cities are looking to engage citizens in behavior- based solutions for civic challenges.

**Red flags:**

The company name, PIPs, is hard to find on a google search. There are a handful of other companies with the same name.

Most of the brands in the social conscious space are very small. The large ones, like PIPs, are less likely to attract customers who are already supporters of other socially conscious action businesses.

There is simply too much going on with the PIPs site and strategy. For a business to succeed in the world of virtual currency, it has to be mission critical and the platform needs to be scalable.

The space of loyalty programs and socially conscious actions are very crowded.

Dream See Do

Dream See Do is a web app which enables students to explore a range of career possibilities through the lenses and mentorship of NYC- based professionals. The online social learning platform allows students to hone in on their skills by taking online challenges supported by professionals. Students can then hone in on their skills further in the “Club”, where through one-on-one mentorships with teachers, students learn about a variety of 21st century skillsets such as leadership, entrepreneurship, design and coding.

**Takeaways:**

Students have earned internships, the opportunity to pitch their app ideas or prototypes to their local mayor, and have been featured in local media publications.

The app reduces the gap between education and job. Once the student-user has honed in on a set of a skills, the app provides real-time opportunities to advance, such as tackling a new challenge, learning a new skill or take on a mentor-driven maker project.

Although primarily focused on students, the company also seeks to help out other companies. The online challenges helps employees and use them for hiring, onboarding, professional development. The challenges can be custom- made to fit a company’s needs.

The app consists of a mobile video check-in process which allows students to track their progress and get support from peers.

Founders, Josh Shwartzman and Jeremy Berman have found previous companies (FlyByMiles, Social Agency) and both have worked as developers and consultants.

**Red flags:**

Very poor online and social media presence and coverage.

It is difficult to figure out who the app is catered towards. The initial cover page of the site suggests that the app is for students, but on the “About Us” (which is difficult to find in the first place), the app seems to be catered towards professionals and the community as well.

There is no information on the site about which system(s) the app is compatible with. It can be found in the Apple Apps store, but not in the Google Play store.