



How to accelerate cities towards zero waste

Seenons

Case Study

🕒 8 min.

Key Results to Date

- ✔ Validated and developed a software platform to give new value to cardboard, PET, glass, coffee residue, PMD, GFT and orange peel
- ✔ Built a range of corporate partners including Renewi, Rabobank, Amsterdam Smart City, KNVB (Royal Dutch Football Association) and Yoghurt Barn
- ✔ Raised €7.75M seed capital to finance its ambitions
- ✔ Seenons’ team grew from 2 to 25 in the space of 2 years
- ✔ Aimforthemoon guided Seenons from idea to MVP phase and facilitated the collaboration with Renewi as launching partner

The Start

The waste management industry, like many industrial operations, is not aging gracefully. This industry, which struggles to balance efficiency, transparency and sustainability, is underpinned by an even greater challenge: Change is next to impossible from within.

One one hand, the commercial waste industry's inefficiencies lay bare a shocking story. The current business model generates revenue by selling the energy that is generated from burning waste... The more volume, the more profit. Companies need to meet a set quota of waste and anything that's not incinerated is piled into landfill eliminating almost any chance of a second life. And with levels of consumption growing, this perpetual stream of refuse only continues to expand.



On the other, entrepreneurs and enterprises alike are screaming out for new streams of resources to turn into circular & sustainable products. Whether it's soap made from coffee grind or 'oranchello' made from orange peels, there's a rapidly growing market to give waste a second life. The problem is that they struggle to get their hands on it.

The current system surrounding the disposal of waste is difficult to change from within. "The current business model generates revenue by selling the energy that is generated from burning waste. Hence, the more volume, the more profit," says Joost Kamermans. With sustainability challenges mounting and both industries and consumers demanding change, this presents the perfect opportunity for new players like Seenons to shake things up.

At least, that's exactly what Joost Kamermans and Jorn Eiting van Liempt thought. Joost, an ex-BCG strategy consultant, had started Caltrix in order to tackle big environmental problems in 2018 and Jorn, a serial entrepreneur who also coached startups, got talking about waste at one of Aimforthemoon's community events.

Discussing the problem — that the greatest problem with waste is that it exists at all — the two saw an opportunity that was too good to pass up.

“Seenons has taken a traditional market with many existing solutions and tackled ‘why’ they were not scalable, built a platform around it and created new value as a result. This is 21st century thinking at its finest; not solving new problems with old solutions.”





The Plan

“As soon as you recognize an opportunity to do things differently, you tend to start thinking in solutions.”

“The greatest problem with waste is that it exists at all”, says Joost. One day, as they were discussing the problem, they counted more than 5 rubbish trucks driving along the street and started asking themselves: Why does it work this way?

In 2019, the two entrepreneurs embarked on an entrepreneurial journey under the name Seenons. With the guidance of Alimforthemoon and headquartered in Alm’s startup space, Seenons chose to employ the lean startup approach: a methodology to take the shortest possible route from ideation to finished product.

Seenons, taking a leaf out of Ries’ book, began creating a strategy to accelerate time-to-market and increase the feasibility of venture in four phases:

- ✓ **Scan.** The first step in the development process is to learn about customers and their problems as early as possible and to determine the exact problem that they would be solving.
- ✓ **Test.** Next, the two co-founders had to test their concept by creating a mockup website and entering the marketplace.
- ✓ **Build.** With both their problem defined and their assumptions validated, the next step is to move from ideation and build their minimum viable product (MVP).
- ✓ **Grow.** With their MVP in hand, the two co-founders began to target their first market — football clubs — as a viable source of new waste streams.



Assumptions

How did Seenons validate their assumptions?

With the ability to work outside the system, Seenons saw many opportunities to make the industry more efficient and more sustainable. The mission was clear: To bring together key stakeholders and shift the industry towards a circular and waste-free economy. But who would their customers be? What would their product do?

Validate their vision. If they couldn’t change the system from within, how could they leverage technology to approach it from the outside? During the scan phase, the team began to evaluate, test and validate these assumptions.

Mock website. To get the process moving, Seenons began to use their agility to their advantage. Rather than the standard validation process, Seenons put up a mockup landing page to collect email addresses and began advertising via Google Ads, promoting the product that they intended to create.

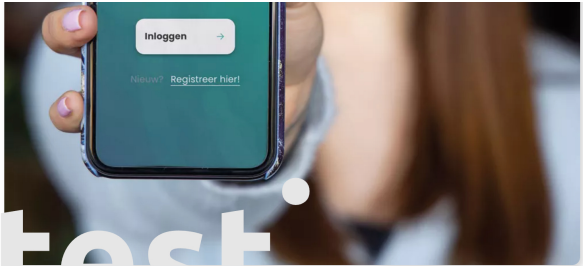
Mom test. This process avoided what Joost calls the mom test, “In the beginning potential customers will say that whatever you’re doing is a good idea, but when it comes to get their wallets out, the story changes.”

“It’s really important to stay honest about what phase you’re in. You can’t trick people into becoming a customer, but you really have to explain your journey and how they would be a part of that. But with this test, we validated our idea by actually acquiring our first customers.”

– Joost Kamermans, co-founder of Seenons



Let's test



Testing their concept

As the team began to receive requests for waste disposal, they informed the potential customer that they were just getting started. However, rather than decline the business, the team explained their intention to create the service and began actually executing orders.

✔ **Get on the road.** In a rented van, the two co-founders were driving around The Netherlands collecting waste streams from clients.

✔ **Learning by doing.** "In the beginning, we did every step of the process ourselves. Whilst this was super inefficient, we really experienced what the possibilities and the challenges were. In reality, this was going to be way more complicated than how we originally portrayed it on the website," said Joost.

✔ **Connecting the dots.** At the same time, Seenons learned many businesses had difficulty sourcing pure waste streams to make circular products. Identifying multiple Dutch businesses seeking upcycled ingredients including liqueur producers Dik & Schil, homeware producers Unwaste and artisan soap and shampoo makers Kusala Gifts, Seenons delivered their first waste streams: Coffee grind and orange peel.

Whilst these tactics may have been unconventional, the findings showed that the market was crying out for solutions on both sides: Those looking for recycled material couldn't access enough and those disposing of waste couldn't do it sustainably. The only thing missing was the middleman.



The market

The next step in a perfect world was for Seenons to take their MVP to market.

Joost & Jorn had agreed with a Football club in Utrecht which had no deposit system for cans or bottles to pilot the software. With the first successful outcome, the startup demonstrated that they could collect waste separately and reduce the overall price at the same time. However, as we all know, 2020 was far from perfect.

This successful pilot led to the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) agreeing to participate in the next phase of testing, but this time with 10 pilot projects around the country. But just as the project was set and all the bins were in place, lockdown began and the Netherlands went into hibernation.

For many young businesses, the Corona Crisis was a nightmare. For Seenons, however, the lockdown brought with it a grace period which allowed the startup to build out their product. And a well designed pivot.

"With no hospitality or sport happening, our target audience was completely out-of-office. But luckily the lockdown gave us time to focus on product development", says Joost.

Quickly, Seenons learned that their software — which they had prepared to give away for free — was so much more efficient than what the waste services were using themselves, a new revenue stream appeared.

"At first, we thought we would only help customers get rid of their waste. But as the dust settled on the corona crisis, we found out that waste companies also wanted more value. Their systems were so outdated that they too wanted better software. And they were willing to pay for it. Today, we have four waste companies that license our software."

– Joost Kamermans, co-founder of Seenons

How did Seenons build their product?

The duo decided to start with an app which could get waste to businesses who can re-use it in the most efficient and sustainable way. If Seenons could leverage new technology as well as existing transport infrastructure, they could create a new business model creating positive environmental impact in the process.

✔ Armed with a validated circular business model, the team began to build out the solution: A platform that provides a market for waste that would usually be burnt — including food scraps, plastic waste and paper-based materials — whilst collecting waste from companies struggling to dispose of it.

✔ After serving their first customers with this make shift concierge model, Seenons has partnered with market leaders, including Renewi, as a launching supplier and began working on their minimum viable product.

✓ Through an iterative process of testing and building, Seenons' software facilitated the management of all a business's waste flows in one place. The platform would not only collect residual flows sustainably, but dramatically improve logistics in this traditionally inefficient industry.

"I am convinced that in 10 years, we'll be thinking different about waste than we do today. So instead of investing in assets, we decided to build a platform that can evolve with the most affordable and most sustainable way to deal with waste. We can always do the best thing for the customer and the moment someone creates a better system, we'll swap to it. And in the process, we actively remove the double incentives which have defined the waste industry in the past."

– Joost Kamermans, co-founder of Seenons



The Impact

A business model designed for systems change

Perhaps the greatest impact from addressing the inefficiencies is the creation of a totally new value chain. By changing the economic model, companies can then create a business model around that new waste stream.

The more transactions that are happening, the more demand for reusables grows. The more waste tracks that you have, the more valuable separating waste becomes. Waste like Cardboard, PET, Glass, coffee grind, PMD, GFT and even orange peel, still have residual value after their first use.

What's important regarding this business model is that it actively changes the system by creating demand for a product that wasn't available before. The more valuable waste becomes, the more the price drops for the waste itself and the more business

This self-perpetuating cycle has the power not only to create significant and systemic positive impact, but also to change an inefficient market and build an entirely new industry.

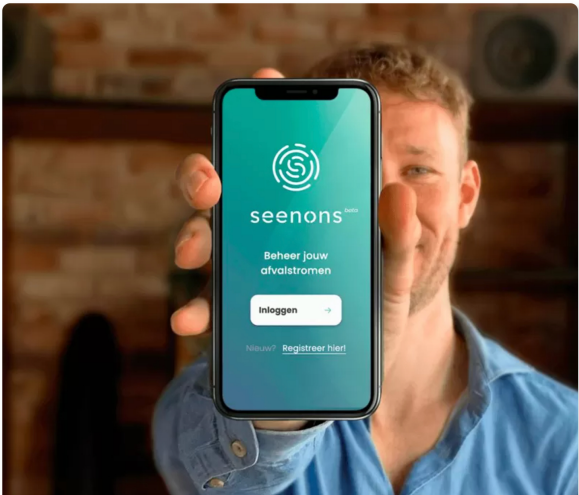
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Want to know more?

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