Meet the Startups

Startup Pivots to Support Sustainable, Anti-Fragile Supply Chains

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The pandemic has not slowed down startup retraced, who sells to the fashion brands that tout sustainability as a core value. The company saw a 33% increase in new customers in just one month, and the founders attribute the increase in customers to an initial slowdown in sales. While many brands saw their business slow, retraced took the breather as an opportunity to improve their offering.

"We tried to use the slower time to really focus on product development and make sure that we can fulfill the need to connect brands with their suppliers and make data collection and document collection more efficient," says Lukas Pünder, cofounder and CEO. "Because of these new features, brands are just more excited to use it."

Based in Germany, startup business retraced secured its first U.S. customers, Boyish Jeans, which joined a portfolio that also includes German brands like ArmedAngels.

Retraced uses the Oracle Blockchain Platform to create a supply chain management tool that helps companies map and verify their data — including certified details about raw materials, textile manufacturers, fabric dyers, designers, craft people, factories, and sewers. As retraced gathers information, two things happen: a consumer QR code is built automatically, and brands have supply chain data they can analyze. Consumers scan the QR code to discover relevant supply chain information related to ethical sourcing and sustainability.

"There are just so many products in the market that aren't ready to use, and Oracle's was. It was comparably easy to set up and work with because of all the pre-installments," he said. The platform connects well with the Oracle Autonomous Database, which helps retraced save money and time as they scale their database needs up or down.

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How Startup Retraced Made the Most of the Slowdown

Blockchain and sustainability

The Oracle Blockchain Platform is permission-based, which is critical for privacy and security. Some of retraced's customers share the same suppliers. Since supply chains are often seen as a competitive advantage and are kept secret hidden from the competition, the platform wouldn't work if there were any chance brands can see each other's supply chains without explicit acceptance.

A permission-based blockchain also has a much lower carbon footprint compared to public blockchains. "The public blockchain uses a lot of energy," Pünder says. "We are working in the field of sustainability, so that would be counterproductive to what we're doing."

How selling shoes led to building a supply chain product

Retraced's origins have nothing to do with supply chain platforms. Pünder and his cofounders initially set out to build a shoe company that produces ethically sourced, sustainable Mexican huaraches and leather boots. The online business is The Cano Shoe.

They immediately encountered problems. "Manufacturing a shoe is tougher than one thinks. We made so many mistakes in the beginning," Pünder says. It was particularly difficult to trace and prove that every element of the supply chain met their requirement of ethical sourcing and sustainability. That's how retraced was born. The startup joined Oracle for Startups to help keep cloud costs low and receive support from local Oracle experts in Germany.

"With coronavirus, brands realized that supply chains could be a huge problem if they're not

functioning properly. A lack of insight into their supply chain can lead to big risks and huge problems," Pünder says. Countless supply chain disruptions, due to lockdowns or COVID-19 outbreaks, have shocked brands and served as a wakeup call for brands to start digitalizing their supply chains and gaining flexibility.

 "You can start to connect with your suppliers, to really engage, and exchange information and data. And at the same time, of course, also manage for you, let's say a single point of truth when it comes to sustainability and this whole feat of organizing supply chains."

Pünder says a product that started out as a way to document and share details on ethical and sustainable sources has evolved to help brands understand their supply chain.

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Cathy is a writer and editor for Oracle for Startups.

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