
**“Conformity
is
the Jailer
of
Freedom
&
Enemy
of Growth”**

-John F. Kennedy

CASE CHAPTER 12

Ouzzie Entrepreneur-*ing* in Uzbekistan: Hitting hard to Scale his small boat (Enterprise)

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Abstract

The case discusses the story of a business in a central Asian economy. The case talks about the journey of a small business owner and his aspirations to grow his successful entrepreneurial venture. The case aims to provide healthy business expansion and growth scenarios for fresh graduates to enrich their problem solving and decision-making skills regarding business issues faced by many enthusiastic small businesses in the contemporary world. The case also offers insight on different prospects for scaling up business growth and Expansion.

Synopsis

It was one Thursday evening of July 2018 when Ouzzie Alba, the owner of Aventura Travels, confirmed tour booking for a customer before leaving his office. While signing the final office sheet for 37 bookings (individual and families), he felt happy with the outcome of the day. He took a deep sigh of relief and started recalling his old days and how he solely started the travel business eight years ago and where he stands now with a big office employing 12 travel consultants. For a moment, he felt proud of himself, but in the very next instance, a wave of questions started flooding his mind. His conscience started interrogating him as to whether he has achieved what he always aimed for in his life? Questions in his mind began probing him as to whether

this is what he struggled for all these years for? Thoughts grilling him as to whether he will stay in the same position till the doomsday and won't strive for better? Voices inside him started asking him as to whether he will be happy in future with what he has today? All this shook Mr. Alba, and he unconsciously uttered the word 'No.' Actually, it was the force of his conscious self (mind) that raise this word (No) as the answer to all these questions. It was an eye-opener for him as he realized that what makes him happy today may not make him feel content tomorrow; what he has achieved today might not even be sufficient for him tomorrow. And this was the point where Mr. Alba pledged himself to work harder than ever to take his business to new peaks... peaks *that will make him achieve what he really aspired for in life!*

Aventura Travels

Aventura Travels is a travel consultancy company in Uzbekistan. The company operates from physical office on Amir Timur road near Tashkent Tower, which is one of the famous tourist places in the city. The company was established by Mr. Ouzzie Alba back in 2000. Since then, the company has grown and has served nearly of 2938 locals and 1471 international clients to date. The company offers travel advice to local and foreign tourists visiting Tashkent in particular and Uzbekistan in general. Therein, the company provides air ticket reservations and bus bookings for city tours and road trips across the country. The company is popular locally for offering competitive rates for bus routes for local tourists from the country and neighboring states. The company has a total workforce of 21 employees that work in the following areas:

No	Designation	No of Staff
1	CEO	1 (Ouzzie Alba)
2	Manager Operations	1
3	Travel Consultants	12
4	Finance department	3
5	Office staff (assistants)	1
6	Clearing Agents	2
7	Office boy (cleaner)	1
	Total	21

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan, officially known as the Republic of Uzbekistan, is a central Asian country and formerly part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). The country secured independence from the Soviet Union on 31st August 1991 and was formally recognized on 26th December 1991. With 172,700 sq. miles, Uzbekistan is the 56th largest country in the world, with a population of 33 million, and more than 88% of the people are Muslims (BBC, 2018). Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, is also a major business and tourist destination. In recent times, the country has been showing massive acceleration in business growth and foreign direct investments particularly being part of the Silk Road project initiated by China. Many of the central Asian economies have had remained part of the ancient trade route between eastern and western nations whereby some notable cities of Uzbekistan, such as Samarkand, were also historically famous (BBC, 2018).

Travel and Tourism in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is located in the heart of central Asia. A country with a rich infusion of Muslim and Soviet culture. The country is said to be one of the safest to travel across all the ex-soviet nations offering rich history, heritage, and culture for the tourists. The country attracts a big number of local and international tourists to visit its historical, archeological, and architectural treasures. Uzbekistan attracts a big number of tourists who mainly come to witness ancient Muslim history and heritage, observe its rich culture, rites, ceremonies, and traditions. The country also is a hot destination for mountaineers, hikers, and rock climbers from across the globe. The country also hosts the central office of World Tourism Organization's Silk Road office. Uzbekistan is also part of 'The Region Initiative' (TRI), which is a three-region based tourism-related commissioned organization. TRI acts as a link between Eastern Europe, South Asia, Central Asian economies to promote tourism. Talking about whether Tashkent and Samarkand have a better climatic combination of snow, warm and sunny weather, which also serves as a key point of

attraction for tourists compared to other nearby tourist destinations (Central Asia, 2019).

Mr. Alba

Mr. Alba is a 46-year-old Uzbek from the city of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Mr. Alba was the only child of his parents, so he received a lot of love, care, and affection from his family. With humble beginnings, he spent most of the early years of his life in Bukhara and then travelled to Tashkent for higher studies in 1990. After completing three-year undergraduate degree in commerce, Mr. Alba worked for a sales business as sales support officer in Tashkent for two years. Mr. Alba had high aspirations for himself; therefore, the idea of a typical job didn't fancy him much. Later from 1995 to 1998, he switched four jobs until he got a call from a travel business to work as a travel sales consultant. With good sales and excellent communication skills, he nailed the interview and was offered a job right on the spot. Ms. Alba recalled this and said, *'I knew I will get this job. I had all that they wanted, like sales techniques, persuasion skills, the art of communication, presentation, and welcoming appearance'*.

During this employment, Mr. Alba progressed a lot. As a quick learner, he gained much knowledge and expertise in the travel and tourism sector. He shared an unusual incident that changed his entire professional career life.

'One day, there was this family from Kazakhstan who came to visit Uzbekistan on a very short trip of three days. The family looked excited to visit famous places in Uzbekistan but didn't had much time (3 days only). When they came to our office early morning, I was the only travel consultant available out of the four. They explained to me the whole situation and said we would like to visit as many places as possible but in this short period of time. How can you possibly help us with the best rates possible? I took a few minutes to analyze their situation, did a bit of study on the routes, and gave them a comprehensive tailor-made plan combination of air and road journeys. The plan sounded interesting and appealing to the entire family,

and they happily booked it. More importantly, they went delighted to learn that the first bus that they had to catch was for Samarkand, which was set to take them to famous places of the city, including Registan, Gur-e-Amir, Shah-i-Zinda and so on was set to leave in the next 75 minutes. In short, they didn't had to wait or waste their time at all'.

Now comes the most important part, said Mr. Alba while continuing further. 'When they were leaving after settling payment and getting the travel routes with hotel bookings, they said something which changed the entire course of my life. They said, "Its pleasure meeting you, Mr. Alba, and this is my visiting card. Please let me know if you move to any other company as we would like to make all my travel bookings through you whenever we revisit Uzbekistan. This one statement, on one hand, was a big compliment for me and at the same time, it made me think when I can do so better for someone else why not I do it for myself (mean opening my own business and serve them as my clients). And this is how I decided to start my own travel business, and here we are now.'

Meeting over the Dinner

After pondering over the idea for whole Thursday night and next day morning, Mr. Alba decided to talk to his team of travel consultants for strategy and advice. He realized that it was essential to get the employees on the same line of action to help him achieve what he aspired for. But the question came why they would be interested in supporting Mr. Alba in his mission and dreams. The only way to get the support of his employees was to offer them some benefits in return.

He immediately called his assistant on Friday afternoon to invite all travel consultants for the dinner the same night. Almost all of the consultants agreed to come except a few who apologized due to other engagements. The dinner was hosted in a reasonably good restaurant 'Country Grill.' Everyone looked happy and, at the same time, puzzled as to what made Mr. Alba call for this sudden dinner party. Usually, the company arranges dinner nights on occasions such as Eid and Independence Day. Mr. Alba welcomed the attendees, and everyone enjoyed the buffet dinner. Once the dinner was served and people refreshed themselves with the traditional tea as well, Mr. Alba got on the main agenda.

'Once again, Salam, and thank you very much for coming tonight on such short notice. As a custom, we generally inform you of such gatherings well in advance so you could plan accordingly, but this time it was sudden due to some ideas that I would like to have your opinion on. So, I thought having an informal meet up would be good,' said Mr. Alba.

Mr. Alba continued further and said, *'I was just looking back all the years that we have worked, and thinking are we all happy with how our company is performing and whether we are satisfied with the current scale of our business. Do you think we will all be able to sustain in the long run with the massive business expansion happening everywhere? Will the business be able to sustain for long with a few services and one physical unit? What is your opinion on it?'* Mr. Alba expressed his feelings.

The travel consultants started sharing their views. Some said the business is fine, and we just have to keep our clients satisfied so that they keep coming back and spread a good word of mouth for us. On the other hand, Mr. Alba also heard some views expressing the need for growth and diversification to sustain in the long run. After hearing opinions from everyone, Mr. Alba asserted, *'if you allow me to give my opinion, I believe that we are good, but there is no guarantee that we will remain functional in the long run in the first place. Secondly, if we think that we are good and doing fine, then we are mistaken because the sky is the limit. You all as travel consultants get rewards and commissions for the business you bring and deals you close, but doesn't the idea of having more opportunities to earn fascinate you?'*

Approximately everyone started nodding their head in agreement with Mr. Alba. Upon seeing this, he said, *'if you all agree with this idea and are willing to work for some extra income, then we have a job to do, and that is scaling our business. Now I want ideas from all of you as to what course of action we should take and how to go about it for our company.'* The team discussed and exchanged a variety of different ideas; they debated and argued with one another. Though the ideas sounded interesting to Mr. Alba, he noticed his team being divided on them. In short, they came up with the following ideas/possibilities for scaling the business.

Idea/Option	Details of Possibilities	Resources Required
<i>Local Expansion through</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Opening new branches in other cities including Samarkand and Bukhara to attract local clients for our travel and ticketing services</i> 	<i>Financial Human capital</i>

<p><i>currently offered services</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Launching recommendation and loyalty schemes</i> • <i>Increasing cold calling (compared to the current practice)</i> • <i>Strengthening online marketing through aggressive marketing on major social media platforms</i> 	<p><i>Business relations</i></p>
<p><i>Local Expansion through offering new services</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Starting business development in the new areas such as offering site-seeing packages,</i> • <i>Initiating adventure trips for mountaineers (customized) for both individuals and groups</i> • <i>Hotel bookings services and/or</i> • <i>Comprehensive travel packages</i> • <i>Travel packages for couples and newlyweds (e.g., honeymoon)</i> • <i>Launching special weekly and fortnightly travel packages</i> 	<p><i>Financial Human capital Business relations</i></p>
<p><i>Local Expansion through an alliance</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Connecting and partnering with other companies providing services closely related to Aventura to offer comprehensive travel packages at competitive prices (one-stop service).</i> • <i>Agreeing with companies operating locally on related aligned services to recommend clients to us and vice versa.</i> • <i>Launching promotions with mutual agreement</i> 	<p><i>Financial Human capital Business relations</i></p>
<p><i>International Expansion through the same services</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Launching business services with regional operators to offer multiple country travel packages (e.g., 15-day comprehensive travel package for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and/or Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, etc.)</i> • <i>Establishing offices in the regional economies (Kazakh, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan)</i> • <i>Establishing business offices in European and South Asian economies from where most travelers come from (based on travelers data)</i> 	<p><i>Financial Human capital Business relations Government entities</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnering with existing travel businesses in Europe and South Asian for business expansion and customer attraction</i> • <i>Networking with foreign agencies for business promotion and client attraction</i> • <i>Working on paid promotion for the existing services in the international channels and platforms</i> 	
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Mr. Alba carefully discussed and debated on all ideas and options with his consultants, but the gathering adjourned without finalizing any specific course of action. MR. Alba knows it must be a careful and well-thought decision to ensure he achieves what he aspires for.

Discussion Questions

Q1. How do you see Mr. Ouzzie Alba in terms of his career and success?

Q2. Comment on the progress of Aventura over the past eight years. Do you think the company has done well so far?

Q3. As a CEO, which idea/option you believe would be the best for scaling up Aventura, and why?

Q4. How would you operationalize the chosen idea/option if given the role of the project manager in this regard?

Q5. What could other possibilities be there for Aventura to consider?

References

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