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Nearly half
of Britons believe that those born into poor families make the best entrepreneurs



51%
of Britons aged over 50 carry non-mortgage debts averaging \$7,000

SOURCES: THE ENTREPRENEURS BOARD/THINK MONEY

Charging ahead

ENTREPRENEURSHIP How to pursue an idea that could run and run

Today, there are 3.3 billion mobile phones in the world, and every one of these has to be charged at least every few days in order to keep its user connected. That means umpteen chargers to get lost, forgotten or broken. But what if you could charge phones wirelessly? Surprisingly, the core technology (magnetic resonance) has existed for decades. All that needs to be done is to unite it with the user.

GET ME TO THE CHURCH ON TIME
But technology can sometime prove the reluctant groom. Wireless charging of mobile devices requires equipment both to send and receive the power. It requires integration, so the system functions as intuitively as a wedding ring. It requires consumer awareness and adoption. From a business perspective, that means bringing on board power adapter suppliers, telephone and laptop makers, standards and certification bodies and countless other industry players. Not easy for a single entrepreneur to accomplish.



DESIGNING RELATIONSHIPS
Undaunted, Maija Itkonen set out to make this opportunity her own. But, as an industrial designer from the University of Art and Design Helsinki, her first instinct was not to look for a technical answer, but to redesign the user experience in a way that intuitively integrates the technology into our daily lives. When she thinks about user experience, she starts with frustration, such as when you have two hours in the terminal to wait for your flight and realise you forgot to charge your cell phone. Itkonen is there with you in your moment of pain, when you put your dead phone down on a table next to you and wonder how to spend the next two hours. Without any other action, the phone on the table magically comes alive. It's charging!

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS
Approaching the problem from a design perspective led Itkonen to partner with Martela and Isku, two of Finland's largest furniture makers. And so the romance was on. Together with these partners, Itkonen built a prototype table, as well as more relationships with local cafés, so that she could pilot test the technology. Users in downtown Helsinki sipped coffee while their mobiles lying on the table recharged. A perfect union, by design.

LOVE AT FIRST KISS...
The initial introduction created a lot of attention for Itkonen and her 12-person start-up Powerkiss. And entrepreneur



Powerful positions
The brainchild of Maija Itkonen, below, Powerkiss technology has the potential to recharge phones anywhere

Itkonen soon found herself CEO as well as chief matchmaker. Her ability to form relationships that create a compelling user experience is what makes Powerkiss more than a simple technical company. These relationships define the product, inform venture-building activities and shape the new market as it emerges into the world. They also broadcast the fact that this is simply not yet another technology company.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER?
It's not quite that simple. It is going to take ongoing effort to maintain the energy in this, as in all, ventures. As she moves to scale deployment, the number of possible partnerships Itkonen could arrange is limitless. And each will involve more design and redesign of the product as well as the venture. If she pulls



it all off in the long term, she will also end up transforming our world. No wonder EUWIIN made Itkonen 2009 Woman Innovator of the Year. She teaches us that opportunities are crafted from a unique combination of the different elements partners bring together and realised through action and interaction with the environment. What kind of planned coincidences or purposeful leveraging of the unexpected is it going to take to recharge the venture that is our lives today? ●

details

By Stuart Read, professor of marketing at IMD, Lausanne, and Saras Sarasvathy, associate professor of business administration at the University of Virginia's Darden School

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