

University of Aberdeen Alumni: Start-up Stories

The following case studies feature University of Aberdeen graduates who have enjoyed success working for start-up businesses. The case studies were sourced by [BrighterBox](#), a website promoting graduate opportunities at start-ups.

Angela Crouch, Business Unit Director for Sticky9 (part of the Photobox Group), Europe's leading online photo-printing business and a shining light in the UK start-up scene.

Q. Why did you choose the University of Aberdeen?

I visited all of the Universities on my shortlist– Edinburgh, St. Andrews and Glasgow. I knew I wanted to pursue my love of Biology and Science but was undecided on what degree. When I visited the Zoology facility at Aberdeen and discovered it was regarded as one of the best institutions in the world I decided I wanted to be part of that.

Q. What did you enjoy most about your time there?

Aberdeen is a wonderful city and community. It was a great environment for me to start living independently. I truly loved my degree. One day I would be in the lab, the next day a lecture on Animal Behaviour and then off to the Bat House! It inspired me and it was a privilege to be there.

Q. Can you tell us a bit more about what you are doing with Photobox right now?

I manage a small start-up business, Sticky9. We are a global app business offering a range of personalised products from fridge magnets to photobooks. We focus our time and resources on innovating and testing out new products, while continuing to optimize our digital experience.

Q. As Photobox grows, how does it manage to maintain the feel of a start-up?

One of our company values is to “Shake things Up” and we are fully empowered to do this. The Group embraces the culture to fail fast and learn. If we aren't failing then we aren't being bold and trying something new.

Q. What piece of advice would you give a grad thinking about running their own business?

“Failure is not a necessary evil. In fact, it's not evil at all. It is a consequence doing something new” – Ed Catmull, Creativity Inc.
Embrace failure, fail fast and learn quickly.

Q. What's your one tip for grads looking to get noticed by start-ups?

Start-ups always need self-starters with high energy that are good problem-solvers. There is no rule-book in start-ups. Demonstrate creative thinking, hard work and tenacity. Be bold - email the companies you want to join and make suggestions or recommendations on how you think you can help or support their business and ask to join as an intern to prove it. Believe me, if you can make an impact they will create a role for you.

David Shayer, Financial Entrepreneur

Q. Why did you choose Aberdeen University?

- The University had good courses, tradition and reputation. It was reasonably local to where I grew up in Elgin but far enough away to have some independence.

Q. What did you enjoy most about your course?

- The city was a nice size for learning, not too big and not too small. The university campus had a nice feel separate from the city and maintaining a good student feel. The course was in depth and good experience for the future.

Q. How much of a factor was your time at Aberdeen in your career?

- It was important to start my independence, being an oil city it gave a global feel to take forward after University.

Q. Can you tell us a bit more about what you're working on right now?

- I am focusing on Compliance to guide the business which is an expanding area with increased regulations. It is a growing career path with multiple jurisdictions. I will be joining a FCA regulated broker soon that is looking to expand into other areas such as investment management. Business is very forward-thinking and entrepreneurial. I am looking to integrate Compliance in a modern way and work with the business for solutions to keep to the rules and regulations whilst taking the business forward on the correct path.

Q. What advice would you give to a graduate looking to get into the fintech world?

- Be flexible, work will not come to you always so sometimes you will have to move or go to where the work is. Have enthusiasm and be willing to express new ideas and be creative, try and think outside the box. Professional qualifications are important but so is practical relevant experience so try and seek opportunities where you can. Talk to people and communicate as relationships are still important and don't always be stuck in the modern digital age of electronic messaging. Look for ideas around you and take notes, always be looking out for where an idea might come from as sometimes simple ones are the best and have often been overlooked. Big companies are good but don't worry if you don't get on graduate schemes – you can build a career in a number of ways and get on the ladder and get experience.

Sam Kumar, Advisor for media start-ups, helping them scale quickly and efficiently by creating a plan for international revenue and investment.

Q. Why did you choose Aberdeen University?

Aberdeen University is a school of heritage and excellence. I recall it had an excellent life sciences faculty, which suited my love of science. It's also a great place to be if you are into the great outdoors; there is some great climbing, mountaineering, hill walking and mountain biking routes moments away.

Q. What did you enjoy most about your course?

All the rock climbing, mountain biking, abseiling off the cliffs by Cove and mountaineering was most definitely the most enjoyable bit.

Q. How come you didn't end up being a microbiologist? Was advertising a natural follow-on from your degree?

I didn't agree with the vivisection - I felt it was an unnecessary element in learning the science. Advertising wasn't a natural follow on - industry in Aberdeen is/was generally geared towards the oil industry and scientific research. Neither of which were areas that particularly floated my boat. So I upped sticks and moved to London, where the streets are paved with gold...apparently. In 1999 when I moved, the media industry was booming and very print focused. The digital arena was very much in its infancy then. However, this element of media appealed to me as it was very entrepreneurial; there was only a handful of us making it all up as we went along.

Q. How much of a factor was your time at Aberdeen in your career?

The science degree helped me land a role at The New Scientist, where I was setting up their digital advertising proposition...in 2000.

Q. Can you tell us a bit more about what's happening at AdCompass right now?

In the digital space you have to constantly innovate to make your product and platform relevant to the advertisers and marketers. Here at AdCompass we are constantly innovating our platform, upgrading the technology and have a slew of new product launches slated for 2017.

Q. What advice would you give to a graduate looking to get into the digital advertising world?

It all used to be London, London, London. It's true that London is the start-up hub of the UK but there is also a bustling scene in Edinburgh. My advice is 'just go for it and don't look back!'