



Susie Hollands: VINGT Paris

The only property company in the French capital managed by expats, VINGT Paris – owned by Scottish-born Hollands – has helped its clients understand the city, its neighbourhoods and the French way of life for 10 years. Arriving in Paris for what was supposed to be a two-month stay, Hollands chose to remain there and start her dynamic business. "I started with one property in 2003. I now have 80 properties under management and 30 exclusive sales listings ranging from 300 000 to 5 million euros," she says.

"I saw a need for tailored real estate search companies for international professionals coming to Paris," she explains. Building on her success, Hollands launched a magazine for expatriates, also called VINGT Paris, featuring interviews with Parisians, art, culture, beauty, food and lifestyle. "It's a far cry from the fluffy or the clichéd; this is the real Paris," she says. Having studied history at Stirling University in Scotland and being a Francophile since an early age, she believes she's following her destiny in her career.

SUCCESS PRINCIPLE: "In a crowded marketplace, creating a strong brand with a great reputation that regularly takes business away from household names like Christie's and Sotheby's is my greatest source of pride."

Mayara Campos and Tahiana D'Egmont: UniPay

Campos, co-founder of UniPay, says she "fell in love with payments" while working as a Product Director in social games. "I realised many people wanted to spend money on virtual goods, but they couldn't, because they had no credit card," she recalls.

This inspired her and fellow UniPay founders D'Egmont and Sergio Costa to take stock of trends: "We saw an opportunity in Brazil to help professionals increase their payment acceptance through their mobile phones or tablets, using UniPay."

Campos admits, however, that they initially came up against several challenges. Since Brazil's known to have a risk-averse culture, UniPay struggled to find staff. "We had to show potential employees that we believed in the business and demonstrate how we were going to make it succeed." Fortunately, with Brazil's mobile market "rising like crazy" (Campos estimates the mobile payment market to be worth over \$6.6 million – about R62 million), they eventually managed to convince others of UniPay's potential.

Campos believes that in the current global economic and social conditions, the time's ripe for entrepreneurs. "The success of start-ups like Google and Facebook has shown people, and especially investors, that entrepreneurs can make it happen," she says.

However, she adds that they must be able to manage crises, acknowledge their own faults and surround themselves with people they trust. "And love what you do, so that you're motivated to work towards your goals."

D'Egmont – who has previous experience of both business start-ups and the payments market – is realistic about the challenges facing entrepreneurs. "As a start-up owner, you need to take risks. In Brazil, it's easy to get a well-paying, stable job, so it's difficult to get other people to accept your risks and understand what you're doing. I overcame this by having a clear view of what I wanted to achieve and knowing I could build something big."

Focusing on this goal is also useful when she tries to achieve a work-home balance. "I remind myself that I need time for myself to stay healthy. If I'm not on top of my game, the work won't get done. It helps to have a hobby outside of business."

SUCCESS PRINCIPLES: "Have respect for those around you, from co-founders to investors, employees and customers. These are the people who really create your success. Working hard is also essential, as is being willing to learn more in our fast-changing environment," says D'Egmont.



Cjin Cheng: Cubie Messenger

Taiwanese-born Cheng is no stranger to the world of entrepreneurialism: Cubie Messenger – "a free, fun mobile messenger allowing users to draw and chat on Android and iPhone" – is, in fact, her third start-up. The first two are also web and mobile Internet-related.

Her husband is MD of all three ventures. The Chengs devote all their time to their businesses, while parenting their four-year-old daughter – a challenging occupation, given the unpredictable nature of start-ups. Cheng reveals that in 2004, during the early days of the first business, the couple battled to stay afloat financially. "However, we just kept going, analysed the user data and feedbacks and worked to improve the service for others."

With Cubie, Cheng appears to have got the mix just right: since its launch in March 2012, it's been the fastest-growing of her businesses, with more than seven million downloads from users in Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia. The app has also been featured on Google Play, which has attracted users from the USA and Latin America.

SUCCESS PRINCIPLE: "The messenger app is becoming an increasingly competitive area. There's lots for us to learn and we're just a small team of 11, but we try to provide the most fun for our users."

Eskom Tips:

FIND A MENTOR

Are you struggling with a business challenge? Not sure how to handle sticky situations? The guidance of an experienced mentor can help you shave years off your business growth simply by learning from their mistakes.

At the Eskom Development Foundation, we know that this kind of advice is invaluable and through the Business Investment Competition, entrants are exposed to some of SA's top entrepreneurs who can guide small and medium black-owned businesses in the manufacturing, agriculture and trade/services sectors.

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– Tahiana D'Egmont