

TOP-UP triumph

Serial entrepreneur Mark Roden is the man behind the highly successful company Ding, which enables people who are working abroad to support loved ones back home by facilitating the instant transfer of credit top-up to any mobile phone, anywhere, anytime.

ENTREPRENEUR: MARK RODEN

Q: How is life and how is business at present?

MR: Life is really good! Ding is growing tremendously well. We are experiencing double-digit growth and expanding with new partners we had never engaged with previously. Ding tops up prepaid mobile phones and, given that 80% of the world's phones are prepaid, there is huge ever-increasing demand for mobile top-up. We have just passed 400 million top-ups sent on Ding since we started in 2006.

New offices in 2019 include London and Moscow, which brings us to eight international locations. We are also continuing to add more mobile operators and have recently surpassed 500 operators across 140+ countries.

Q: Would you say you always had a business head on your shoulders?

MR: I have always had a very strong interest in business, even during school. The business head came from all my various jobs over the years, both part-time and permanent. They all add up and at the end of it you have a set of experiences that give you perspective when making decisions.

Q: What would you say has been the secret to the success and impressive global growth of Ding?

MR: People need to keep their prepaid phones connected which means they need top-up regularly and our service helps them to do that quickly and easily. Over the past ten years the importance of staying connected has grown exponentially as everyone needs data. Access to data is both a basic need and life-changing and people are very reliant on their mobile phones.

This has been highlighted to us on a number of occasions. One which sticks in my mind was in 2010. I was in the office looking at our top-up transaction screen which shows live transactions being sent from senders to receivers. A few minutes later, the screen just lit up with thousands of top-ups flying endlessly from New York and Florida to Haiti. At first, I thought it was a software blip, but in fact it was the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti as relatives in the US could not get through to their families back home. With Ding.com they were able to send top-up through to mobile phones to be able to speak to them and see if they were OK. Overnight our volumes exploded and I realised the power of top-up for staying connected. We had built the largest mobile phone top-up network without realising it!

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Mark Roden,
Chairman and Chief
Executive, Ding



Mark Roden

THE LIGHTBULB MOMENT

In 2005, Mark Roden sold his previous business easycash, which had introduced in-store ATMs into Ireland. After the sale, he took his family for a holiday in Dubai and one morning went for a coffee and got chatting to an Indian waiter. He told Roden that he was working in Dubai to support his family back home in India by sending money remittances every month – but he said that if he wanted to speak to his wife in Bangalore really quickly he would text her a PIN from Indian mobile operator BSNL, which he had bought from a local shop in Dubai. It was a cumbersome, expensive process. Roden began to think of ways to automate it and to make it easier, more cost effective and global for all users in emerging markets.

Q: You recently appointed Paul Duffy as head of finance. How important has the team around you been in the success of Ding?

MR: Paul is a fantastic addition to our finance team. The fact that we need such an experienced Head of Finance in addition to our Chief Financial Officer highlights the increasing growth and complexity of our business. We now have 250 employees across eight international cities and they are all core to our success. In the past few months we have also appointed a number of fantastic people to our senior team – including a new Chief Commercial Officer, Rupert Shaw, a new Chief Marketing Officer, Christelle Chan, and a new Chief Technology Officer, Barbara McCarthy. They all bring a wealth of experience with them and I am enjoying working with them immensely.

Q: What are your mantras in business and how have they kept you going and your business growing?

MR: ‘Speed wins every time’, and ‘If it’s worth doing, it’s worth measuring’. I can’t claim either of them as my own originally, they were coined by Steve Kaufer.

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Q: What are your thoughts on entrepreneurship and the types of start-ups emerging here in recent years?

MR: Entrepreneurship is something which has played a big part in my life. I have always been attracted to people who say, “I can change this!”. As a founding board member of the Endeavor programme in Ireland, I believe that jobs, innovation and prosperity all come when there is real support for entrepreneurs. Ireland has a vibrant start-up scene, and I’m looking forward to playing a role in mentoring and advising some of the incredibly talented entrepreneurs we have here.

Q: Do you have any advice for budding entrepreneurs hoping to get a business off the ground (and also be selected for the Endeavor programme)?

MR: Make sure your service is addressing a real need and get big fast! Endeavor is looking for high impact entrepreneurs – those with the biggest ideas; the greatest potential to achieve meaningful scale; and the ability to inspire, mentor, and reinvest in the next generation. We want entrepreneurs who have the potential to make a real impact and bring about real transformation in their home markets and beyond.

Q: Would you like to highlight some recent key achievements/news at Ding?

MR: In short, we are in the middle of an aggressive growth strategy. We are expanding to the UK and Russia. We’re continuing to make a real push online and that business is seeing tremendous growth. We’re also growing our partnership network around the world, including increasing our mobile operator network. The opportunity for Ding is really significant.

Q: Where would you like to be in five years’ time with Ding?

MR: Much bigger! I would like to see Ding being the word that people say every time when they want to top-up their phone. That means being connected to every mobile phone operator in every country and to every prepaid phone in the world.