

Global Innovation Forum

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Contact: Nicole L'Esperance
The Fratelli Group
202-822-9491

At LivingSocial, Innovators and Entrepreneurs Discuss How Technology Enables Startups to Go Global

Washington, D.C. – Business and startup communities gathered with public policy makers on May 1 for an event hosted by the [Global Innovation Forum @ NFTC](#) and [LivingSocial](#), in partnership with [eBay Inc.](#), [Intuit](#), [Tech Cocktail](#) and [ideaspace](#) DC, to discuss how entrepreneurs are engaging in the international marketplace thanks to Internet-enabled technologies.

Devin Wenig, President of eBay Marketplaces, and Jen Consalvo, Chief Operating Officer of Tech Cocktail, kicked off the forum. Their remarks were followed by a discussion featuring globally-minded startups – Laura Kennedy of LivingSocial, Kavita Shukla, CEO of Columbia, Maryland-based Fenugreen, and Pranav Vora, founder of Georgetown-based online menswear label Hugh & Crye – and Usman Ahmed of eBay Inc. and Lindsey Grossman of Intuit.

Participants explored issues from the importance of localizing your product offerings and salesforce to the challenges of being able to move talent internationally to support the needs of startups.

Several key themes emerged from the discussion, including:

The dramatic impact of technology on global trade

“We never imagined and never set out to be a global startup, but then we started to find all of these tools...from BigCommerce to QuickBooks to UPS Mail Innovations. Within a year, we were exporting to around 40 countries.” – **Kavita Shukla, Fenugreen**

“The easy part was launching this business online. It was so easy to get up and running and to build a global brand, but the difficult part was manufacturing globally...On the customer side, we have customers in all 50 states and in 40 countries. The interesting thing is we haven't done a thing to market globally, and have let people self-select into our brand.” – **Pranav Vora, Hugh & Crye**

“You can't be a tech startup these days and not think about a global strategy. Even if you try, you won't be able to ignore it for long - there are very few boundaries, so you can wait for them to come

to you, or start thinking about it as early as possible.” – **Jen Consalvo, Tech Cocktail**

“Fifty years ago not many startups would have built in international activities into their business plans. The great promise of the Internet is that it democratizes global markets.” – **Jake Colvin, Global Innovation Forum**

The importance of diversifying exports

“I think most of the startups and small businesses that grow, they may start with one market ... and they usually stay pretty small because it’s tough to develop those relationships, but luckily as we’ve heard from the other panelists, that’s not the case with the Internet-based model.” – **Usman Ahmed, eBay Inc.**

“If you are exporting to one country, you should be exporting to 10 ... We are starting to see some momentum. Obviously, the technology is there to enable this and that smaller [companies] are able to make connections with business partners around the world.” – **Lindsey Grossman, Intuit**

The rapid growth of mobile

“Our business has changed more in the last 24 months than it has in its entire history. And the thing that’s driving that is globalization, mobile and data. Everything points back to those three places...Those are the big waves that are driving not just e-commerce, but they’re driving what we see as innovation around the world.” – **Devin Wenig, President of eBay Marketplaces**

“Connectivity, Internet and computer access really varies, but everybody has the phone. ... If you’re not being mobile, you’re really going to miss out on a lot of growth opportunities.” – **Laura Kennedy, LivingSocial**

Challenges startups face in foreign markets

“We think of the higher transaction costs of international shipments at a business level. Passing along the cost of shipment to the customer or thinking about customs duties – It just comes back to margins. Do we think about it at a policy level? No.” – **Pranav Vora, Hugh & Crye**

“Infrastructure can be a big challenge. We are very lucky to have high Internet and credit card penetration for e-commerce. In other parts of the world, credit card penetration was really low and in some cases was an impediment to accessing those markets, though there are really creative ways around that. Our operations in Indonesia had a fleet of mopeds to deliver vouchers for cash-on-delivery.” – **Laura Kennedy, LivingSocial**

“As a small business starting out, you are facing really basic issues – what are customs procedures? At first, we went to the post office and filled out customs duties by hand. We spent about an hour for every two customs forms at the beginning...Luckily, we found online tools and surrounded ourselves

with smart advisors who helped.” – **Kavita Shukla, Fenugreen**

“The difficult part was manufacturing, was the supply chain. I tried to do a lot of outreach over email and over video chat, and that only got so far. I realized I needed to take a trip. I got on the ground and it was an iterative process.” – **Pranav Vora, Hugh & Crye**

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The Global Innovation Forum (GIF) is dedicated to fostering a better understanding of the policy foundations that underpin the ability of startups, researchers, universities, NGOs and companies of all sizes to innovate and engage globally in the digital age. Through public forums, private workshops and online activities, GIF connects innovative businesses with startup, university and development communities to explore the role of public policies in enabling global innovators to develop transformative businesses, pursue solutions to shared challenges, such as climate change and public health, and improve the lives of workers, families and communities around the world.