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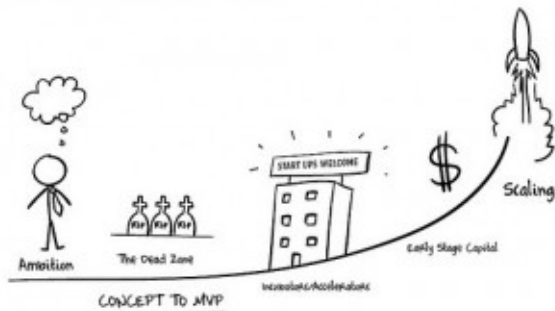
By: Jason Lorimer

Hot Wiring Entrepreneurship: An Experiment in Detroit

It's an exciting time to be an entrepreneur. There are no shortage of problems to solve, ever-lowering barriers to entry, and near-ubiquitous access to low/no-cost technologies, which makes damn near anything possible. I adore working side-by-side with those who also see the world as an experience in which to participate rather than just consume. I am constantly energized and inspired by their works. These are my people, ambitious and proud.

My business being invention and intervention during a company's earliest stage, I spend a good deal of time in different American cities working with entrepreneurs and those who advocate on their behalf. Having the opportunity to serve these folks while experiencing their local entrepreneurial networks firsthand, I have observed a number of too-disparate, closed-loop entities along the way that are effectively guiding startup community members towards market viability. Historically, entrepreneurs have existed at one end of the ecosystem with investors at the other. A startup has to leap the chasm of proving their business scalable and, as such, investment worthy. The accelerator model pioneered by Paul Graham with Y Combinator disrupted that century-old model, moving down the chain halfway closer to budding entrepreneurs and providing them with sustenance in the form of small investments, as well as mentorship and a community of fellow entrepreneurs off which to bounce ideas.

It is my contention that the proliferation of startup accelerators and the subsequent realignment of early-stage capital behind the best of them to serve as a pipeline and viability filter has revealed a kink in the overall process of starting up for an overwhelming majority of entrepreneurs. As a result, thousands of would-be founders are currently mired in the "dead zone" that exists between ambition and minimum



viability. The accelerator model, while certainly a net-positive for entrepreneurship, only serves the small minority of today's entrepreneurs—those with technical expertise or a co-founder with the same who can clearly and concisely convey an idea. In aggressively cultivating the large majority, you direct the flood of ambitious folks waiting to be guided toward viability to existing early-stage market filters, fundamentally changing the landscape of

entrepreneurship while simultaneously realigning the existing network of capital behind filters even further down the chain and closer to entrepreneurs.

Most every market—be it thriving, dormant, or beginning to burgeon—has more than enough resources to catalyze and drive a fertile startup community, including Detroit. You all have the raw ingredients: advocates, entrepreneurs, and investors. It's not a question of resources, but how they are directed or, in this case, misdirected. Who you consider to be an entrepreneur or, more specifically, what your allocation of attention and resources would suggest, is fundamentally flawed. After engaging with hundreds of entrepreneurs on the subject, I find that for a city and its investment community, there are actually five types of entrepreneurs, and that acting passively and focusing on only one type repeatedly stalls and ultimately dilutes what could be a vibrantly dense entrepreneurial community with startups begetting other startups. I have categorized these five types as:

1. Those with a viable idea.
2. Those who think they have a viable idea.
3. Those who are spinning their wheels.
4. Those who do not know where to start.
5. Those who live in another city.

My experiment in Detroit will be to implement market-positive ventures that will serve to cultivate each of these groups of entrepreneurs effectively and efficiently, with the goal of intersecting them with the existing ecosystem. Participatory platforms that like the accelerator model will serve both as filter and pipeline to the early-stage capital system. I am not so much attempting to reinvent the wheel as I am realigning, or, as the title of this article reflects, “hotwiring” the city’s existing assets to jumpstart what is innate.

The obvious next question is: why Detroit? After all, I was born and raised in Philadelphia, which has a fantastic community of ambitious folks building things, with many of the same problems all industrial-age American cities are currently facing. It wasn't an easy decision for a myriad of both professional and personal reasons and, in truth, I talked myself out of it more than once. In the end, it came down to two reasons, one more practical than the other.

First, I believe that these additions to and restructuring of the early-stage startup ecosystem can be applied to any market, be it blue-collar towns like Philly, Buffalo, and Cleveland, or more traditionally thriving tech markets like New York and Silicon Valley. To that end, if these platforms prove successful in

Detroit, other markets will likely respond in kind with their own versions of the same. Second, and admittedly less practical, is the affection I have come to have for the city and its people. I love it because of the kind of people it attracts. Builders and instigators—artists and adventurers. The kind people who hold close their city's history and push forward towards a brighter future. For as many people I have met from Detroit and the surrounding suburbs, I've had the pleasure to meet just as many from places like San Francisco, New York and Atlanta, all of whom came to Detroit to create something new, to find a canvas on which to paint their own sense of purpose.

For all the problems Detroit has—and there are more than a few—it has something you cannot put on a map: It has big ideas in its bloodstream. And so do I. So please follow me on this journey. Be it quick and painless or exponentially more likely, long and arduous, I want to share it as much as I can with all of you.

Jason Lorimer is a strategist and entrepreneur who works to advocate and execute on behalf of those with the ambi

on to do more than just entertain ideas. You can follow him on Twitter at @JasonLorimer.