

DOs and DO NOTs for Civil Engineering Startups

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In this message of mine to the Civil Engineering fraternity, I have chosen to focus on the DOs and DO NOTs for Civil Engineering startups so that the new enterprise runs successfully. There are certain things which make all the difference between a successful venture and a failed one. Thousands of Civil Engineering startups are established every year; some succeed and others do not.

First, the DOs:

Create a good business plan. This is very crucial. Formulate a sound strategy and vision statement.

Be different. Be clear as to why your business is different and what you can do differently from others. This factor is very important. A startup needs to have an USP (Unique Selling Proposition) to ensure that clients are driven to the startup.

Correct mistakes quickly. Give an experiment a maximum time-frame of two years to work. An experiment is a failure if it has been continuing for the past two years and is still not working.

Be strong enough to overcome any hitches that you may encounter during the initial process of establishing your startup and getting it running.

Find the right people. It is very important to partner with people who complement your skills. However, avoid getting too many people on board as it might become tough to find common vision. Ensure that the people you partner with share your values and your vision.

Be flexible. Constantly test your idea in the market and seek feedback. When the feedback indicates that changes need to be made to the original hypothesis, have the courage to modify the original hypothesis without compromising on the fundamental vision.

Meet everyone you hire. This may sound outlandish but do make the effort of meeting everyone you plan to hire for your company. Outsourcing hiring is a big mistake.

Use Information Technology to the greatest extent possible. Sectors like Information Technology are evolving very fast. Use as much of Information Technology in your business as you can. Make sure that you are up-to-date with the latest developments in Information Technology and that you are using it to the greatest extent possible in your enterprise.

Be creative. Be creative in your approach and constantly focus on solving the problems of your clients by innovative approaches. Out-of-the-box thinking is crucial.

Understand that change is the only constant. I, as a Buddhist, know that this is one of the most fundamental teachings of Lord Buddha, emphasised by him throughout his life, and that it is applicable in every situation. Not everything will go as you want and it is important that you realise that sometimes you may have to solve problems that are not of your own creation.

Be research-driven. Be absolutely up-to-date with the latest in Civil Engineering research so that you can offer the best solution possible to your clients. Do a lot of Civil Engineering research yourself.

Learn about the competition. Know who the companies are that you are trying to beat and what are their strengths and weaknesses. Know your enemy is the mantra given by Sun Tzu in the now immortal Art of War. This facet is one of the cornerstones of victory in any battle.

Now, the DO NOTs:

Do not take technology lightly. It is one of the greatest mistakes to ignore technological developments. You run the risk of being outdated.

Do not under-rate commitment as a trait. Specifically, for the initial set of hires, commitment, and resilience, coupled with skills rank way higher up on the scale than skills alone. Sticking with you through the bumpy parts and not jumping ship at the first sign of trouble is an essential quality of a team member.

Do not ignore Open Source software. Using Open Source source software to the greatest extent possible can save you a lot of money. Before investing in a proprietary software, see if

an Open Source alternative is available.

Do not ignore marketing. Strong marketing is one of the essential requirements of an enterprise. Reach out to your clients. An enterprise that has a lot to offer can lose out to another having a lesser portfolio if the first enterprise fails to market itself properly. Marketing strategy is a commonly ignored aspect.

Do not think that you are unique if you have merely one or two points, peripheral in nature, different from your competitors. You need to have a significant number of major points different from your competitors in order that you may stand out.

My company, MultiSpectra Consultants, specialises in research-based solutions to Civil Engineering problems. It is absolutely up-to-date in both the latest developments in Civil Engineering research as well in Information Technology. It also does a great deal of Civil Engineering research itself and the outcome of all that research makes its way into peer-reviewed professional Civil Engineering journals. It has carved out a place for itself in solving difficult and critical Civil Engineering problems.

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