
The sky's the limit for Bobby Healy's Manna.Aero

When it comes to the future of takeaway food look to the sky and Bobby Healy's vision for drone deliveries through his start-up [Manna.Aero](#).

Listening to Bobby Healy, founder of Manna.Aero and the CTO who helped drive CarTrawler from a start-up to more than 500 people, talking about his new venture recently at The Real Deal 2019 was stirring stuff.

Forget about meals and wheels, think about food from above.

He describes a scenario where your food of choice is delivered by drone, and the way he explains it, it all sounds quite plausible. Quite simply you tap into your phone what you want, tick your location on a map, and at the restaurant the food is loaded into a drone that will then take off to 80 feet in the sky. The drone will travel at a speed of 80-kilometres per hour to the location you selected. A bit like a UFO movie, a LED light will shine on the location you selected, the drone will descend to about 10 metres and the food will float down at the end of a biodegradable linen thread.

Sounds futuristic, right? The future, could in fact, be very soon. And here in Ireland this side of Christmas.

If he is successful Healy could be the author of a breakthrough in transport that could make much of the road transport of goods by road a thing of the past.

His goal: to build a worldwide drone delivery system that can deliver goods in volume.

From silicon chips to potato chips

Healy has form in building tech companies of scale and it was [reported](#) earlier this year that Manna has already attracted backing from venture capital firms Elkstone Capital and Frontline Ventures.

Healy is an experienced inventor, investor and tech entrepreneur who has specialised in travel tech and has founded and exited multiple software companies during his career. He is the former executive director and owner of CarTrawler, one of the world's leading B2B travel technology platforms and one of Ireland's greatest SME success stories.

If Healy succeeds with Manna.Aero, he could soon be mentioned in the sentence as Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos.

At Real Deal 2019 Healy described himself as “a risk-taker, I start businesses. I am a techie.”

Manno.Aero came about when he was tinkering with cheap drone he bought and wrote software code for it to fly to the local chipper. “But it never picked up the chips because they were too heavy for that drone.

Healy hopes to use his experience in travel technology, which involved working closely with 80pc of the world’s airlines as customers, to navigate the world of aviation regulation and deliver on his vision on the future of food delivery.

“Drones are the end for road delivery. People die every year delivering hamburgers. We have an ambitious team and strong backers. There is nothing between us and success that I am aware of.

“The first version will go live at the end of this year in Ireland. That version will show the rest of the world what this model will look like. You will not find a bigger transformational opportunity than this.”

Highlights from Bobby Healy at The Real Deal 2019

CarTrawler strategy:

<https://youtu.be/GMbGPOrY0rE>

Timing, dumb luck, execution and strategy. And dumb luck and timing were critical. And then it was about a strategy and a laser-focused strategy. Even airlines around the world and each of them had, even a small airline like Aer Lingus had 10 to 20 million customers a year, with credit card in hand, you know, sales for airlines were going direct, direct to website. Aer Lingus I think at the time, were 20pc to 30pc online. And you had this thing where people were going into the shop with a credit card with a massive purchase with serious intent displayed and with data that they were giving the airline such as ‘I’m going here, I’m going with these people, and I’m going for seven days.’ And the airlines were doing nothing with it. So, you could see it was pretty obvious that the gin needed tonic and car rental is a high margin business if you’re an aggregator, not if you’re an operator, but if you’re an aggregator it’s a very high margin business. And to me, when I met the lads, it was really clear that ... like I had 80pc of the world’s airlines as customers in my previous business. And I had more importantly really strong relationships with them at a senior level. And I knew that anything that I could build, they would buy, so long as it was, you know, relevant because there was a trust thing there.

And so, so it was, it was very straightforward, though, for me, less so for the Turleys because new boy coming into their business, they own it, you know, huge amount of distrust of the tech guy, and it took me it was a year and a half before we could switch the engine on. And, you know, for founders like that the business that they were generating cash, like that’s a lot to give away to

some person they don't know and they don't know what he's doing. And he goes in and he replaces the whole team and brings in all his people and you know, take controller the wheel. There's a leap of faith there and look, but the strategy and the timing and the early team, those three things are the case in any successful business.

Founding Manna.Aero:

<https://youtu.be/h4YwWn4lmZw>

When I started Manna, I started off by writing some code to control the drone. I bought a Chinese drone, I wrote some code to fly it to my local chipper. And I know it sounds crazy, but that was the first you know, it's called the bag of chips app, hit the button and but I never actually picked up a bag of chips because it was too heavy for the drone that I had. So it's useful to be able to be in the engine room. It's useful. I think it's a very strong advantage that I have.

The future of drone delivery:

https://youtu.be/_l1m76Fszfk

It's not an option to crash. You kill any number of cyclists delivering food and nobody notices, you, even crashed one drone without hitting anyone and you're out of business. So it's a really, really existential problem. So, therefore, you behave, you act and you invest as an airline and an aircraft manufacturer would in terms of safety processes, procedures, all that stuff.

But at the same time, you're regulated and licensed by an aviation authority that knows how to look at that and evaluate and approve it. And so in essence, you go into an insurer with a fait accompli, where the insurer already knows that you're safe, and insurance willingly license helicopters, light aircraft, big airlines, and it's not an expensive part of our cost.

Changing structure while growing:

https://youtu.be/Na_kc5vPsbQ

The people side of the business was key to that part. So, when you scale a business it's impossible if you don't ace the people side of your culture and the organisation. So we had a girl called Gillian French, you know, between myself and Mike [McGearty] and Gillian, those three – you had your tech, your people and culture – and you had your, you know, commercial management business. That was key and we went from 30 to 50 to 100 to you know, each scale in terms of just people counts, we are just short of 600 now.

We changed the complete composition of the business nearly every year, we were a different business. And part of that involves shedding a lot of skin and managers that were valid and

appropriate and very successful at a certain level, just couldn't keep up and couldn't, you know, they didn't have the skill set to thrive as you go through those transformations. And to be honest with you, if I wasn't at the top of the business, I may not even have survived. It was it was a crazy business that we you know, it's like you're building the aircraft while its flying kind of thing.

- *The Real Deal 2019 event took place in Goffs in October 2019 and was supported by Renatus, Bank of Ireland, Fitzgerald Power, The Sunday Times, The Panel, Davy, Byrne Wallace and The Pudding. To get more video highlights, [click here](#)*

Written by [John Kennedy](#) (john.kennedy3@boi.com)

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