

Creating a new relationship with the places we work with FlowSpace

Creating a startup is always challenging. Founding one during a tech downturn, cost of living crisis and recession seems near impossible. However, with risk comes reward and many of the world's most successful companies were founded during times of economic uncertainty. As part of a series with Antler, Maddyness has interviewed founders hoping to become the entrepreneurial success stories to emerge from this time of crisis. This week, Maddyness spoke to Harry Wilson Hallberg, the cofounder of FlowSpace.

Temps de lecture : minute

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I have always been a massive advocate for flexible work, hiring amazing people and giving them big objectives and the trust to find their own way. I am a firm believer in work can happen anywhere, it's a state of mind, not one place. It can be in a cafe with great music playing, it can be a conference room in the city, it can be from home in silence.....it depends on the work and crucially it depends on your team.

In my past life I traveled and worked across 7 countries and worked wherever I could find and always longed for a product that I could book spaces where I needed them. Commuting to a boring office never made sense - life is too short.

That being said, meeting your colleagues on a regular basis is of course essential to connection and motivation and unlocking something bigger

than just work.

Doing all this easily was too hard and covid was a once in a generation acceleration of flexible work - so it seemed like the right time to go and build FlowSpace

Can you share your elevator pitch?

FlowSpace is developing a workspace management platform to help hybrid companies save on traditional workspace costs.

We do this by giving on-demand access to workspaces globally & by helping companies find their ideal office based on their actual usage.

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with Antler?

I met my two co-founders Hayri and Ieva at Antler in late 2020. It was a wonderful way to find great co-founders with different skill sets and have the right mentoring and advice to get started quickly. The process was demanding and the pitch events all remote during covid where both fun and very stressful ☐ we raised our pre-seed round from Antler and angels in early 2021 and since then the team have been really caring and supportive and fun. They are fun. Busy people, but fun.

Tell us about the working culture at FlowSpace?

I'd say fast-paced, no BS, direct, open, caring and hopefully a culture of extreme ownership. Everyone on the team brings something unique and I think collectively makes a nice culture.

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

I would say accepting that when building a new product it takes time to get feedback from the market. You of course have initial customers who are innovators too and are happy to be using something new and cool, they are forgiving. But it takes time to reach the broader market and to get their feedback. I heard a great quote recently that “startups should expect 18-24 months in market to be validated, rejected and redirected.”

I think that is a challenge. To accept this and to understand that building takes time and patience. How have I overcome this? Hmm....kids have kept me extremely busy! I always say I think I would have worked 20 hours a week more if I hadn't had kids and they've definitely taken the edge off me and kept me in a constant state of tiredness which ironically may have helped us to build at the right pace - rather than running too crazily fast and building the wrong thing. Or chasing the “wrong revenue”.

What's in store for the future?

We are currently building our next version of our product which is extremely exciting and we're working with a new CTO and his team to accelerate this. A skillset that we're really happy to bring into the company and will allow us to scale so much faster.

We're raising a seed round to scale our sales work across Europe and which we have dipped in and out of.

Our founders are all European by family or work backgrounds so we're excited about how our team can unlock new markets and new opportunities in markets we have loads of experience in.

How has the cost of living crisis and the tech downturn impacted your experience building FlowSpace?

A lot of our initial customers scaled back their budgets. Events for example got less frequent and less boujee!! But what we didn't expect was that we'd actually benefit from people downsizing their office, finding more cost effective options and offering increased flexibility as a money saving step too. For example one of our current biggest sales projects is a company of 300 people, 100 in London and 200 over Europe, who are giving up their fixed leases on large office spaces - adding smaller HQs in a couple of cities and booking spaces all over wherever their team needs them. That sort of change is really exciting!

Our favourite email to get from a customer usually starts....."so we've given notice on our office...." As this signals a broader shift to a more flexible set up for them and their team.

We made the decision early in 2022 to get profitable in order to get closer to the market and I would say, run a better business with stronger foundations that are future proof in terms of scaling and our ability to switch between growth and profit as a tool in our toolbox for navigating the years ahead. We have been extremely nimble I would say, moving from a big team of 12+ growing quickly to down to founders doing every piece of customer care, sales and marketing. This has been great for us as it's laid our foundations and allowed us to address any issues around scalability for the business.

What barriers have you faced in realising

your entrepreneurial ambitions? How can we make entrepreneurship more accessible in the UK?

I think fundraising in this climate has been time consuming. Finding a way to reduce time to find the right investors would be brilliant - some sort of marketplace.

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

Just Sell. Don't get distracted.

If you're a founder responsible for sales and marketing then if you're not selling or not talking to customers or working on activities that help you try to find your customers, you're just playing shop.

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

My routine is dominated by the kids at the moment as we have just welcomed our 3rd girl to the family - they are all young and demanding!! 4.5; 2.5 and 3 months.

Depending on how the night has been (parents will know!) we get up around 6; try our best to avoid TV (some days I make it and some days we don't!!).

We get everyone ready through a couple of tantrums and get them to nursery by 8:15ish. I'm usually at a local workspace booked on FlowSpace

of course(!) or a cafe by 08:30. I spend the morning working on all active sales and customer matters.

I try to get a quick lunchtime workout in to keep the juices flowing. And back to work by 1pm either into town to meet customers, hold sales meetings or, as we are fundraising at the moment, I'll often have investor meetings or calls in the afternoon.

I try my best to get to nursery for 17:30 but usually it's 17:55 and I'm running to try not to be the last to pick up again.

We have some evening garden time, a cartoon or two, loads of play, bath, bedtime for the girls by 7:30 and then I walk the dog and collapse to an episode of something like The Bear until 10pm then it's lights out and off we go again.....

Harry Wilson Hallberg is the cofounder of *FlowSpace*.

Antler is one of the world's most active early-stage investors. With 1,000 portfolio companies in 27 countries, they have a global community of early-stage founders addressing the world's biggest challenges.



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