

Victor Cui – One FC

I: ... Victor Cui, who is the chief executive of One Fighting Championships, which is a fascinating company. I believe it's the fastest growing sport in the world and is operating in the fast-growing sport area of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). Victor, could you tell us a little bit about the company, why you founded it, what it does and a little bit about where it's at, at the moment?

VC: Sure. Well, you'll have to make sure you've got at least four hours of recording on your camera, because I love talking about that. Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is the world's fastest growing sport and it is in its infancy in Asia. It's presented a huge opportunity for its growth. So I launched One Fighting Championship about a year and a half ago. We are Asia's largest Mixed Martial Arts organisation, holding events right across Asia and selling out stadiums everywhere we go. We have the region's largest television broadcast deal, a 10 year television deal with ESPN style sports and it puts our show in front of over 500 million years in 20 countries right across Asia.

I: Wow, that's pretty impressive. And that's from one and a half years ago?

VC: Yes.

I: Goodness me. You have a background in this area, though, so how did you find the opportunity?

VC: I've always worked in sports media. I've been doing it for over 15 years now and lived in Asia for the last six and a half, seven years. When I was looking at opportunities with my last company – with ESPN style sports – we were always developing new sport properties or finding where the opportunities were. I looked at every sport from poker to badminton to ballroom dancing to taekwondo tournaments to darts. Just everything. In my entire career I never saw an opportunity as big as it was in Mixed Martial Arts, with a gap that was so huge, where I was seeing a clear business model that was making billions of dollars around the world and very, very successful, yet that model wasn't in Asia. It would be like me talking to you, saying, 'Nobody in Asia's ever heard about football, why don't we create some football properties here?' That's how the gap was.

But, even more so, when you think of martial arts, the roots of martial arts is Asian. Every major martial arts has history in Asia, from taekwondo, kung fu, silat; those are all Asian-based and Asia's been the home of martial arts for the last 5,000 years. So, to interest people about a new sport that was in Asia, that was martial arts, was a very easy step to do.

I: Fascinating, absolutely fascinating. I would love to watch it someday. I think it looks very exciting. But it can't have been easy. I'm sure building this built-in, very successful business up didn't happen easily. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the challenges you faced?

VC: Sure. With any start-up organisation there are a lot of challenges, especially when you're growing as big and as fast as we are, right across the region. I mean, we weren't holding an event that was just in one city, we were going to different countries, different venues, different suppliers and every single month we're doing that. So, it definitely poses a different kind of challenge. But I think one of the greatest challenges that we face as an organisation is that the sport was in its infancy. So you need to not only grow the sport but you're also educating people. You're educating sponsors and partners and letting them understand where the passion is, but guarantee they come out to an event, they see it and they've never been that excited before.

I: And you were saying that you also have, part of that learning, your cameraman and your film crew have to also go through a learning curve as well.

VC: Yes, because it's a unique sport; it's a new sport. Filming this and telling the story from a production side and from a television side is different than when you would shoot football or where you'd shoot cricket or F1. So, there is a different skillset that's required for that and you've got to train the team about the nuances of the sport and the things that are different.

I: Fascinating. One last question, you're an experienced entrepreneur, clearly successful and I think is going to grow very fast by the look of it, if you were giving some advice to someone else, starting up as an entrepreneur, what lessons have you learned? What would you pass on?

VC: I would say the biggest lesson that I've learnt is a combination of two things. One is you need the very, very best people on your team. If you do not have superstars, if you do not have A class people, if you do not have the very best of what they do, you don't even have a chance of being successful, because the best people, when they're together, they thrive and they excite each other and they want to produce even more and be the best. That's the kind of environment that you need in any organisation. So, first off you need the best people.

The second thing is you need to create the very, very best product that you can, world class property. If you have the best people, they will create the best product, and if you have those two things together, your company will be successful. You can't have one without the other. And, to create the best product means you've got to set a standard that is above everybody else. That's difficult because not a lot of people are used to an environment where excellence is demanded of them.

If you've grown up in the corporate world and a lot of the times in the corporate world you're rewarded for staying under the radar. You need to be quiet and don't rock the boat. But when you're creating something new, you have to rock the boat, you have to think differently, you have to drive aggressively and you have to be confident in what you're doing in that way.

I: That's fascinating and I think it also connects the essence of what the business is about, which is martial arts, and that tradition of excellence, but also I think a bit of courage as well.

VC: Great point.

I: Victor, thank you so much for your time. I hope, if people can, they can look at your website and find out more and maybe even watch a game or fight.

VC: One.fc.com is our website or follow me on Twitter – Victor1FC.

I: Fantastic. Thanks again, very much, Victor.

VC: Thank you very much.