7   Global Start-ups and business development

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> *"The whole of the global economy is based on supplying the cravings of two per cent of the world's population."*
>
> BILL BRYSON (1946–)

This chapter at a glance:

- Introduction
- Characteristics of Global Start-ups
- Global Start-ups: Case Studies
- Conclusions

Introduction

Rialp-Criado et al (2002) noted several key driving forces behind the emergence of global start-ups as well as their age, industry affiliation, export behaviour and performance, geographic distribution, (rise in) number and size. In addition, international operations from the start-up of the business have been seen to be important. General consensus has provided that the underlying notion and theoretical definition of the global start-up phenomenon perceives them as young entrepreneurial firms engaged in international business from inception (Rialp-Criado et al, 2002). On the one hand, researchers have considered a six-year period as the standard in measuring international operations from the start-up of the business (Oviatt and McDougall, 1997). On the other hand, academics have selected other criteria to empirically define the global start-ups being analysed. Rennie (1993) has reported that firms began exporting two years after foundation on average and realised seventy-six per cent of their total sales by exporting. Other authors have defined this according to foreign sales of twenty-five per cent or more after starting exporting activities and within three years of birth (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996; Madsen et al, 2000; Servais & Rasmussen, 2000).

By describing, understanding and interpreting the reasons behind the emergence of global start-ups it is possible to gain insight into their needs for business support provision. Interestingly, according to Rialp-Criado et al (2002), much of the present literature about global start-ups has been assumed to be concerned with high tech businesses, considering the globalisation aspects present in sectors within which these firms compete (Bell, 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1995; Roberts & Senturia, 2000; McDougall & Oviatt, 1996; Burgel & Murray, 2000, Autio & Sapienza, 2000; Autio et al, 2000; Zahira et al, 2000).

Characteristics of Global Start-ups

According to Rialp-Criado et al (2002), the top ten characteristics considered as critical success factors (CSFs) for global start-ups (not in rank order) are:

- "managerial global vision from inception
- high degree of previous international experience on behalf of managers
- management commitment
- strong use of personal and business networks (networking)
- market knowledge and market commitment
- unique intangible assets based on knowledge management
- high value creation through product differentiation, leading edge technology products, technological innovativeness (usually associated with a greater use of IT), and quality leadership
- niche focussed, proactive international strategy in geographically spread lead markets around the World from the very beginning
- narrowly defined customer groups with strong customer orientation and close customer relationships
- flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing external conditions and circumstances" (Rialp-Criado et al, 2002, pp. 25–26).

Further to this, Rialp-Criado et al (2002) from their research into twenty seven of the most important studies in the decade 1993–2002, which consider global start-ups amongst other forms of these types of businesses, say that having identified, examined and critically assessed these studies they have been able to formulate an adequate observation of the state of the art of this important research area within the field of International Entrepreneurship (IE).

According to Wakkee et al (2003), global start-ups are described in the literature as perfect examples of entrepreneurial ventures and therefore need to be investigated from an entrepreneurial perspective. They go on to say that, the concept of global start-up was first mentioned in a paper by Mamis (1989). At about the same time, Ray (1989) undertook four cases for which the term global start-up was used. Following this, the term global start-up was defined by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) "as one that seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from extensive co-ordination along multiple organisational activities, the location of which is geographically unlimited" (pp. 59–60). Wakkee et al (2003) add that, these firms do not only respond to global market conditions, they also act to acquire resources and sell wherever in the World there is the largest value.

Since Oviatt and McDougall (1994, 1995) the term global start-up has been little used. A number of authors, including Harveston (2000), Madsen and Servais (1997) and Saarenketo (2002), have also referred to global start-ups. More recently Rasmussen and Madsen (2002) have suggested that they are the only type of international new venture. Wakkee et al (2003) have said that "a global start-up is the most radical manifestation of the international new venture because it derives significant competitive advantage from extensive co-ordination along multiple organisational activities, the location of which is geographically unlimited. Such firms not only respond to globalising market conditions but they also proactively pursue opportunities to acquire resources and sell outputs, wherever in the world they have the greatest value" (pp. 6–7). According to Wakkee et al (2003), from their discussion of the literature on the definition of a global start-up, five relevant characteristics are apparent, and these are:

1. the diversity or scope of the international activities
2. the company age
3. the timing of international activities (time to entry)
4. the global diversity of the international activities
5. the purpose of the international activities (strategic choice)" (Wakkee et al, 2003, p. 13).

In fact, they say that the nature of the opportunity differences global start-ups from other types of start-ups since the opportunity is a global one. From this Wakkee et al (2003) define a global start-up as:

"A new venture that from its inception ("opportunity recognition") seeks to pursue opportunities wherever they arise (i.e. global or in an unlimited number of countries around the world), it co-ordinates multiple activities in the value chain through the interaction with network actors around the World. The entrepreneur(ial team) leading the firm is internationally experienced and skilled." (Wakkee et al, 2003, p. 14).

They go on to say that global start-ups are characterised by high levels of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) although originally developed by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) and Lumpkin (1998) for established firms when considered for global start-ups they exhibit high levels of EO. In these terms Wakkee et al (2003), bring together the descriptions of global start-ups and, describe them as "an entrepreneurial firm that literally from its inception is involved in a variety of international activities around the World" (Wakkee et al, 2003, p. 28).

The case studies selected in this chapter are spin-offs, from a "new" university, which are believed to have global potential and exhibit differing states of technological innovativeness. Those that have been selected are university spin-offs operating in the global market or with a global potential. Founders, closely involved with the spin-offs from establishment until now, have been interviewed. No restrictions have been placed with regard to the spin-off age and industry. Although, it is the case that spin-offs running for a number of years will provide more valuable information about their development than those only recently founded. For spin-offs in existence for many years it may be difficult to find a founder who has been involved with the business since the original idea. It might also be more difficult for these people to remember the specific problems encountered in the early stages of the development of the spin-off. Spinout managers identified the interesting spin-off cases and provided contact names for interviews. They also approached the companies in the first instance to gain their support. The stages of development of the case study companies have also been measured.

Global Start-ups: Case Studies

Described below are the six global start-up case studies, which were investigated, and these reveal different characteristics and aspects for business development. Perhaps the main limitation is that most of the companies are in the early stage of business development, but it is envisaged that this work will be developed into a longitudinal study which will show interesting evolutionary dynamics in future years. Due to the sensitive nature and stage of their development all the companies have been referred to anonymously.

Consultancy Services

The Consultancy Services (CS) company, founded in January 2004 as a University spinout, commenced trading in January 2005 to assist organisations access European Union (EU) funding in order to implement specific projects in accordance with regulations accompanying the use of funds. In particular the Internet has been used to interact with organisations who, as the customers, need to access EU funds. This has been taken into account in the company's overall marketing strategy and e-business strategy. Services involve a range of training courses that cover all aspects of European Union (EU) funded projects, including State Aid Rules and Public Procurement Directive. CS has a team of Prince 2 practitioners and freelance consultants. Table 7.1 summarises the profile and background of the company.

Profile and Background – *Consultancy Services*	
Brief overview of the firm's activities, its mission and focus	
Industry	European Project Management
Technology	Project Management software
Product/service	Training and consultancy
Market and targeted customers	Wales, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Bulgaria and other European countries
Company's current mission and focus	To develop the company at a European level over the next three years.

Table 7.1: Consultancy Services

The company has grown on an incremental basis and this followed a long period of time to receive approval with the University. The construction of the Web site, which was essential to the operation of the company, took six months and this was achieved on 1st March 2005. The company has won a number of contracts and this has therefore not been an issue. It has also been important to have clients returning and to draw on their expertise. There are six current clients including public sector and voluntary organisations.

Energy Management Systems

Energy Management Systems (EMS) was launched in January 2005 as a spinout company. The focus of the company is to reduce utility costs and to provide customised online utility information regarding these costs and to ensure that they remain low. The company works with customers to provide a full energy/ utility service ranging from fuel purchasing, meter installation, advanced monitoring and targeting to project engineering and information technology (IT) solutions. In its early stages the company received public support through the Spinout programme and more recent developments have been resourced by the founders. In addition to IT and software developments, EMS undertakes remote analysis of customers' consumption patterns and works closely with clients to achieve reduced costs. The company aims to be a professional service provider by establishing trust through building personal relationships with customers over the Internet. This has been included in the firm's overall marketing and e-business strategy. Through this trust it enables EMS to work with customers, employing the most appropriate technology to gain outstanding results. The products and services provided include metering hardware and connectivity; IT support, hosting, VDN and networking; installation of metering hardware and network cabling; installation of gas, water and steam meters; Web design, Web development and consultancy. Table 7.2 summarises the profile and background of the company.

Profile and Background – *Energy Management Systems*	
Brief overview of the firm's activities, its mission and focus	
Industry	Energy
Technology	Energy management technology
Product/service	.Net Web management system
Market and targeted customers	Public, private and leisure organisations
Company's current mission and focus	To maintain and consolidate company activities over the next five years.

Table 7.2: Energy Management Systems

Literary Book Publishing

Literary Book Publishing (LBP) was launched, and registered, as a limited company in May 2001 as a spinout company from the University with public support through the Spinout programme. The company publishes short stories by authors in a small book format and provides retailing through coffee shops, tearooms, restaurants and hotels. The books are being marketed, over the Internet, to customers in the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US) initially and the English speaking world due to the co-founders' business partner being American. This role of the Internet has been included in the company's overall marketing and e-business strategy. Other markets and languages will be considered later. There is a three-year business plan targeting sales in the UK and USA for the first three years. The spin off is linked to the University since both of the co-founders are graduates of the English Department Centre for Creative Writing. This provides a link with academics and a network of authors. The co-founders are MPhil students from the University. Table 7.3 summarises the profile and background of the company.

Profile and Background – *Literary Book Publishing*	
Brief overview of the firm's activities, its mission and focus	
Industry	Book Publishing
Technology	Book publishing graphic design technology
Product/service	A6 pocket sized books
Market and targeted customers	UK, USA and the English speaking world
Company's current mission and focus	To develop the company in the book publishing trade over the next three years.

Table 7.3: Literary Book Publishing

The initial markets are in the UK and America to be followed internationally. Work with partners is finite for international distribution. Once the product is proved LBP will approach international chains such as Marks and Spencer. As a small start-up company they are not ready to sell to Marks and Spencer who have 6 warehouses and 140 coffee shops in the UK. The large international chain stores will consider the product once it is proven. A contact for London and Cambridge has taken the books to shops that are willing to pay a higher price. The product will sell better in the South East of England and it is hoped that this will be the case with international markets. The company organised a short story competition for authors on its Web site for the winners and runners-up to have their first books published. There are also competitions for poetry and writing for children.

Mobile Phone Security

The Mobile Phone Security (MPS) company is a spinout of the University with limited public support through the Spinout programme. It was formed in 2004 by the Founder who as an undergraduate developed a unique patent pending software application which overcomes password protection technology limitations. The application is different to existing mobile security software since it is undetectable. This provides high levels of data security since there is no evidence that data is hidden. Once the application is installed in a mobile phone it creates a second menu for users to store confidential contact information, office documents, pictures or video files. These are safe since there is no trace of the second menu which is not visible in the event of unauthorised use, theft or loss. Since the menu mirrors standard phone functionality it is easy for the user to navigate requiring little effort to learn.

Since the take up of 3G services has not been as strong as the industry forecast companies are looking for third party content to differentiate between their own and competitors' service and product offerings. This will result in third party software developers such as MPS to be in a strong position. It is envisaged that the primary route to the OEM market will be through regional licensing agreements with major network operators. Through the pre-installation of the software in phones this will enable users to experience the software application and will allow the encouragement of new potential users through direct marketing by the network operators. In order to encourage new users to adopt the service the try before you buy approach is a powerful tactic.

The ability to differentiate the network operators' product offering, for example the incorporation of e-mail facilities and second secure message facilities for secure contacts, will relative to the downloadable version also allow a premium price. End user pricing of the network provider is expected to be in the range of £9 to £12 a year. As well as repeat business for the network operators each time a user upgrades a phone the software application will generate considerable new revenue streams. It is also anticipated that the software, with time phased licence agreements and enhanced product differentiation, will enable network operators to increase their market share through regional exclusivity rights and to further increase revenue. Table 7.4 summarises the profile and background of the company.

Profile and Background – *Mobile Phone Security*	
Brief overview of the firm's activities, its mission and focus	
Industry	Data security industry
Technology	Mobile phone technology
Product/service	Application software
Market and targeted customers	Global
Company's current mission and focus	To develop the company in the data security industry over the next three years.

Table 7.4: Mobile Phone Security

Pet Care

The founder started-up as an incorporated company in May 2004, using Spinout programme public support, with a new product that needed development following considerable research into the market. When the company was at the early development stage there was a need for a manufacturer. It was difficult to find early stage support since contacts were reluctant to provide backing and were cautious. The original idea arose from outside the University from a company formed by the founder in 1986. This produced water beds for pets and a cage system as a holding bay for animals before and after hospital. Collaborative work originally took place with another University. The bed, for use in animal hospitals, was new on the market and with this product it was the first time the founder had started a company. From the experience of doing this the founder decided to start a company again.

With the present company the first product is an outside cat cabin, which is being marketed on the company Web site. This has been developed following the founder's experience of housing cats while at work. There is a clear demand arising from owners not being able to have a cat flap in a wall, or where the cost to replace a door is prohibitive (@ £800 in some cases). From this the idea for a cat cabin arose. Table 7.5 summarises the profile and background of the company.

Profile and Background – *Pet Care*	
Brief overview of the firm's activities, its mission and focus	
Industry	Pet products
Technology	Pet care technologies
Product/service	Specialised pet care products – cat house, pet bed and animal warm mattress.
Market and targeted customers	UK (in the first year) – pet super stores, multiple retailers, pet shops, privately owned high street outlets, veterinary surgeries. Europe (second year). North American market (third year).
Company's current mission and focus	Through the development and sale of pet products the company will establish itself in the UK market and progress to the European and United States markets.

Table 7.5: Pet Care

In the first year the company concentrated on the UK and Irish markets. Since this was a challenge it was decided to concentrate on one product. In the second year the company sold into the European, United States and Chinese markets. The Chinese market is a large window of opportunity since the majority of homes have a cat and therefore there is an immense market. Since the cat house is a unique shape representing the head of cat at the entrance it looks good. It is therefore functional since the cat head fits into the garden as a piece of furniture and appears as an attractive product to customers on the company Web site. This was taken into account in the overall marketing and e-business strategy.

Under Grad

Under Grad is a company, which provides a scheme that encourages companies to employ the best engineering and technology students through the company's Web site. The co-founders started the company about seven years ago in January 2003 with public support through the Spinout programme. The idea for the company arose due to the national decline in the number of students gaining employment in the areas of engineering and technology. Following this being recognised as an opportunity in 2002, a limited company was formed in January 2003. Office space was provided at the University spin-off premises with the help of the Head of the University Commercial Services. The ambition of the founders is to help the University and other universities (like minded organisations and departments) to find industrial employment for their engineering and technology students. The two founders are both employed by the University in the School of Technology and when they formed the company they were the two directors. Office space, support staff and facilities are provided in the School, as well as the office space at the University spin-off premises. Table 7.6 summarises the profile and background of the company.

Profile and Background – *Under Grad*	
Brief overview of the firm's activities, its mission and focus	
Industry	Employment
Technology	Student employment systems
Product/service	Employment service for companies to employ engineering and technology students.
Market and targeted customers	• Engineering and technology students • Companies • Universities
Company's current mission and focus	To maintain and consolidate company activities in the employment of engineering and technology students over the next five years.

Table 7.6: Under Grad

The company was developed within the University's School of Technology. The firm places undergraduate students at a host company while studying part-time for a degree using the Web site. Two days are spent by trainees at the University and the rest of the week at work. Complex systems have been developed to support the scheme, by a franchise centre, through innovative support systems with the award of the ISO 9000:2000 accreditation of the work. Originally work was aimed at higher education institutions in Britain, but following modification overseas colleges and a private European training organisation have become involved. Franchise centres deliver key skills modules at level 1 through to five-year supported programmes. The company provides valuable work experience to students during their university course, with no fees and a bursary up to £9,000. Businesses benefit from motivated undergraduates studying at university, working with the businesses, and they become competent and experienced company members. Franchise centres are cost effective. These have been very successful and have helped to reverse trends in declining numbers and entry qualifications for engineering and technology students. There have also been follow-on efforts such as the retention of students. Through students being more aware of potential debt, and the incentive of a bursary and work experience they are attracted to the scheme.

Conclusions

Since most of the global start-up companies are fairly young they have tended to report early stage development in terms of business growth. It is, therefore, planned to undertake follow-up interviews in future years to develop a longitudinal study to reveal business developments. In order to do this a coherent structure for both the data and the analysis will be essential.

Recommended Reading

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