The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Young Entrepreneur Tackles Online Education (Video)

By Diana Kulchitskaya

March 11, 2014



Yelena Maslova at work in Moscow.

Yelena Masolova may be only 29, but she has already convinced prominent business consultants like Ichak Adizes, Tim Enneking and Alexei Kapterev to join forces with her to revolutionize Russian education.

Sort of.

Masolova, who has 20 start-ups under her belt, is aiming to bring premier business education to Russia and other BRIC countries through Eduson.tv, an education platform that is less than a year old but already well-known on the Russian market of online education.

"Living in Russia, I understood that it is possible to overstep the boundaries of the country and create an international company," Masolova said in an interview at her office located at the hip Krasny Oktyabr business center.

"Besides, I have always been interested in education," she said. "My grandmother was a teacher and my mother was also involved in teaching. So this project met all my personal interests."

Eduson, whose name is a neologism combining two words: Edison and education, allows people to sign up for online courses with tuition fees that range from free to $109. The classes have names like "From $0 to $400 Million Gross Sales in 1.5 Years" (Taught by Peter Kutis, serial entrepreneur; $49), "Roadmap to Successful IPO" (Arie Kravtchin, Bank of America Merrill Lynch; $99) and "Personal Productivity" (Eduson; free). Soon Eduson will introduce three courses taught by Ichak Adizes, widely acknowledged as one of the world's top management experts.

Masolova, who at the age of 27 was ranked among Russia's Top 30 young Internet entrepreneurs by Forbes Russia, is herself a product of traditional education, graduating from Moscow's Higher School of Economics. But in 2006 she completed an online education course from California's Stanford University and discovered that, contrary to widespread opinion, the quality of online classes was quite high.

Yelena Masolova explains how she is aiming to bring premier business education to Russia and other BRIC countries through Eduson.tv.

"I had world-class specialists as professors, read tons of articles and books, and submitted essays," she said. "So this education did not differ much from an offline course. In my case it was even better."

In addition, she said, this route saved money and time, giving it a key advantage over classroom study.

Masolova was further inspired by Coursera, an education platform that partners Stanford and other top universities to offer courses online for free.

So in April 2013 she launched the Eduson.tv website in English, adding Russian, Chinese and Portuguese versions later. The site's mission was to bring top business specialists to a Russian audience as well as to people in the other BRIC countries of Brazil, China and India. The online platform now boasts about 100 corporate clients and offers many classes in all four languages.

"I find the concept very good," said Tim Enneking, founder and director of Altima Asset Management, who quickly agreed to teach two courses devoted to negotiation skills and public speaking at conferences when approached by Eduson.

"But I believe that Eduson will eventually have to include more interactive content in the courses," he said. "This will make the content more appealing and effective for the clients, much harder for pirates to steal and allow the business to be more profitable."

Alexei Kapterev, the author of the books "Death by PowerPoint" and "Presentation Secrets," signed up to teach a course titled "Art of Presentation: an Unforgettable Motivating Story" after four hours of back-and-forth talks on what he could offer Eduson's students.

"I saw that the company had ambitions to enter the international market, and I found that

interesting," he said.

Kapterev added that he believes the project has potential but needs time to mature.

The online classes are simple. Clients may choose individual learning tracks and select any courses they like. Some of them are available offline, so one can learn at any place and any time, wherever one's computer is. The courses usually are designed with a two-screen interface, the first showing the professor and the second with the presentation of the course.

"At first we wanted to follow the business-to-client model, but later we realized that it is more useful to be a b2b company," Masolova said.

Now the main focus is on companies with more than 1,000 employees that pay an annual fee of $30,000 for access to all available courses. Firms with fewer employees are charged $49 per month for the same service. In addition to training employees, Eduson provides companies with statistics on their studies and how they are progressing.

"We truly believe in distance education on demand. Eduson are pioneers in this space in Russia," said Shahar Waiser, the founder of GetTaxi, an Israeli-based company that allows people to order taxis online and via mobile devices. GetTaxi, which entered Moscow in 2012 and counts Ukrainian-born U.S. tycoon Len Blavatnik among its investors, became a corporate client about six months ago. His employees take courses in marketing, sales and management.

"I have found Eduson to be a great source of professional growth," he said.

Marina Aslanyan, 30, who works in the Internet business, enrolled in her first Eduson classes after reading an article about the website during an online search for sales and marketing courses about four months ago. "I think the platform is very useful. Everything is designed in a comprehensible and interesting way," Aslanyan said.

While Eduson targets BRIC countries, Masolova is considering narrowing the focus to Russians and U.S. citizens after finding that they are the main users of the service. She would like to enter — and conquer — the U.S. market one day.

Eduson's Moscow office consists of 10 people, while about 40 freelancers work remotely around the world. The company also maintains a small office in Silicon Valley in the U.S. Masolova said she tries to keep prices affordable and thinks current tuition fees are one of the company's competitive advantages. The $50 to $100 fees for classes are on the lower end of online tuition fees, and the $30,000 corporate rate is comparable to other offerings.

The Russian online education market is young, and not all universities have embraced it.

"A tradition of online education has not formed in Russia. That is why emerging new online projects will not have an immediate effect on the market of higher education in our country," said Alexander Rozhdestvensky, rector of the Russian State Technological University MATI, which offers its own distance-learning program.

He said universities should not ignore the trend but classroom study would remain because it is more challenging to educate technical specialists online.

However, Dmitry Guzhelya, founder of Universarium, another platform for online education, said a battle is brewing for leadership in online education in Russia. "There are some successful projects, but there are also significant difficulties. One of them is the lack of big players in the game," he said.

Masolova hopes to be that leader. Her goal is to have about 1,000 companies using her platform by the end of the year.

Contact the author at bizreporter@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/03/11/young-entrepreneur-tackles-online-education-video-a32875