

Slinger, secure flexible hospitality shifts in seconds

As part of a series with Google for Startups Black Founders Fund, Maddyness spoke to Theo-Lee Houston at Slinger about funding, plans for the future and their advice for other founders.

Temps de lecture : minute

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After seeing through two years of service to The Bank, I wanted something more out of life than feeling like I was on a conveyor belt. So, I went against everyone's advice and started a street food business. This was before it became trendy and all you'd expect back in those days was a below par hot dog or burger. After running my street food businesses for three years, I got into curating one of the biggest markets in Europe, Maltby Street Market. I took over the reins and put it on the London map, offering London's best street food. After being headhunted by my dream company KERB. I became the Head of Markets and took over say 7 iconic London Market sites and helped develop 100+ street food business concepts, including the likes of Bleecker Burger and Pizza Pilgrims.

One of the common issues that all these businesses struggled with is staffing, even before the pandemic. After being in the heart of the hospitality storm, I set up a Whatsapp group to help hospitality professionals find staff. After maxing it out (256 participants, FYI) we moved it to Facebook and the community of Slingers grew to 3000+. During the pandemic, I officiated the community and made it into a mobile app, in time for the reopening of hospitality.

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

We're on a mission to make CVs redundant - archaic systems for finding work or workers are over.

Born from London's vibrant hospitality community, *Slinger* is a platform offering fair and fun shift work to side-hustlers, students and hospitality professionals around the UK.

When it comes to fairness, Slinger is the only platform that promises to pay The Real Living Wage for every shift, with 30% of the roles on the app paying above that. Also, with a slick and straightforward app, people can start earning easily—that's why we shout about having the fairest pay and the easiest way to get work.

For Slinger businesses, the platform is revolutionising the hiring process. In an era when the CV is dead in the hospitality sector, Slinger vets potential workers by video, gets rid of their shifts on an average of 60 seconds, and gives budding and booming businesses an efficient way to attract full time staff if they later need it. So businesses get quality workers, without dealing with hiring roadblocks. We provide trial shifts, think of it as a work date.

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with the Google for Startups Black Founders Fund?

The Google for Startups Black Founders Fund has had a huge impact on our business. The validation has made it easier to open more doors across the startup ecosystem. The equity-free financial support has enabled us

to grow from a team of 2 to 7. Plus the mentoring support provided by the Google team has helped us to further develop our tech platform.

Tell us about the working culture at Slinger.

A few years ago, on a bar stool in Maltby Street Market, I started a Whatsapp group that was designed for one thing: connecting workers and businesses with great opportunities to earn and support their business respectively. The group very quickly became lively, and our founding team realised we were feeding a real need. We updated it into a Facebook group to handle the size, and in 2021, we became an official app.

The Slinger founding team is a blend of people who have run or work for hospitality businesses and have seen how frontline workers are treated, so when we say we've been here before-we really mean it. And we decided to ensure Slinger is a few things we wish we had when we needed it:

Firstly, a company that values workers—which means at the least, fair pay and respect for the hard work that you do.

Secondly, a company that doesn't discriminate, our current diversity split looks very much like the city that we started in, and love: London. And though we're proud of that, we plan on being even better.

Lastly, we believe working in hospitality is truly an adventure. So we're a company that wants you to learn, earn and have fun with us along the journey of your working life. No matter your experience level, your goals, your stage of life—if you share our values of respect, honesty, community and adventure—you have a seat at our table.

How are you funded?

We're funded by a mixture of angels, VCs and of course Google

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

Fundraising, it's a hard market and adding the challenge of being a Black founder can make this twice as challenging, but we've done it!

How does Slinger answer an unmet need?

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What's in store for the future?

We're in building mode, want to make Slinger a great place for everyone to work and ultimately make CVs a thing of the past.

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

Network, network and network. Your network is your net worth.

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

Always focus on the body, so gym first, I never have meetings in the mornings. Mornings are to work on projects and then I'm out in meetings in the afternoon. I dedicate Friday afternoons to mentor inspiring entrepreneurs from Global Majority backgrounds (non-white men and women) - anyone can book a session via my appointment link on my IG page @theoleehouston.

Theo-Lee Houston is Founder and CEO at *Slinger*.

The *Black Founders Fund* aims to tackle racial inequality in venture capital funding. In June 2023, 40 selected Black-led startups received \$150,000 each in non-dilutive cash awards through the fund. The Black Founders Fund was first launched in 2021 with a \$2M (£1.5M) fund - this year's fund doubled to \$4M (approx. £3.3M).

Prior to the fund's launch in 2021, *less than 0.25%* of venture capital (VC) funding went to Black-led startups in the UK.

British tech startups make up a quarter of the 40 companies selected across Europe and are set to transform a wide range of sectors - *this year's UK startups* are using technology to transform the fitness industry, tackle the country's workforce shortage and disrupt rental insurance.