

easyEverything: The Internet Shoppe

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Introduction:

“I want to bring the Internet to the masses, just like I did with air travel,” declared Stelios Haji-Ioannou, chairman and owner of easyEverything, the first chain of large Internet cafés to be conceived anywhere in the world. Stelios, who preferred to be addressed by his first name, remarked, “We have taken a cottage industry to a grander, industrial scale. We are not in the business of doing things small.” A typical easyEverything Internet shop contained 400 to 600 computer terminals, and allowed customers to surf the Internet at rates as low as £1 for 6 hours.

EasyEverything was one of several companies operating under the UK-based parent company, easyGroup, which also managed easyJet airlines and several other start-up ventures. The airline, which began operations in 1995, had achieved tremendous success by adopting a low-cost operational model, creating brand awareness, and maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction. Stelios hoped to leverage the easy brand and his entrepreneurial skills to transform easyEverything into the biggest and most successful venture of its kind.

The first easyEverything Internet shop began operations in June 1999 near London’s Victoria station. The runaway success of the operation led to the creation of four more shops by February 2000. Not content to limit himself to the UK market, Stelios aggressively planned to expand operations to more than 50 locations throughout continental Europe by 2002.

Despite its initial success, easyEverything still faced several challenges. Operations director Mike Keefe noted, “Whenever you are in a start-up retail concept, the first six months are the real true test.” The *Wall Street Journal* was less reassuring, stating, “They got the first one right, but there won’t be any others like this.” Never one to pass up a challenge, Stelios and his management team set out to prove the critics wrong.

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