

## 3 Tips to Get Your Green Tech Up and Running

When your business is designed to solve big environmental problems, learn how to pick small battles.

BY NICK HAWKINS



*Windmill's environmentally friendly window AC unit. Photo: Courtesy company*

Consumer appetites for sustainable, environmentally friendly products continue to rise. For entrepreneurs, the green space looks ripe for innovation, but it can also be daunting. The problems can seem too large to conquer. The good news: There are plenty of opportunities to improve something old to make it more environmentally friendly by reducing design inefficiencies and choosing to use new greener tech or materials. There's also plenty of room for growth: The market for green products in

2021 was valued at \$10.9 billion and is expected to reach \$44 billion by 2028 according to research by Vantage Market Research.

Numerous companies with sustainable focuses, such as Allbirds and Rent the Runway, have gone public in previous years demonstrating that investors and consumers have an appetite for sustainability.

With that in mind, here are three pieces of advice for launching a new innovation in an established industry.

## 1. Focus on one problem and learn in the real world

"If you try to solve 10 problems at once, you're never going to launch a business," says Mike Mayer, co-founder of Windmill, a New York City-based air care company that manufactures environmentally friendly window AC units by using a less impactful refrigerant, carbon footprint offsets, recycling programs, and an efficiency software called eco-rewards. "Don't make it harder for yourself. You know, start with something that's attainable and reasonable and then build up."

Innovation, he explains, takes many forms and often many steps. He acknowledges how much effort goes into running a business and that breaking things down into bite-sized pieces can help keep things fresh and give your business flexibility and room to grow. "Our operating strategy was, learn quickly, put something together, launch it, learn, make improvements and grow the business, says Mayer. " This doesn't mean you shouldn't be solving big problems. It just means that big problems are often more manageable once they've been broken down into smaller pieces and once you start solving for those smaller chunks.

## 2. Persistence is key

"Our business is built around solving the toughest problems. And that's what we wake up and want to do," says Gregory Constantine, CEO and co-founder of Air Company, a New York City-based carbon utilization business that takes captured carbon dioxide and turns it into products of value--aviation fuel, perfume, and vodka to name three.

Constantine says there will always be naysayers who doubt your product or business, and the best antidote for dealing with them is still old-fashioned grit. He's also seen how that persistence pays off, "if you believe in what you are trying to achieve can work, and if you have reason to believe that it legitimately can work,

then that persistence will allow it to," says Constantine, adding that, "if you build something on the back of that, the world will, hopefully, kind of turn in your favor."

### 3. Know your strengths and find partners to help with your weaknesses

It's a lesson that Dan Nadav, CEO and founder of Enviro Power, a South Windsor, Connecticut company that makes a smart boiler that produces heat but also generates and stores electricity in the process, learned after years in the clean tech and sustainable energy industry.

He urges other innovators to not get caught up in the fairy tales of unicorns and startups that make it big by going it alone. "In reality, startups are such small bodies, that without extreme focus, and focus on what you're good at, it's very easy to get lost in this huge jungle when you're just a small fly flying in between those large trees," says Nadav. He adds that many startups in the hardware business fail, not because their tech doesn't work or doesn't solve a unique problem, but because when they jump from prototyping to production they're not prepared.

Nadav suggests taking stock of you and your team's strengths and weaknesses and finding a partner to counter your businesses' weaknesses. In Enviro Power's case, that's Burnham Holdings, a Lancaster, PA-based holding company with a portfolio of domestic boiler manufacturers and related HVAC products and accessories. One of the advantages of this partnership was its ease. Nadav says when he showed the folks at Burnham, who have nearly 100 years of experience in boiler manufacturing, his smartwatt boiler, they not only immediately understood what was happening inside, but they also had the parts required for manufacturing already in inventory.

This made the partnership a no-brainer, "that was a very natural decision to not take investor money and try to put it into our own production facility with no deep knowledge there. But to align with at least half a dozen boiler producers here in Northeast that are second, third generation in this business."

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