

# SIMON QUIRK: THE THRILL OF IT ALL

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**An oft-quoted 2014 *Fortune* article estimated that 90 percent of all start-ups will ultimately fail. This figure has since been disputed, but there's no doubt that it's a challenging area and certainly not for the faint-hearted.**

Simon Quirk is one who relishes that challenge. Currently the CEO and co-founder of VidVersity, the lawyer turned entrepreneur has a long history of start-up and accelerator experience. His attraction is fuelled by the thrill of it all. "When you create a novel technology solution that wasn't there before and the people start saying 'yes' or buying it at scale, it's really a rush, it's incredibly satisfying," he explains. "It's not about the money. Obviously you need to make money, but it really boils down to creating something completely new and that's probably one of the reasons why I was not really suited to being a lawyer in private practice."

Beginning his law career at K&L Gates and then Freehills [legacy], Simon then spent time at global companies like Getty Images and Bosch before co-founding his first start-up, a strategic business planning company called Strategy Fusion in 2012.

His most recent venture, VidVersity, was born from personal frustration and identifying a gap in the market. He was looking to build an online program for Strategy Fusion using slide-based e-learning and approached a range of providers to help him pull it together. "I was staggered at how long it would take and how expensive it was," he recalls. "So I contacted Natalie Wieland, who was an expert in the online learning world."

Six months later, he and Natalie (another alumnus of both Freehills [legacy] and Monash University), founded VidVersity – an online education platform that enables anyone to capture a video and then transform it into an interactive video-based learning course. The platform is used by corporates and government to train their staff with their own bespoke training.

A 2015 *Forbes* article detailed four ways that start-ups can increase their chances of being a success. The first and second are making sure the product is perfect for the market, and not ignoring 'anything'. As a lawyer versed in due diligence, Simon always enters the start-up space well-prepared. His legal background gave him other skills too. "The law teaches you about solving problems," he says.

"That analytical balancing of situations and making a call on things is a really valuable discipline and skill. Natalie and I often talk about this in the context of solving problems almost on a daily basis. Our legal background helps that and this is why you see lawyers go on and become successful in a range of occupations."

The third *Forbes* tip was for a company to grow quickly. Again, Simon is looking ahead. VidVersity is taking on some expansion capital and its immediate focus is to grow in Australia and then launch the company in North America.

The fourth and final must do for start-ups, according to *Forbes*, is having a team that knows how to recover. VidVersity has yet to be tested in this area, but having had experience in so many different industries, Simon has had plenty of opportunities to test his resilience.

He has also had to learn flexibility and spontaneity and to let his creative urges run free. "I can now articulate why being a lawyer wasn't for me. I've got a huge amount of respect for what lawyers do, because it's hard and intellectually rigorous work. For me, I'm more big picture creative and I wasn't able to scratch those itches being a lawyer."

When not putting in the long hours that running a start-up always demands, Simon still finds time to advise other start-ups and act as a mentor in various accelerator programs. "In any role, one of the greatest satisfactions that I have is to offer other people opportunities," he says. "I get more out of it than possibly the people do. I learn a lot out of helping people and it's something that I just enjoy doing."

He's particularly proud of his work on the board at Runway, an organisation building regional start-up ecosystems. It's another program that is rapidly expanding. "We've got a large facility in North Geelong, but we also now have facilities in Ballarat and Warrnambool. We've got ones coming up in the Latrobe Valley and what we are doing is to help promote, support, educate and facilitate people who want to build early stage businesses from the regions rather than feeling they have to just pack up and go to Melbourne. And if they can do that, it will help support and grow regional communities."

As an experienced mentor and adviser what advice would he give to his younger self? "I'm very happy with the way things have taken me and I have absolutely no regrets," he says, "but I have learned that it doesn't cost more to think more expansively about your options and what it is possible to do."