

Tying loose knots

*'Where there's a will there's a way' is a principle that sparked the idea of a business aiming to bring peace of mind to wedding preparations. Get Hitched co-founders tell **Marija Camilleri** how they have been growing their start up, how they decided to 'breathe' after a brief experiment in the UK market, and what further expansion they have in the pipeline.*



A wedding should be a magical experience, full of happy memories with friends and family. The run-up to the occasion, however, is an entirely different matter.

The couple is stuck with having to contact and coordinate countless vendors, wasting time and energy. This stress can disrupt people's enjoyment of own wedding.

Jonathan Azzopardi Frantz, co-founder of wedding organiser platform Get Hitched, together with his now-wife, found themselves chasing wedding suppliers for information, quotes, and packages two and a half years ago when preparing for their big day. Azzopardi Frantz would call and send emails and instant messages to suppliers, but most of them would not even bother to respond, while others simply told them that they were fully booked.

The couple, both entrepreneurs, started to get irritated. 'Photographers, videographers and the like should chase me instead of me

chasing them,' he said. The groom decided to share his frustrations with his business partner Benjamin Vincenti. 'The biggest question at the time was not how big of a business this could be but "How did no one think of it before?"' says Azzopardi Frantz. When Vincenti heard about the lack of a one-stop-shop for weddings, he took to it immediately. 'We did some research and couldn't find such platforms; all we found were the typical directory sites, which meant that you still had to contact the vendors one by one. And so we built it ourselves,' says Vincenti.

Their joint venture, Get Hitched, launched at the Malta Fairs and Conventions Centre (MFCC) weddings fair two years ago and has now grown to over 400 suppliers and 13 employees. 'Before we set out to build Get Hitched we validated the idea; we brainstormed around Jon and his wife's pain points and then we spoke to other couples, asking them whether they would use such a platform. All of them responded with 'yes, obviously!' and that was the first part of the puzzle,' explains Vincenti. ➤

The co-founders needed to make sure that suppliers would actually invest in this product. They created a prototype to sell to vendors and managed to generate over €13,000 without a brand name or website. All the profit earned from Get Hitched has gone back into the business. 'Use our platform to find everything you would need for your wedding, [and] there is nowhere else you need to go — save time and hassle, stop chasing people and focus on what's most important, like enjoying your relationship and having fun at your wedding,' Vincenti summarises his company's offer.

When he started building this business, Azzopardi Frantz already had his own marketing agency, which was working with Joe Bartolo at the University of Malta. Bartolo told them about the TAKEOFF incubator, and the founders applied for the seed fund. 'Winning the TAKEOFF award was more than just about the funding [...], it was more about the acknowledgement that we are doing something different and innovative,' asserts Vincenti.

'Our team is multicultural. We have people from Malta, the United Kingdom, and Lithuania. Even in terms of users, some 25% are non-Maltese residents, but arrive here to get married,' he adds. The bulk, although not all, of their suppliers are local.

'The company makes its revenue from suppliers through two different pricing models, meaning that the service for users has been and will always remain completely free,' Vincenti explains. As suppliers pay for the listing, neither the platform nor the supplier applies commission to the prices the end-user pays. 'We are not just a listing provider, we match the criteria of the user with the

supplier, so if the supplier doesn't match the client's budget or is fully booked on the day, for example, they won't even communicate with each other,' he says.

Users can filter suppliers based on the date of the wedding, the estimated number of people to serve, budget, and over 35 categories of services. Get Hitched suppliers are vetted meticulously. The team speak to people who have used the service directly, converse with the vendor over the phone and then arrange a face-to-face meeting. 'In certain situations, we have stopped engaging a supplier because they didn't give a good service,' admits Vincenti.

Once a match is made, the customer and the supplier can start communicating directly through the website. 'Competition and users' expectations are always increasing, and so you need to give the customer a tailor-made, personal service,' says Vincenti.

Knowing that most of the couples getting married would also plan a bachelor or hens party, the founders decided to launch a category for those events. Not to

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Benjamin Vincenti and Jonathan Azzopardi Frantz, founders of Get Hitched

mention that the two have recently built another website, Evently, which is an extension of Get Hitched. 'In just three months we have added 130 suppliers and have had over 90 companies from the iGaming industry, the government, and the financial sector using it to find venues for their events,' Vincenti says about Evently.

Not all of their wild ideas enjoyed smooth sailing. Get Hitched attempted to venture outside of Malta with Wedago in Manchester, UK, but the team soon realised that the demand for weddings over there in Manchester was not comparable to that of Malta. 'An average wedding in Malta would hold approximately 400 people and therefore more services are needed, such as a photo booth, photographer... some couples would even want fireworks,' notes Vincenti. 'UK weddings hold an average of 30 people, who would get married and go for lunch. So it's a smaller operation, there isn't the need for the 35 services that we have on

Get Hitched,' the co-founder adds. Hence, management decided to pull out from the United Kingdom since growth there was not up to founders' expectations.

'We learned many lessons from this experience and it was a very tough time for the company, but we are very grateful that we went through it since we learned so much and became much more stream-lined in all our processes,' Vincenti adds.

Despite past setbacks in foreign markets, the founders are currently looking to expand. 'Start ups are ever-changing at lightning speed so we are constantly adapting,' Vincenti adds. 'Our vision is to internationalise our platforms and be the matchmaking platform of users finding their suppliers for the world. We love Malta and it will always be our home, but we have bigger aspirations.' **T**

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