



ACHIEVING YOUR AMBITION

Interview with
Richard Strachan
Managing Director
3 Sided Cube

Commissioned by

Avonglen

Financial Direction for your Business

Ironically, as an independent company grows and becomes more successful, so the day-today demands on the owner-manager increase and the emphasis on the 'here and now' can become the focus of the entire business.

It might be that the business has never been more successful financially, but the reality is likely to be that it has never been as vulnerable because it has never been so inward looking, less innovative, and more likely to be victim to a disrupter (the role which it probably played at the outset!).

But are there other reasons why those which have the potential to go further plateau instead and don't actually achieve what should have been possible?

In an independent report commissioned by Avonglen and to be published by DECISION magazine, business owners share their experiences and ambitions.

This is one of the papers to be published in the report.

“Every step of human evolution has come from using technology, but the use of technology is agnostic. An ape could pick up a stick and use it as a tool or a weapon. We believe technology should be the driver for positive change in the world.”

Richard Strachan is managing director of 3 Sided Cube, an app development company which has the mantra ‘technology for good’ - not as a marketing tagline but a description of the work it is prepared to undertake.

“We’re trying to change lives for the better with the work we take on,” he explains. It started eight years ago, when the British Red Cross approached the company wanting to digitise their first aid content. “The app had to work offline, which was almost unheard of at the time, but we did it and it became number one in the health and wellbeing category in the app store,” Strachan explains.

Following this project, the company has worked with eighty-seven member countries of the International Red Cross, providing apps in fifty-five languages. “The Red Cross is our biggest user base; for instance,



Richard
Strachan

seventeen million people use the apps we've developed for disaster preparedness globally," says Strachan. "We've created a hurricane, tornado, earthquake and flooding emergency suite of apps which alerts users in affected areas and guides them out of danger. Last year we sent out a quarter of a billion alerts warning people of danger and telling them how to stay safe.

"We also developed a blood donation app when the American Red Cross reached out to us with a problem of show rates, which is basically the difference between appointments made and appointments attended. Blood donations booked via the app have helped to bring in over \$90million in revenue for the charity and save hundreds of thousands of lives. Before the app, volunteers had to chase people up by phone to try to ensure they fulfilled their appointments, but this still only led to a small percentage actually turning up. Using the app, show rates have increased from 47% to 89%."

Taking what could be described as the commercially moral highground when it comes to the work it does has made business sense. The company now has some thirty staff across two offices in the UK and in Washington DC.

So how did 3 Sided Cube transmogrify from good work to good work for the greater good?

"Duncan [Cook] founded the company in 2009 and I came on board five years ago when we had seventeen or eighteen staff," says Strachan. "I remember we all had a chat to ask ourselves: 'what are our drivers; what makes us tick'? Everyone loved the 'for-good' bits of what the company was doing, so we decided that was the work we would pursue."



App for the
Global Disaster
Preparedness Centre

Independence and the resulting financial freedom allows them to focus on work which they feel is significant: “We couldn’t make those choices if we were constantly being told to chase the money,” says Strachan. “The challenge has been finding the volume of the ‘right’ work. We don’t follow up on around 70-80% of the leads we get because they don’t match our ethos. If a company has significant borrowing to repay and shareholders expecting the biggest possible dividend, I appreciate it can’t be this selective, but to have a high hit rate of the projects you go for, potential clients must want to buy in to what you do and your principles. Our key financial target is to secure high impact projects which provide recurring income.”

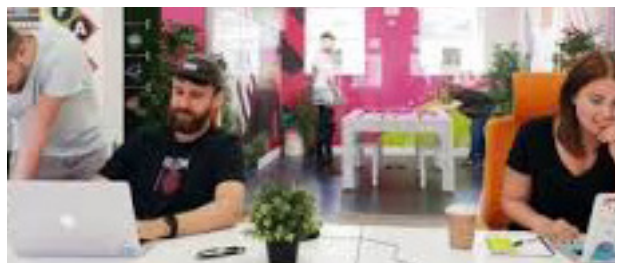
Strachan reveals the average age of the staff at 3 Sided Cube is twenty-four, unsurprising given that many of the world’s largest tech companies, including AOL, Facebook and LinkedIn have a median below thirty. “But a big challenge with the new generation of graduates is getting

them to work effectively in teams,” says Strachan, “Younger developers and coders are used to working alone. They’ve been very much focused on their own work and their own assignments throughout university, so we’ve had to make our working environment more inclusive.”

Their Google-esque open-plan offices have been designed to create an environment which encourages communication and collaboration. “It’s the oldest cliché in the book,” says Strachan, “but a company must ensure it has the right people doing the right things, and make them feel comfortable.” He is a fan of the “Goldilocks” process. “It’s about getting things ‘just right’, enabling people to enter a flow state where they are fully immersed in a process and totally focused on what they’re doing,” he explains.



Inside
3 Sided Cube



The three dimensional nature of the company name is intended to reflect their three key areas of activity, starting with their actual work. The second is the Cube Academy, an initiative to bring talented people into the business, and unprecedented for a company of this size (and, for cultural reasons, probably when it comes to multinationals as well).

In essence, instead of a Saturday job stocking shelves or cleaning cars, young coders and designers studying for A-levels, or at college or university, with a minimum of eight hours a week available, will be paid to work with 3 Sided Cube specialists to create “real world” digital products which meet the company ethos. Strachan cites the example of ‘Callum’, who built a platform with 3 Sided Cube which raised £15million for charity while he was at college and went on to work for the company, staying for over seven years.

“I’d want to get more young people into doing software development,” says Strachan. “It’s so underserved by the education system, considering that so much of our economy runs on software! Those with a true passion for coding start noodling around at the age of eleven or twelve, but not enough kids are taught to code at a rudimentary level. My daughter is seven years old and I just feel we’re not placing enough emphasis on software in schools.”

The third area is a campaign called ‘Ignite’ which is an advocacy piece aiming to build waste-conscious habits and to tackle issues around recycling. The app gives people a structured journey, one small step at a time, through a game-like interface with challenges, quizzes, and tasks that relate to real world actions. Users will then be “rewarded” in the game world, where the impact of their behaviours is shown.

Explains Strachan: “The blocky, childlike style abstracts the heavier aspect of the serious subject matter, but the richness and physicality for the user, especially when you add layers of flora and fauna through good habits, makes you increasingly want to engage and nurture it.”

With 40,000 followers on Facebook, the company hopes the Ignite campaign as well as the app itself will bring these issues to light and influence change. Holding his mobile phone, Strachan observes: “We now have access to really powerful behavioural change tools, and as a business, we want to use these devices to help change the world for the good.”





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