



Venture - Lanterne

Institution - London School of Economics, University of Oxford

Social science discipline - Geography,
Environmental Studies & Archaeology,
Politics & International studies

Sector - IT & Communications

Route-to-market - Social Enterprise

**Avoiding the
crowds: social
distancing app**

lanterne

Yohan Iddawela

Role -

Co-Founder, Co-CEO, Lanterne. Yohan is a Geographic Information Systems specialist. He has previously worked as an economist for the Institute for State Effectiveness in Afghanistan and Puerto Rico, and for the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Degree -

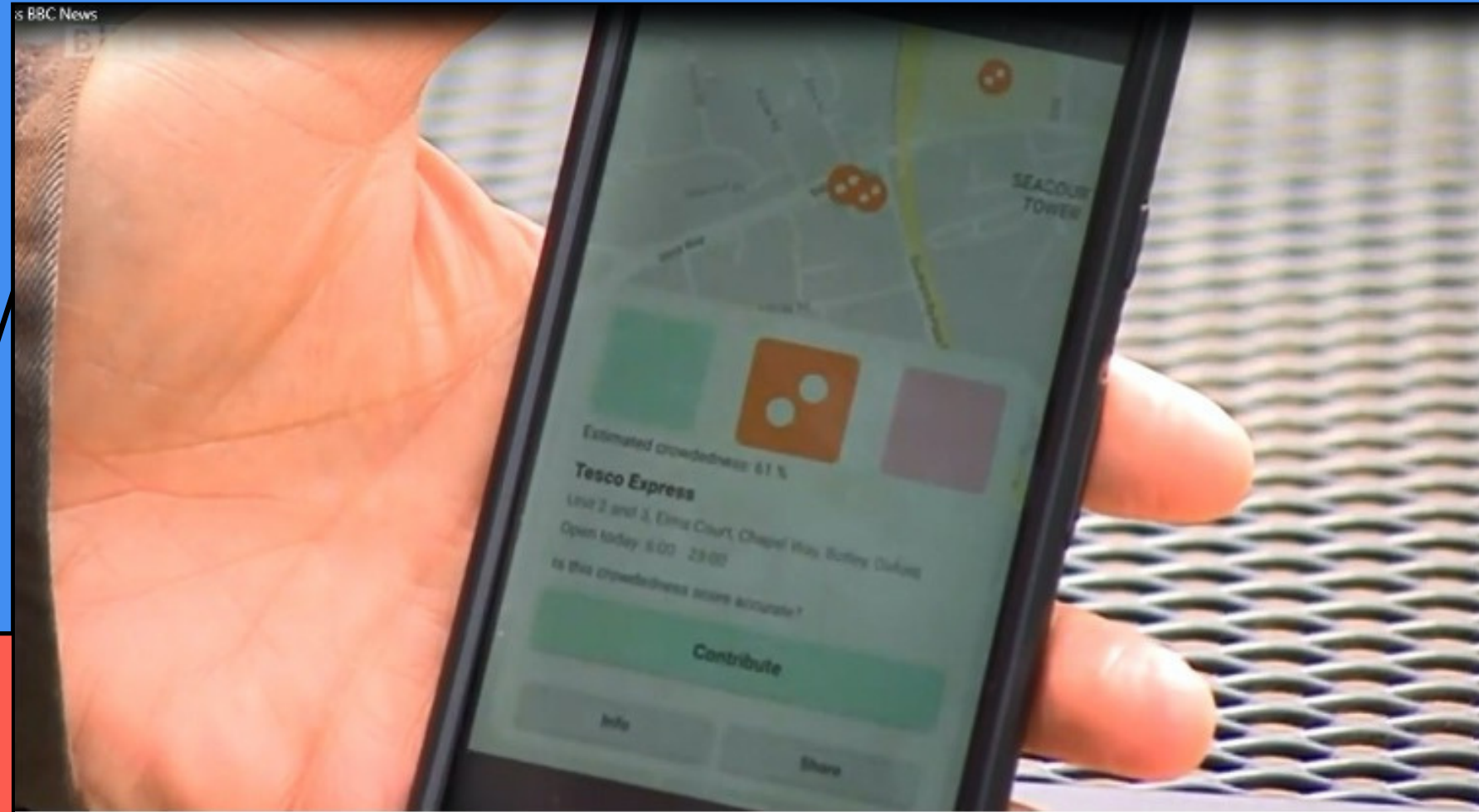
PhD in Economic Geography, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Contact -

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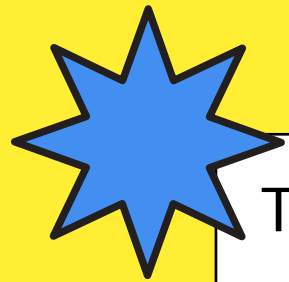


**An app created
by social science
entrepreneurs in
response to
COVID-19 is
helping people to
keep safe**



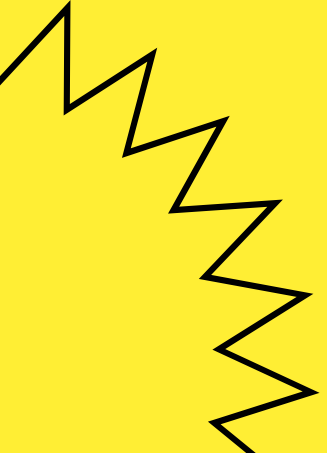
Social distancing has become the new normal. The global pandemic has changed our social behaviour. Navigating ourselves around public places in our current climate brings uncertainty and for many, anxiety. Staying safe is priority. Enter Crowdless, an innovative app created by LSE alumni entrepreneurs. Available on iOS and Android, Crowdless is an app which provides users with real time information on how crowded places in their locality, are. Launched in April 2020 in response to the global pandemic, this free platform has global coverage, helping people to undertake their essential shopping in lockdown.





The idea for the app was conceived by the co-founders of Lanterne, a UK-based social enterprise whose mission is to use data to improve safety and improve economic development. Previously, both LSE Alumni, Yohan Iddawela and Alex Barnes lived and worked in Afghanistan and saw how people's lives were constantly at risk; this sparked their entrepreneurship journey with fellow LSE alumni, Sebastian Mueller. The trio identified a more intuitive and efficient way of getting critical danger alerts, such as a local explosion. The team were about to travel to Colombia in early 2020 to roll out the technology when COVID-19 hit and the subsequent lockdown measures and travel restrictions brought their plans to a halt. Instead, keen to apply their skills and knowledge in crisis technology to the pandemic, they changed course, in response to the immediate world crisis. The idea for the crowd instead of crisis avoiding app was sparked by Sebastian and in just three days they co-developed Crowdless.

Using existing data sources such as mobile location data, crowdsourced data and machine learning; the app gives a percentage rating of how busy supermarkets, pharmacies other venues are. This enables users to identify the best place and time to visit or explore less crowded alternatives. Ultimately it gives them the information they need, to leave their homes and feel safe to do so, whilst playing a part in slowing down the infection rate of COVID-19.



With backgrounds in social sciences and a commitment to social impact, Lanterne addresses United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities) - "Open spaces in cities" where the goal is to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces". Lanterne's mission to promote social distancing in public spaces, will ultimately help people to access safe and accessible spaces and deliver positive social impact.

THE IMPACT

Crowdless currently has over 60,000 users across the UK and Europe.



The app has really resonated with people, with most users in the 'at risk' demographic and is supported by a wide range of organisations who represent vulnerable people. It has also received wide media attention, both in the UK and Europe.



Idea for Crowdless originated from ideas for a crisis-avoidance app, but was refocussed in response to COVID-19, to help people plan their essential visits to shops during lockdown. Since the recent easing of restrictions, the app has been further developed to be used for wider local attractions such as pubs and restaurants.

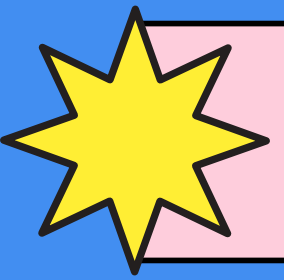
The start-up journey: Key Learnings

The start-up journey: key learnings The social science entrepreneurs acknowledge the substantial support that they received from their respective Universities, LSE and Oxford, which has enabled them to develop and launch the company, including funding, workshops with accountants and lawyers, introductions to valuable connections and sponsorship of visas. The start-up also received support and funding from: the European Space Agency's Business Incubation Centre UK, the European Union's Big Data Corridor Program, the University of Oxford's Oxford Foundry, the London School of Economics (LSE) Generate, Santander Universities and Yoti's Humanitarian Tech Support Program.

“Universities provide instant access to a network and resources for budding entrepreneurs. Without this level of support and tools, it would take someone twice as long. If you're a student and are considering starting a business, then my advice would be to do it now.”

Yohan Iddawela, Lanterne

- ◆ Maximise the support available from your university. The support from LSE Generate was particularly important, including Award prizes which helped generated media attention and further leads for the development of the business.
- ◆ Develop a couple of ideas for the business. The best ideas are those that you have experience in.
- ◆ Conduct market research into your potential users.
- ◆ Find a business partner to share the journey with.
- ◆ Develop a filter for good/bad advice; question whether the advice is being delivered from someone who has success/expertise in this field and is therefore giving you a credible perspective.
- ◆ Have a flexible mindset – we changed our app from crisis to crowd avoidance in just 3 days, in response to COVID-19. In an ever changing, fast pace world, start-ups need to be adaptable.



What's next for Lanterne?

Whilst there are plans to return to their original crisis avoidance tool in the future, in the shorter term the plan is to continue their focus on Crowdless and evolving the app to meet the current social distancing restrictions. They are working with organisations including local government in Spain, to develop the app so that it can be used as a crowd management tool. Other companies want to use the foot traffic data derived from the app to inform knowledge on where people congregate, data that is valuable to a number of organisations from property developers to financial institutions.

A number of proofs in concept are in development and 3 commercial contracts have been secured so far. The aim is to secure further commercial contracts, a significant achievement in the current economic crisis.

Covid-19 has brought significant financial challenges to start-up companies. The focus is to develop a funding strategy which will enable the company to be profitable, coming out of the global economic crisis.



I like the simplicity of the app and how easily it gets me to the least crowded local shop. It's all very good trying to stay 2m away from people, but if you check Crowdless before you leave home it's going to be an awful lot easier to keep physically distanced if the shops aren't busy!



Adam Sidbury, Tester and Crowdless Community Ambassador