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## Kerry events firm Elite makes a brilliant pivot to digital

### Killarney business [Elite Events Management](#) launches crowdfunding campaign for its new fitness app called HotFoot as part of Covid pivot.

Elite Events Management, a Killarney, Co Kerry-based events business that found itself on the brink due to Covid-19, is to launch a new sport and fitness tracking app called HotFoot as part of a pivot from mass participation sports events into the sports tech space.

The company has just launched a [crowdfunding campaign](#) with Spark and hopes to raise €150,000.

Before the pandemic, Elite Events Management were the market leader in the sports events industry, with 14 large-scale events planned for the year, including the Quest Adventure Series, the Ring of Beara Cycle, the Wicklow 200 cycling challenge, the Dingle cycle and the Run Killarney half marathon.

However, with all large-scale events cancelled due to Covid-19, Elite Events Management found itself on the brink, having to let its 9 full-time staff go.

### Taking on the digital challenge

While many businesses in Ireland, from hairdressers to pubs to restaurants and clothing stores got to open for a period during the summer, the large-scale events industry never started up again.

“Our business was stopped in its tracks with Covid-19. For the events and entertainment industries, there seemed to be no roadmap for return,” Elite Events Management founder and CEO Oliver Kirwan said.

“We have more than 30,000 people attend our events each year. We had 14 events planned for this year, and were only able to have one, which was back in March.”

“Over the summer, we realised we weren’t going to be able to host events again this year. We decided to run a virtual Quest Adventure Series over one weekend in August. We set routes all over the country, and people completed those routes individually, but we recorded them. 1,500 people took part.”

“We used an off the shelf app for it. The app didn’t work as well as we wanted it to, but there was huge demand for it. So, we decided to create our own app with pre-determined virtual routes for running and cycling.”

The company has since re-employed four of its former staff to help launch the app and hopes to ultimately re-hire more.

Uniquely, the app will be the first of its kind to guide sports and fitness users through running and cycling routes using audio cues. Additionally, users can generate their own routes, and compete

against others with a ghost function.

“You can create a route yourself on it, and anyone can compete in that route. You can see if one of your friends did the run and compete with them. It will tell you if you are catching up with them, going slower than them etc. It guides you through the routes with audio cues. It will be like a sat nav telling you to turn left ahead, but also telling you your friend is ahead and you need to catch up.”

## **Running with the crowd**

Kirwan this week launched an equity crowdfunding campaign to raise funds for the new app and kick-start its entry into the Irish and UK markets.

The campaign is being run on [Spark Crowdfunding](#), Ireland’s first equity crowdfunding platform. The company is aiming to raise €150,000 at a pre-money valuation of €500,000.

“We’re raising a small amount of money now at a very modest valuation to hit the ground running and we want to give our members an opportunity to own a share of the business from the outset.

“Crowdfunding is the ideal vehicle for that. With a cash injection now, we can grow very quickly and exploit what is truly a global opportunity. We are building our own proprietary technology and all funds raised will be used to rapidly scale the number of users of the app,” Kirwan said.

Chris Burge, CEO of Spark Crowdfunding, said HotFoot has a unique combination of a strong management team with a successful track record in their industry, an innovative product and access to a huge database of users from the outset.

“We love supporting early-stage Irish businesses, especially those outside Dublin. It is operating in

a high-growth industry and it has a very sensible valuation for investors coming in at this time. When you add in the 40pc EIS tax rebate for Irish investors it makes for a compelling investor proposition.

“Oliver has identified a gap in the market and devised a solution appropriately. Uniquely among tech start-ups, HotFoot has access to a huge database of clients before it even launches. We’d encourage private investors to check out the campaign on the Spark Crowdfunding website before the campaign ends.”

With a global industry of 650m fitness app users worldwide, HotFoot is well positioned to capitalise on a market growing at 25pc per annum. The business model is a freemium service in which the basic features will be free to use and additional features can also be accessed for a small monthly subscription.

HotFoot is hoping to convert many of Elite’s sizable database of more than 100,000 members over to the new app at very low cost using simple email marketing, allied to engagement with its sizeable social media following. It is hoped these early adopters will then attract a wider pool of users as word spreads about the unique features of the app.

“We’ve done a lot of research into the needs of our substantial database of users and we believe we have developed a product that perfectly addresses these needs. The market is ripe for a solution of this type and we have been getting excellent feedback from members.” says Kirwan, who has been organising and taking part in sports events for 10 years.

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