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TaskRabbit helps folks get the job done thanks to one visionary entrepreneur

October 21, 2010

1:59 PM MST



TaskRabbit founder and CEO

Leah Busque

As early as eight years old, Boston native Leah Busque showed signs of an entrepreneurial spirit. Then the 4th grader decided her school needed a recycling program. With two friends, she launched a ‘recycling company,’ appointing herself CEO – the title her father told her was the highest management level in a company. Enlisting the support of the school lunch ladies, the girls created signs for each trash bin so that the materials would be separated into paper, plastic and other.

Some 20 years later, that same entrepreneurial spirit led Busque to quit her job as a software engineer at IBM and launch **TaskRabbit**, a highly successful new service network, a term she coined that describes the productive and service power of a web-based social networked community.

TaskRabbit brings together people who need help with a task – pick up dry cleaning or groceries, a ride to the airport, help organizing a closet or even online research -- with ‘runners’ who get the job done. As the person in need of assistance, you post your requirement on the TaskRabbit site where the runners bid on the project. Once your task is complete and you pay your runner online, you rate and review the performance.

What sets TaskRabbit apart from other online job communities is the level of due diligence that goes into selecting runners, who first apply online and, if selected, are added to the community based on their location and flexibility. Each TaskRabbit runner also gets a background check before being accepted into the program.

An idea takes shape

Pet lovers will be delighted to know that Busque got the idea for TaskRabbit – originally called RunMyErrand – because of her 100 pound yellow Labrador Retriever Kobe.

“One evening in the fall of 2008, I was trying to figure out how to juggle going out for dinner with my husband and buy Kobe’s dog food, which was running low, and the idea for the company just came to me,” she says. She immediately registered her domain by using her iPhone and that evening began laying out the roadmap for her new venture.

Busque spent the next four months figuring out how to build and launch the network and talking to a lot of people to get feedback. When she had all the input she needed and a solid plan in place, she left her job with IBM. Over the course of the next 10 weeks, she locked herself in her house and worked on her prototype. Initially, Busque launched a beta network in one Boston neighborhood; other networks soon followed driven by word of mouth and enthusiasm for the concept.

Funding and West Coast Move

This year, Busque relocated the company from Boston to San Francisco. The West Coast move was influenced by the choice of San Francisco as the second TaskRabbit city to launch and the selection of the company last summer in the inaugural **fbFund Rev**, a \$10M seed fund and joint venture run by Facebook and venture capital firms Founders Fund and Accel Partners. The fund invests in companies building products that plug into Facebook. In addition to funding, the fbFundRev provides startups with mentoring and education.

In the fall of 2009, TaskRabbit raised an additional two million dollars from three other Bay Area venture firms, Baseline Ventures, Maples Investments, and First Round Capital.

Lessons learned

Early on, Busque recognized the value of mentors. Scott Griffith, the founder and CEO of **Zipcar**, the leading car sharing service, was an enthusiastic supporter and trusted source of advice. Still she points out, “Even with good advice – not to mention vision and drive – launching and running your business is filled with surprises and lessons learned along the way.”

Staying focused is an ever-present challenge. “When you launch a company, the opportunities are endless, but you need to stay focused and prioritize in order to meet your goals, especially when your goal is to set an industry standard,” Busque says. “You also have to be tenacious and never take no for an answer.”

An important and yet not easy decision for her was changing the name of the company from RunMyErrand to TaskRabbit. RunMyErrand was the inception of the company and the name she lived with for the first nine months so it was not easy to give it up. In the end, she says she accepted the change because the core concept of the company had become more than running errands and TaskRabbit captures that vision much better.

Today and tomorrow

Today, Busque and her team are busy building out the San Francisco network, which requires screening the hundreds of applicants who have signed on for the part-time work TaskRabbit affords.

Plans call for more TaskRabbit cities to roll out and more than one at a time; although Busque is firm that she will never compromise quality for growth. “The most important thing is to provide the users with a quality experience,” she emphasizes.

About her venture, Busque says, “What I love most about being an entrepreneur is having new challenges and constantly innovating.” Based on the response to TaskRabbit from those using the network to get things done and those making money providing service, a lot of people are grateful she does.



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