

# Hate ironing? Meet ihateironing, the 24hr door to door laundry service

*As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Matthew Connelly, founder and CEO of ihateironing about staying on top of laundry, expanding to New York and the importance of surrounding yourself with a team of determined people.*

Temps de lecture : minute

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10 January 2023

Before *ihateironing*, I helped early-stage businesses with their growth and development for around eight years. My lightbulb moment for ihateironing came on one of my usual runs while I was working in Old Street.

I ran past a backstreet dry cleaner who had a large sign in front of his shop advertising to wash and iron shirts for half the normal price.

That's when it hit me.

There was no way for this cleaning centre to bring in new customers without having to slash their prices below what was sustainable. And still, its unfortunate location tucked away from the highstreet made it impossible to come across naturally.

It made me think of my own experience as a working professional. I was struggling to stay on top of my own laundry without the luxury of a flexible schedule, having to wake up early enough to iron my shirts before work, or rush to find an open cleaner on my commute home.

There was a gap in the market for a two-fold solution. At the end of my

run, I had the first seeds for ihateironing.

## Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

*ihateironing* connects people to the best dry cleaners in their local area. At the touch of a button, customers can have their clothes collected, beautifully cleaned or altered, and delivered right back to their homes.

Powered by a curated network of local dry cleaners, we take the hassle out of laundry by providing door to door pickup and delivery with a 24 hour turnaround. We help customers create time for the things they love, while still enjoying beautifully cleaned garments exactly when they need them.

The dry cleaners are supported to take their cleaning to the next level by utilising ihateironing's operating procedures, technology and data to drive their performance. ihateironing also supports the dry cleaners by providing world-class customer care.

## How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

Actualizing the idea behind ihateironing first came in the form of my brother and I creating a simple website, and I set forth on my mission to establish the foundation of our service, all while juggling a full-time job and struggling to find the symbiotic relationship I had in mind with a partner dry cleaner.

What started as a one-man project, where I would personally carry out deliveries and partner searches in my evenings after work back in 2013,

has now grown to become a leading on demand dry cleaning service. As of 2022, we currently have over 70 dry cleaning partners operating in cities across the UK as well as in New York, with a growing head office team based in Brixton, London. Earlier this year, we hit the milestone of having 100,000 customers, a goal which seemed a million years away when we first started.

In October 2022, I was proud to win the Entrepreneur of the Year award at the *British Business Awards* for my role in making sure ihateironing doesn't go under when the pandemic hit, and for pivoting the business to offer support for people in need while simultaneously providing consistent revenue to our network of local dry cleaners.

## Tell us about the working culture at ihateironing

We've got a culture of people producing a high standard of work but within a relaxed, collaborative and supportive environment.

Across our operations, marketing, tech and customer care departments, we're lucky to have a culture of people thriving under the opportunities and responsibilities they're given. The people at ihateironing take pride in their work, and are happy to support one another instead of competing with one another.

We've had several employees who joined us as fresh graduates years ago and have now worked their way up to taking more responsibility and developing to higher roles. It's great to see people truly stepping into their best potential and to see their passion in applying themselves fully.

## How are you funded?

When we first started, we were able to raise £900K from angel investors as well as early-stage venture funds. That really helped us invest in the parts of the business which would facilitate our growth, including customer care and software development.

As of today, we are profitable and funded from our revenue.

## What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

At the start of the pandemic, the business was hit with its hardest blow: losing 70% of its sales in the first 3 days of lockdown. Our leading Central London dry cleaning partner, who used to process upwards of 1,000 garments a day, witnessed an unprecedented drop to 200 orders a day.

Beyond our determination to keep the small businesses at the heart of our operations afloat, we also wanted to utilise the tools and services we already have available to us to provide support for the local community. Thus, our Essential Food Boxes initiative came to life in April 2020, where we wanted to lend a helping hand to people who were unable to leave their house to use their local shops. We partnered with food wholesalers to deliver a variety of fruits, vegetables and essential items to customers. It was also a way to maintain revenue for ourselves, local businesses, as well as our drivers.

In a bid to help some of the more vulnerable members of our society, we also offered a complimentary clean for members of our society who are above 80 years old and in self isolation.

# How does ihateironing answer an unmet need?

We offer a range of services, from specialist dry cleaning to a wash, dry and fold. Our expert cleaners also take care of professional wedding dress cleaning, as well as household textiles and bedding. We have expert tailors and seamstresses who provide alterations and repairs for a range of items. Our goal at ihateironing is to take away the hassle of laundry and give them more time to focus on what really matters.

On one hand, many people don't have the time or means to frequent physical dry cleaners to get their items taken care of - whether that's due to a busy schedule and homelife, or to physical restrictions of distance and ability. Our service entails that our drivers will collect and deliver straight from customers' doorsteps,

We also offer a same-day or next-day turnaround on most of our services, making it convenient for people looking to get their laundry or dry cleaning taken care of at the last minute before a special event or travels.

## What's in store for the future?

We're happy with the progress we've made and how far we've come as a service. From the quality of our cleaning to the functionality of our tech, we've managed to expand across several cities in the UK.

Over time, we hope to expand even more geographically to make our service available across the country and venture further intentionally beyond our most recent expansion to New York City.

I believe our service is very good, but I want it to be *great*. Being great will enable us to become a clear market leader in all the cities we serve. By improving our service, offering an even wider range of amenities and

working with more small businesses, we hope to continue making busy peoples' lives ever easier.

## What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

I think it's easy to fall into giving bad advice without knowing the person you're addressing or the situation they're in. However, if I could offer something that's applicable to all founders I'd say there's no substitute for hard work. Another piece of advice I've gained over the years is to always make sure you surround yourself with a team of determined and strong-minded people.

## And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

On most days, I wake up around 6am and try to have a half hour with my young son Cillian. We spend this time reading books, playing and generally having some quality time. Afterwards, I'll have a coffee to get me started and then do some work in my local coffee shop.

An important part of my daily cold water swims before work. It has an undeniable effect on the body and the mind. It takes a lot of willpower to get into a freezing pool first thing in the morning, and then a lot of endurance to keep going. Afterwards I feel very calm and centred for the next few hours, which really helps me be centred at work and get the important tasks done.

Cold water swimming has been key to retaining the clarity of thought and focus that's needed to stay on top of things as a founder. It helped me learn how to control my mind and make sure it's always working for me.

In terms of my work schedule, I aim to be in the office everyday at 9am after my morning swim. I also have a fixed slot in my diary on a Friday afternoon to review the week and decide what is key for the next week. I then keep time in my diary each morning to focus on these key priorities throughout the next week.

Along with having a steadfast and clear mind for work, I'm also very determined to make sure I strike a balance between my homelife and running the business. In most recent months, I try to always finish at 5pm so I can have enough time with my son before his bedtime.

Matthew Connelly is the founder and CEO of *ihateironing*.

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