



Spotlight: Creating a Startup for the Education Niche

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By Annie Pilon

Zaniac is a business operating after-school learning centers focused specifically on science, technology, engineering, and math. And the brand also tries to provide a fun environment for kids to learn.



But the real story behind Zaniac's success, for entrepreneurs, is how the company's founders uncovered a profitable niche in the education market. Read more about the company's story and its offerings for students in this week's Small Business Spotlight.

What the Business Does

Provides after-school programs for STEM learning.

Sidharth Oberoi, president and chief academic officer at Zaniac tells Small Business Trends, "Zaniac exists to engage kids in grades K-8 in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) learning. We are an after-school learning center where students take courses in Computer Programming, 3D Printing, Fashion Design, and even learn physical and environmental sciences using the game of Minecraft as a tool/resource.

"Some students enjoy their time learning at Zaniac so much that they have their birthday parties at the learning center," Oberoi says.

Business Niche

Providing a fun atmosphere for learning.

Oberoi explains, "Students enjoy Zaniac so much that they want to stick around to learn more and finish up the projects that they are working on."

How the Business Got Started

Through a tutoring partnership.

Oberoi says, "When I was attending the University of Utah in 2010, I was provided the opportunity to run the Utah chapter of a Stanford-based math tutoring company and ran the company for two years. It was there that I tutored the children of Paul Zane Pilzer: economist, social entrepreneur, professor, and the New York Times bestselling author of 11 books.



"Impressed with how quickly his children improved and surpassed the other students in class, Paul approached me about creating a peer-based learning after-school program. An engineer at heart, Paul taught me the importance of entrepreneurship and I helped him realize the potential that existed in after-school education."

Biggest Win

Franchising the business.

Oberoi says, "When we initially began Zaniac, originally Zane Prep, there were three different business models we were navigating. Opening our first franchise

location in Greenwich, Connecticut in 2013 was eye-opening for us in enabling us to make a dedicated decision about which pathway we would follow.

“The success of the Greenwich Zaniac set our trajectory forward in terms of recognition of what franchise could do for our business and helped us expand moving forward and have a large impact on students nationwide.”

Biggest Risk

Franchising the business.

Oberoi explains, “Ultimately I believe this was the right decision, but we easily could have doubled down our efforts on attempting to go to schools directly, or working in other markets with a significant capital raise and building out strictly corporate stores.”

How They’d Spend an Extra \$100,000

Investing in their technology.

Oberoi explains, “Our Operating System (OS) is continuously improving and this is the key tool that our franchisees utilize to be successful, so we want to make sure that it is the best it can possibly be. We also utilize our OS to interact and communicate information to the childrens’ parents so they understand how and what their students are doing whilst at Zaniac.”

Favorite Team Activity

Learning from one another.

“Our corporate team regularly participates in lab days — a designated time where all members take a break from their designated routine work and take a few hours to learn a new technology, pedagogical approach, curriculum, or something new and innovative



taught by one of their colleagues," Oberoi says. "Our mantra at Zaniac is to embrace the notion of lifelong learning and we believe sharing our collective knowledge with one another is the best way to do so."

Favorite Quote

"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." – Albert Einstein

Oberoi explains, "This quote is something that we actively deploy with our instructors and students to make sure that they understand the information."

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