

INSPIRATION

Andy Khawaja is an entrepreneur.

As the CEO of Allied Wallet, the e-commerce start-up he founded in Los Angeles in 2002, he saw his business growing from nothing to the multi-billion international company it is today.

He sat down with Mediaplanet to talk business, entrepreneurialism, and what it takes to 'make it.'

By Stefano Pozzebon

Andy, you started Allied Wallet in 2002, when internet companies were still recovering from the DotCom bust. It was hardly an easy time to do business. Where did your flare begin?

“I will tell you this: when I see an opportunity, I can feel the opportunity and I just go for it, and when I saw the internet I realised one thing was missing out there. I had friends who were building websites, generating traffic, and attracting people, but I thought: ‘What are you selling?’”

You need a credit card processor to sell online. It involves dealing with lots of international regulations and business procedures that many banks still don't understand. That is where we stepped in, to provide these services to the entrepreneurs. Our job is to motivate them to continue with the business, to give them hope that they can generate profits out of it and make a name for themselves.

So what inspired your company back then, and still inspires today?

“I see people cheering about me and talking about building a multibillion company and all that, but that is just the outside.

The truth is I can't turn my back on the rest of the entrepreneurs out there, they need guidance, self-confidence. They need attention from people that really struggled to make it big.

Imagine if they all fail: if they fail we would not have all these apps that we use everyday, where we can book airline tickets or rent a car, we can navigate to a 5-star restaurant.

Hundreds of thousands of businesses were created by entrepreneurs. If guys like me don't get involved they would struggle.

When was it that you realised your company was to be successful? When you first understood you what you were making?

“Probably, I'd say, when I saw the light at the end of the tunnel was 2008, 2009. I had such a moment when my previous

company first became a million dollar company and that was in 2001.

You pride yourself on your safety record and your customer care service, where you occasionally take on complaint calls. What do you think is the most important attribute to your success?

“In online retail, the important thing is to make sure that consumers are happy and confident in putting their credit card online.

We make sure that whoever does it doesn't lose money and is not victim of a fraud.

I think it helped to build our company up to the next level. Trust is everything. Back in the day this helped a lot: we did not even advertise the company, we would meet new customers out of merchants, current customers and word of mouth.

For a person who is already a billionaire, and built his own company from scratch, what is next?

“You know I am very open, I am working on different projects at the moment: one is a new software about online security, credit card losses and data losses, and that is keeping me busy for some time, and then I have launched a TV show, we are now shooting the second season. It is called 'Model Turned Superstar.'”

It is a reality show, models compete in different challenges to win the show and prove they are not only pretty but there are truly talented. In a way, I like to think I am bringing out the entrepreneur that is inside them.

Andy, thank you very much for speaking with me.



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Why exporting is key to sustained economic growth

The great news is that the ONS figures show export is going well and has increased dramatically since 2013, going from £304bn to £387bn in 2014; still to be adjusted - but a marked improvement.

This jump in sales has been largely due to services and skills being sold internationally, however there is no need to take our foot off the pedal. Enhancing the UK's performance in international trade is undoubtedly critical to our export-led economic recovery. Building the competences that businesses need to access new markets must be the next thing on the education and skills development agenda in businesses and schools.

The ease of doing business with our neighbours sometimes leads us to forget about the many opportunities to expand into new markets outside the comfort of Europe. So why don't more businesses export?

Trading globally can be complex - each potential market presenting a myriad of challenges beyond getting to grips with basic research and the GDP figures.

With the continued instability of the global economy, the importance of would-



Lesley Batchelor
OBE, Director general of the Institute of Export

"Be confident and don't just sell - market yourself on the global stage"

be and existing exporters understanding the intricacies of trading - from modifying your product, setting a price, packaging, promotion, translations, website localisation and actually getting things delivered - has never been more vital to ensure that the precious margins earned in the sales visit are not eroded.

With a plethora of business support organisations encouraging us to go global, perhaps it's time to take the plunge. Research 'export' on-

line and you'll be surprised how much support there is available, but remember this is not a short term fix for falling sales in your home market; it's a planned approach to accessing new markets. Think about how you position your business internationally and sell on the value and quality of your work - selling on price when sterling is weak will only lead to troughs when it strengthens.

Be confident and don't just sell - market yourself on the global stage. ■

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