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1/4
of UK households hire a domestic help



40% of couples expect their first baby within 12 months of buying a pet

SOURCES: LV= HOME INSURANCE/CO-OPERATIVE PET INSURANCE

Health of the nations

ENTREPRENEURSHIP How one man brought mobiles to the service of medicine

Consider a few of the mega trends in the world today. Healthcare costs are outpacing inflation or economic growth and 25 per cent of the global population has no access to healthcare at all. At the same time, there are 5.9 billion mobile subscribers in the world (87 per cent of the population). It is not hard to fit these facts together and imagine a business that uses technology to deliver better, less expensive and more widely available healthcare. So clear, perhaps, that you may be wondering why you haven't done it yourself.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SHAPE

The answer is that you are not Paul Meyer. In the weeks after the Balkans conflict ended, Meyer founded IPKO, the first and largest internet service provider in Kosovo. It provided critical communications for civilians and aid workers. And a healthy return for Meyer. Before that, Meyer was in West Africa, setting up computer systems to help reunite refugee children with their families. Deploying connectivity and computers in rugged, developing regions, knowing how information flows in these environments and understanding the people who need and use the information are assets unique to Meyer.

VITAL ACTION

But it is important to see exactly how this knowledge helps him. Ideas are cheap and plentiful. Action creates opportunities.



With three co-founders, Meyer formed Voxiva in March 2001. The mission was to create a business that uses technology to deliver better, less expensive and more widely available healthcare. And the action – the important part – was to distil simple elements of the healthcare delivery process into text messages. Whether collecting data on the spread of communicable disease or helping pregnant mothers through the preparations for childbirth, Voxiva turns a cheap cellular handset into a readily available doctor. Anywhere and everywhere...

PERU The first deployment in 2002, in the sparsely populated Andean foothills, showed that Voxiva could make contagious disease information, previously updated monthly on paper, instantly available, reducing costs by 40 per cent.

IRAQ In 2003, Voxiva won an \$815,000 contract to deliver a system for monitoring the spread of disease across the country as the population recovered from war.

RWANDA In spring of 2004, the firm focused its attentions on HIV/AIDS, deploying an information system across the country. The initiative was so successful it led to expansion in South Africa, Nigeria, Madagascar and Uganda, and garnered support from Columbia University.

INDIA On 1 February 2004, Voxiva launched an initiative to monitor the spread of Japanese encephalitis in India. The initiative was so compelling that it drew Madhu Krishna from her position directing the Bill and Melinda Gates Children's Vaccine Program in India to join the start up.

Great expectations
Paul Meyer's Text4baby is just one of his many text-based global healthcare initiatives

UNITED STATES Emerging and war-torn economies are not the only beneficiaries of better, cheaper and more available healthcare. Voxiva's Text4baby, the largest mobile health service in the US, provides information to more than 150,000 mothers a week, and has just launched in Russia.

MEXICO Care4life is Voxiva's mobile-enabled diabetes education and management service. Initially developed in partnership with Instituto Carlos Slim de la Salud, it is now being launched in the US.

ENTREPRENEURIAL CONDITION

So do you have to be Paul Meyer to achieve this kind of impact? The answer is no, but there are at least two things to learn from him. Anyone could have undertaken what Voxiva set out to do ten years ago. And the first takeaway is the importance of action. The second is less obvious. Which is how dependent action (and outcome) is on the person who takes it. Someone with experience in a big drugs company might have taken action with corporate partners. Someone more social might have enabled peer-to-peer support instead of information delivery and data capture. What would you have done? ●

details

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