Fueling the Creator Economy in India
The Story of Knorish

How did India's Leading Course Creator Platform Build Its MVP

"*Everyone has the knowledge to offer and share.*

But nobody was providing them with an opportunity to monetise their knowledge. We had a 40 Billion USD Opportunity to look at us. We had to act on it."

- Kinner Sachdev I CEO I Knorish

The Background

- Knorish Case study

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Background

In 2008, Rakhi Wadhwa and Kinner N Sachdev met at Newcastle University in UK. Rakhi pursued an MBA while Kinner enrolled in the Masters in industrial and commercial biotechnology programme. While they had many things in common, what mainly brought them together was their passion for exploring ideas, especially in the education space that would probably launch one day. This entrepreneurial spirit resulted in their first venture with a small office in their college campus - a consulting firm taking up turnkey projects to help educational institutions expand globally to newer geographies.

In over seven years of operations, they helped multiple clients worldwide to set up multi-million dollar corporate, educational institutions. They would ensure the institute had over 1000 students enrolled while building the administrative and academic foundation, including the vice-chancellors' appointment to the directors, professors and setting up the curriculum.

Word of mouth about their consulting prowess got their projects across multiple industries. They eventually consulted for large technology brands and top fortune 500 companies like Pratt and Whitney, Boeing etc., for all sorts of educational assignments in Europe, the UK and the US and India.

Background

In 2018, while consulting these educational institutions, they interacted with many online academies, trainers and coaches. They all had one common challenge, and they did not know how to market themselves. They had excellent knowledge to share but struggled to create a personal brand or attract audiences. Kinner and Rakhi were natural at marketing and started sharing tips on growing their brand online to attract more audiences. But as consulting with educational institutions started shifting to helping trainers and online academies market themselves, they realised that they needed to make a product. A product that can **help educators share their knowledge online and at scale**.

knorish

a platform that enables educators, creators and trainers to a larger audience

Helpful Link: [Welcome to the Creator Economy | Siddhant More | TEDxStXaviersCollegeKolkata](#)

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Solving a Need

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Solving a Need

Knorish has been built with one primary mission. The founders understood the pain coaches, content creators, instructors, and training organisations face when marketing and selling online. Sophisticated and expensive teams must set up virtual classes, build sales pipelines and use tools to market themselves online. All this required a separate set of expertise and skill, which an entrepreneur in the creator economy did not need to know.

Learning these tools and hiring outside teams was **time-consuming** and **expensive**. Due to this, lower monetary options such as publishing content for free on youtube was the only way for these creators.

As Kinner started exploring these creators, he realised the people who want to share their knowledge are academicians and a range of folks who belong to different professions. He started learning that wine sommeliers, freestyle footballers, chefs, public speaking coaches wanted to share their knowledge with the world. But unfortunately, they did not have the **technology and web expertise** to create and launch courses. This was a need and an opportunity at the same time. Kinner's **consulting help** could only help these creators to a certain level, but if a product creates an **online presence** and allows them to sell these courses, it can be **scalable** and sold to the world.

In Kinner's words, *'We understood that coaches, content, creators, instructors, and training organisations of them were good at what they did, except to promote themselves online. So our mission is that we want them to grow their revenues exponentially without hiring large teams and using multiple tools. We want to empower them with everything they need to build their online academies and online learning businesses and go big without large teams.'*

Solving a Need

Their focus was not primarily on people who are doing traditional physics, chemistry, mathematics, civil services examination, or coaching. But more creators in domains are not a part of the regular academic spaces. And over a while, most of the customers on Knorish belonged to the non-regular academic areas.

~ a **platform that helps content creators launch their courses and monetise their knowledge**.

The timing of the product determines the success of the product as well. As the covid-19 pandemic was at its peak, the consumption of courses went up significantly. Also, at the same time, the creator's physical audience reduced significantly. This provided an excellent time for the creator to start turning to the **digital world** for delivering courses online and still ensuring they have audiences engaged in their work.

Helpful Link: The single biggest reason why startups succeed | Bill Gross

Industry Background

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Kinner quotes, "*Education is one of the oldest professions. People have been coaching, training and instructing for thousands of years, ranging from martial art forms testing physical dexterity to formal Education in analysing science, business, arts and religion. It has been there from time immemorial, and there has never been a better time for the field of Education. It has never been a better time. Let's say the exponential growth, the potential was and made evident this part of the world, particularly just at the time of the pandemic, because before this the physical counterparts, like the natural way of doing this, you know, you'll have somebody just going to a society or a gym and doing the training were the way to go about things*."

His market observation noted that a leadership coach would go to organizations and conduct his training offline. Yet this had a relatively limited scope of doing so. The limitations were mainly time invested and the efforts taken. But with technology, these limitations were reduced significantly. Creators have the potential to make money through online courses.

Example 1: There was a stock market or training instructor who's done a crore rupees in the last 90 days by just creating an investment course on his best practices.

Example 2: A student was going to Stanford, and he postponed his joining date because the pandemic had started; he thought, let me teach other people how to get into Stanford. How did I get successful in my application And he made about 40 lakhs or in just about six months teaching other people how to write essays, and he's covered the living cost for his entire bachelor's program if you think about it.

Kinner quotes,**"*The domain, the expertise, the charm always was there for people who wanted to share knowledge and improve other people's lives. However, this is the first time in this part of the world's history, and it's been happening in the USA for a long time. It is a tangible way for these people to be millionaires, ultra HNIs by building wealth with their expertise, and I don't think this chance ever existed. Yeah, it has been built because of the pandemic created by the access to the internet that platforms like Jio have got and the mobile devices that everybody carries. So this combination of three has enabled the industry to grow exponentially."***

Industry Background

The improved **internet penetration**, **affordable hardware** like mobile phones, and the **advent of newer technologies** such as AI, VR, and related software have resulted in a global uptake in the education sector.

According to a report by the **Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Nielsen**, for the first time, the internet penetration of rural India is higher than its urban counterpart.

The global e-learning market size crossed **$250 billion in 2020** and is expected to grow at over **21% CAGR** between 2021 to 2027.

According to a recent research report co-published by Kantar and LinkedIn on the learner's mindset in India, the top 3 reasons people choose online study are:

✓ Greater flexibility to manage schedule
✓ Better suited to their learning style
✓ Better affordability

Moreover, the study mentions that **89% of the survey respondents** said they would enroll in further studies within the next three years.

Going online has also given exponential scale for creators. All these indicators point toward solid **growth for the online education sector globally**.

Helpful Link: Is India's Edtech Landscape Overcrowded? | Young Turks)

Building the First Prototype

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Building the Prototype

Kinner had one clear idea of building the prototype, and he had to validate his **riskiest assumption**.

The riskiest assumption in entrepreneurship is one assumption in business that if it is false, then the whole industry would collapse

Kinner and Rakhi had to validate that assumption thoroughly. The inference derived from conversations with these creators was would they use a third-party tool to grow their business or not. If this assumption was false, there was no reason for them to exist.

Moreover, they also knew that the **riskiest assumption test** is based on **people's behaviour** and not on the features of the product they are building. The starting point of a product roadmap is **observing the potential customer**.

After that starting point, the rest of the feature set would be made on customer feedback. Kinner was well aware of this and started closely observing the people he was consulting - *What kind of challenges they are facing, what kind of ideas come to their mind while they think of selling their courses online*.

One of the most significant roles of an entrepreneur here is to ensure that they don't influence the customers' thoughts and deviate them from their natural thinking and problem-solving process.

Building the Prototype

Kinner's job on paper was straightforward here. He had to observe how currently are these creators solving their **challenges** - of creating courses and selling them online to their customers.

He had to go back to his team and share the problems these creators are having and develop **technology features** around it.

But at the same time, to ensure the authenticity of the observation, Kinner did not have to suggest or recommend anything during his observation. He just had to stay in the shadow and observe how his prospective users are solving the problem and take notes on how can it solve it better for them. Using this technique of **lean user research**, Kinner was able to get the designs of his **prototype**.

Helpful Link: Laura Klein, Identify and Validate Your Riskiest Assumptions, LSC14

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The Role of User Experience and the Methods in Building a Prototype

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The Role of User Experience and the Methods in Building a Prototype

Kinner strongly believed in the philosophy that **you could achieve what you truly appreciate**. This started reflecting in his **product building process**. He realised that **User Experience** is critical for the success of Knorish, and he has to build it in a manner that users appreciate.

Albeit having the budget to hire a technology team, Kinner himself did a few online courses in the **User Experience (UX) domain**. The most significant insights for building a robust UX came from consuming a lot of **information** and **analysing the need gaps** of his potential users. User experience for Knorish was restricted towards helping Users understand the product and appreciate it.

While building the User Experience of the Prototype, the team at Knorish started taking the learning lessons from the '**Blackboard**', the educational software used by most universities to manage students' curriculum and grades. Even though that software was solving a massive need for educational institutions, he realised that because it had such poor design, anyone would shift if there was a competitor in the field. He emphasised that a good design with a **lean proposition** would be his **minimum viable product**.

He didn't want the MVP to be ugly but functional yet appreciated by the customers. To better understand their customer and build a likeable design accordingly, Kinner started adopting the same lifestyle as his potential customers. He started visiting the same coffee shops, reading the same magazines and living their lives. This provided him with many insights into building the designs for his MVP. According to him, basic functionality alongside a likeable design is the foundation of a good MVP. One of the quotes that Knorish believes in is that **'Design eats features for breakfast!'**

16

The Challenges, Pivot and Learnings

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The Challenges, Pivot and Learnings

The most considerable fodder for getting customer insights is getting the **Minimum Viable Product (MVP)** out in the market as fast as possible. In that pursuit, they started **pitching** their product to many companies as well for their software.

Kinner travelled to Shanghai to pitch for a 1.2 Crore deal in one instance. But after reaching there, he realised that all the big players from all over the world had come to pitch their product to this specific company. It was a realisation for Kinner and the entire team at Knorish that they needed to start focusing on **individual creators** rather than large organisations. It was a crowded space, but the competitors were much more significant. So it was time to **shift the focus** from prominent creators to small creators in the newly emerging passion economy.

As the MVP was getting built and tested, the next step was the feature list.

This **feature list** was an amalgamation of the founder's vision and the feedback that they were getting from the customer. The original idea of Knorish was to build a Udemy.com type of marketplace. But unfortunately, this marketplace segment was getting crowded, and secondly, Udemy had a considerable market share in the domain. The challenge of building Knorish as a marketplace was already too many deep-pocketed competitors present in the market. Thus, they **refined their value proposition** to create a **differentiated product** for a more focused use case. The marketplace model had other issues, where every individual creator had to compete with others in the category. The founders felt that this might not be in the best interest of respective creators and the segment they were targeting.

The Challenges, Pivot and Learnings

Knorish's **Pivot** moved **from a marketplace idea to creating a platform** like Shopify to enable individual coaches to develop their stores. While this model was working well, they were constantly looking at ways to improve the experience for their creator community.
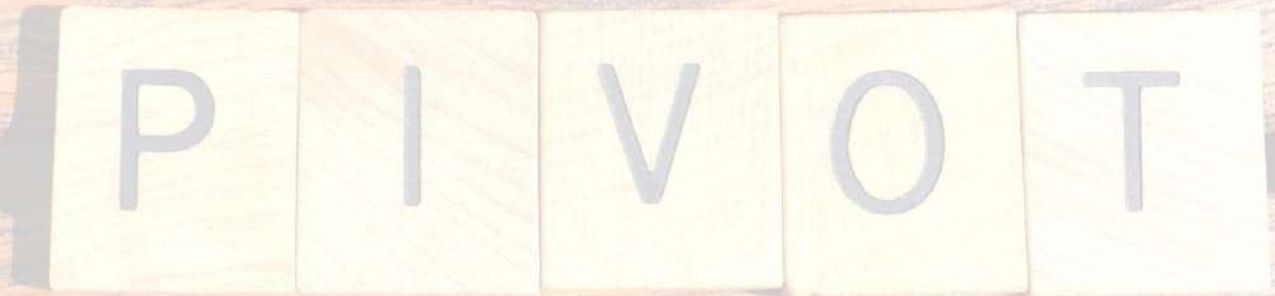
In January 2021, Knorish decided to change the direction of the company. While maintaining the basic framework of the product, they decided to focus more on how the product can help creators build a more **robust sales funnel and pipeline**. The best way to explain this would be a Hubspot built on top of Shopify in Kinner's words. Since the Knorish team always had the product at the heart of the business, they made **constant upgrades** and improvements.

Like any other production company, knowing which features to build and what to avoid is an ongoing battle for them. A notable and intuitive feature Knorish implemented was a **clean video player** with a **minimalistic design**. This was inspired by how Netflix delivers their movies.

The Challenges, Pivot and Learnings

For a company like Knorish, their challenges were very different from that of a traditional organisation. To add fuel to the fire, the **exponential boom in online Education** and the **adoption and acceptance of online Education** attracted a lot of competitors, making it a very **crowded market**. The founders, however, had a true north star to guide them throughout - building a fantastic product.

To do just that, it all had to begin with **building a great team** who understand consumers, their needs, behaviours and the way they think. There is no shortage of good technical skills in the market, but finding the right people who will understand **consumer psychology** as well as the vision of the company to build the correct feature set, was one of the biggest challenges Knorish faced.

To get the boat sailing, the founders donned that hat initially but were soon able to build a nifty team to solve this. They became master delegators, and the team efficiently followed through. However, it was not an easy journey for the team as the daily operational challenges were constant. Some noteworthy ones were - **demand generation**, **fixing the leaky bucket**, **automating repetitive tasks, building dashboards** to better understand and analyse data for actionable insights, and good old fundraising.

Helpful Links: [Mark Cuban: How to Pivot Your Business Model | Inc.](#)

MVP To Get Early Traction

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MVP To Get Early Traction

Knorish strongly believes that product **development and sales should be simultaneous**. This ensures that customer feedback is incorporated in an agile manner. The first 100 customers were pitched and sold to by the founders themselves. As both the founders were managing sales and product development, the feedback they were getting from the pitches they could incorporate in the product development stages. Kinner followed the LPPD methodology closely.

LPPD stands for lean product process development. Kinner followed the six principles to ensure that the MVP gets built in an agile manner

For that, he relied on six principles;

1. **Putting Customers First:** With this approach, he put his customers first for any design change to take place in the product. This principle challenges the founder's vision of the product and puts the customer's vision first.

2. **Understanding and then executing**: Knorish deeply understood the customer's context for a particular feature need. They identified the core value proposition the customer is buying and started building product features that can synchronise with it.

3. **Building an MVP is a team sport**: Knorish started getting their loyal customers and **early adopters** alongside the designers to build and develop the next set of features.

4. **Synchronisation of Workflows**: Knorish ensured **coordination** between the sales, customer success and designing team. Organising **Daily Standups** became key towards ensuring everyone was on the same page.

5. **Recycling Knowledge**: Most of the time, the customer feedback for a product feature development does not have to be immediately acted upon but stored in the future of the roadmap. This recycling knowledge practice at Knorish ensures that **critical feedback** is documented well and used when required.

6. **Creation of new value streams**: Knorish evaluates every step in the **innovation process** and ensures that every small design change or feature addition should add value to its customers.

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Knorish Today

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Knorish Today

Knorish has become **India's leading course creator** for entrepreneurs who want to share their knowledge and expertise with others. By building a **robust platform** and incorporating critical feedback, they have built a product that supports over **25,000 Creators worldwide** and has raised millions of dollars in venture capital.

Kinner continues to **mentor** startups.

Useful Links

Additional Links:

On Knorish

- Meet Knorish

- https://yourstory.com/2021/07/funding-alert-edtech-startup-knorish-pre-series-a-round/amp

- http://www.businessworld.in/article/Sanjeev-Kapoor-joins-hands-with-Knorish-to-launch-India-s-first-celebrity-online-culinary-academy/20-10-2020-333534/

BuiLding an MVP

- Lean Process and Product Development (LLPD) Explained
- Michael Seibel – How to Plan an MVP
- How to Plan and MVP – a step-by-step guide

End of case questions

1. What is the genesis of the business venture?

2. How did Knorish identify the market opportunity?

3. Which kind of market would you categorize the education industry?

4. What is the Key Problem - The Job to be Done - that Knorish is attempting to solve?

5. From a customer's perspective how would you categorize the problem? – one for which a solution is good to have / or need to have? If it is the latter, do you think it makes business sense to go after a product that a customer does not attach critical value to?

6. How did Knorish validate the demand for their products?