



CSI: Failed Startups Division *Project Materials*

* Note to manage waste please print this document in greyscale or black and white rather than in color. Please print on both sides of the paper (duplex) and if you can print multiple slides or pages on one page.

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Cold Case Files

- Zirtual

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- Quibi

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Cold Case Files

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- Pets.com

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<https://www.apptunix.com/blog/boo-com-a-failed-ecommerce-business-plan/>

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- Quirky

<https://medium.com/@dilanbhat02/a-180-million-dollar-failure-the-story-of-the-rise-and-fall-of-quirky-03f53b745a6b>

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- Digg

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Cold Case Files

- Yik Yak

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- Ask Jeeves

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- Hello

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- Shyp

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- Powa Technologies

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- PepperTap

<https://forgefusion.io/peppertap-failure-case-study/>

Cold Case Files

- Sprig

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- Bump

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Agent Investigation Template

Agent Name: _____

Case Date: _____

Assigned Startup Cold Case: _____

1. Case Profile

- Startup Name:
- Industry:
- Year Founded:
- Year Shut Down:
- Funding Raised:
- Team Size:
- Location:

2. Mission Statement

- What was this startup's goal, product, or service?
- Describe its business model or original value proposition.

3. Timeline of Events

Construct a timeline based on your research:

- Launch Date:
- Major Milestones:
- First Trouble Signs:
- Attempted Pivots or Rescues:
- Shutdown or Exit:

4. Cause of Death (Root Cause Analysis)

Based on your findings, what led to this startup's **demise**?

- Market Misfit
- Financial Mismanagement
- Product Failures
- Leadership Issues
- Legal/Ethical Trouble
- Other:

Include quotes, figures, or headlines that support your claim:

Agent Investigation Template

5. Red Flags

List 2–3 early warning signs that were visible before the shutdown:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

6. Could This Death Have Been Prevented?

Propose two alternate decisions or strategies the startup might have used:

-
-

7. Investigator's Takeaways

Log your key lessons from this investigation:

-
-
-

8. Personal Reflection

What surprised or confused you during the investigation?

-

Would you invest in this founder's next company? Why or why not?

-

9. Evidence Log

List your sources (articles, blog posts, databases, etc.):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Case file submitted to CSI: Startup Division HQ for review

Agent Evaluation Report

Agent Name: _____
Investigation Date: _____
Case File: _____

Criteria (1-4 Scale):

1. Case File Completeness
2. Investigative Depth
3. Cause of Death Diagnosis
4. Red Flag Identification
5. Alternate Scenarios
6. Startup Lessons
7. Report Clarity
8. Source Attribution

Scoring Guide:

- 4 – Excellent: Detailed, insightful, professional
3 – Good: Complete, logical, generally well-done
2 – Developing: Some gaps, limited depth or clarity
1 – Needs Review: Lacks key elements or unclear

Final Score: ___ / 32

Comments:

Filed with CSI: Startup Division – Internal Review Bureau

Startup Scene Report: Open Discussion File

Use this file to guide a free-form, open discussion on a failed startup.

Startup Name: _____

Date: _____

Discussion Leader (optional): _____

Initial Reactions

1. What do you already know or have heard about this startup?
2. What is your first impression about why it might have failed?
3. Does the industry it was in seem particularly risky or saturated?

Exploring the Failure

1. What types of problems might a startup like this face?
2. Where do you think the biggest blind spot was — product, team, market, finances?
3. If you were on the founding team, what would you have prioritized?

Ethical and Human Perspectives

1. How do you think the team experienced the failure — emotionally, professionally, financially?
2. What responsibilities do startup founders have to investors, customers, or employees?
3. Is failure always bad, or can it be a stepping stone? Explain.

Forward Focus

1. What would you ask the founder if you could interview them?
2. Would you consider joining a new venture led by someone who failed with this startup? Why or why not?
3. What is one lesson you're taking from this case into your future thinking about entrepreneurship?

Activities:

- Create a “Startup Obituary” — a creative summary of the startup’s life and death.
- Vote as a group: Was this startup a good idea with bad timing, or flawed from the beginning?