

Enabling telework away from home: Daysk.com

“Work is what you do, not a place you go.”

It was a warm March day in 2017. Julien Palier, CEO of Daysk.com and in charge of sales and marketing, and Benoit Gilloz, CTO in charge of platform development, were discussing the way forward. Their recent participation in Barcelona’s Mobile World Congress to pitch their services to potential clients reinforced their belief that they were on the right track to help reshape the way work is designed – and to improve people’s day-to-day work.

Daysk.com’s value proposition was to offer a network of workspaces – be it a desk, a coworking space, a meeting room or a conference facility – that professionals could reserve in real time and access for a specific time slot. For example, it could help locate a quiet workspace for a few hours in Amsterdam during a business trip, a meeting space to conduct a recruitment interview on the other side of town, or a small conference room for a sales pitch to a client team. Booking occurred through an app-based system that showed available spaces across many different locations and enabled automatic billing. Individual professionals such as freelancers could simply recharge their account on a per-need basis. Alternatively, companies could provide individual accounts for their employees, with predefined monthly budgets for telework, and be invoiced monthly. Ultimately, the two founders had the vision of opening the doors to every corporate office space and making it available to any professional using their technology. In other words, Daysk.com was the Airbnb for workspaces and the equivalent of a Ticket Restaurant for companies.

This case was prepared by Professor Sebastian Reiche as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation. December 2017.

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As they refined their service offering, Julien and Benoit were contemplating important strategic questions for their start-up. They firmly believed in the business opportunity of Daysk.com and saw the increasing need for more remote-work policies. However, they were also well aware that they were up against a different mindset regarding how – and more importantly where – work ought to be done in many organizations. How could they convince potential corporate clients to implement more remote-work policies? How could they help clients see the need to introduce other remote-work spaces in addition to working from home? Should they limit their main target audience to freelance or self-employed professionals who were most attuned to finding flexible workspaces? And if they further developed the corporate client base, who should be their main sponsors and multipliers? Should it be human resources? Or line managers? Or even employees themselves? How could they expand Daysk.com to other countries?

Company Background

Daysk.com started as an answer to its two cofounders' own needs. Benoit was a programmer for a tech company, working remotely, and hence looking for an alternative place to work that was not home. Julien was freelancing as a consultant and needed a place to meet clients or check in between meetings. Since suitable spaces were not generally available, both ended up at Starbucks much more often than they liked. They joined efforts and started building a single app that could offer an easy solution to discover, select and book various types of workspaces (see Exhibit 1). Thus, Daysk.com was born, offering both a service and a technology. Prices for workspaces depended on the particular features and services they included and ranged from €15 to €40 per day for a desk and between €15 and €60 per hour for a meeting room. In addition, Daysk.com offered a monthly flat rate that included unlimited access to its network of spaces for a fixed monthly subscription fee of €299.

Exploring the market, they realized that the need was bigger than they initially thought and that it extended to a much more diverse profile of potential clients. As Julien explained:

“Originally, we had thought about nomads and freelancers, professionals who were usually disconnected from a physical office space and office hours – the typical place you go to between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to interact with your colleagues.”

These professionals made up an increasing part of the workforce, as the “gig economy” had expanded into almost every industry. Among them were developers, web designers, coaches, or freelance consultants and studies showed that they would reach a population of more than 1.8 billion by 2022.¹ However, the offering was equally relevant to other types of professionals. Companies were increasingly changing their work design and many employed professionals needed alternative work spaces too. For example, sales people, similarly to consultants, were constantly on the go, stopping in at hotel lobbies or business lounges in airports to finish reports and make calls before moving on to their next client. Daysk.com would prove to be a valuable asset to improve their day-to-day work.

¹ Gina Luk and Andrew Brown, “The Global Mobile Workforce is Set to Increase to 1.87 Billion People in 2022, Accounting for 42.5% of the Global Workforce”, Strategy Analytics, 9 November, 2016, <https://www.strategyanalytics.com/strategy-analytics/news/strategy-analytics-press-releases/strategy-analytics-press-release/2016/11/09/the-global-mobile-workforce-is-set-to-increase-to-1.87-billion-people-in-2022-accounting-for-42.5-of-the-global-workforce#.WjEKAfXiaUm>, accessed December 2017.

Importantly, Daysk.com not only promised to facilitate the administration of remote work by reducing paperwork and the processing of invoices and expenses, it also provided analytics about employees' workspace consumption. For example, a company could track workspace usage and real space needs corresponding to employees and hence better follow up on who was working where and when through the booking data. The matching of workspace type with user profile also provided a rough idea about work habits, such as whether people prefer networking opportunities or quiet places, or whether they require a digitally savvy setting. Since every workspace was different, knowing who was using them could help provide a better understanding of employees' profiles.

After being incorporated in October 2016, the company grew in Europe to include a network of over 100 workspaces. It began offering both on-demand services for freelancers and tailor-made products for companies that wanted to deploy the system to their fleet of employees. The company was not the only competitor on the market. In Spain, four other start-ups – Spaceson, Worktel, Sheltair, and Nested – offered web- or app-based booking of temporary office space, with a variable volume of spaces on offer. Other companies like the French start-up Neo-Nomade – the biggest provider, in which the French food services and facilities management company Sodexo had recently taken a stake – provided similar services in Europe (see Exhibit 2). To support their further growth, Daysk.com planned to raise their first round of capital by the end of 2017.

The Rise of Remote Work

Daysk.com was a response to an increase in the demand for remote work options. The two founders realized that companies had started to introduce new talent management policies in organizations in response to changes in the ways people work. As Benoit pointed out:

“Thanks to the Cloud, better IT infrastructures, and increasingly user-friendly technology, professionals can now connect from everywhere and still be productive and have access to all necessary tools and documents.”

As a result, companies had started implementing more flexible work practices that enabled remote work. One published study revealed that more than 17% of Europeans already enjoyed flexible options at work.² In the United States, the number was nearing 30% and forecasts predicted that by 2020 one out of every two professionals would have access to remote work. For example, Mastercard proposed to its 12,000 employees worldwide to work fully remotely, while insurer Zurich in Spain had implemented a two days out-of-office policy.³ Even in Japan, a country that traditionally had a strong culture of a physical – and long – presence at work, companies were increasingly introducing flexible working conditions as a way to attract and

² International Labour Organization, “New report highlights opportunities and challenges of expanding telework”, Press Release, 15 February 2017, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_544108/lang--en/index.htm, accessed December 2017.

³ Zurich, “Zurich Seguros pone en marcha el trabajo flexible”, Press Release, 12 December, 2016, <https://www.zurich.es/es-es/conocenos/prensa/notas/trabajo-flexible>, accessed December 2017.