

WAHANDA

BOOKING BEYOND

Online beauty and wellness marketplace Wahanda has grown rapidly since it was founded seven years ago, and is now the largest player of its kind in Europe. Annemarie Kruse reports

Wahanda is the biggest online spa, beauty and salon booking website in Europe and has become a classic start-up success story. The London-based company was founded in 2008 by Lopo Champalimaud and Salim Mitha – veterans of lastminute.com and Yahoo! respectively – and it quickly became the biggest online beauty booking provider in the UK.

Wahanda's concept is simple: beauty salons, hair salons and spas can sign up at wahanda.com, listing their business address, treatment menu and other information online. The salon listings are structured in categories – Hair, Hair Removal, Massage, Nails, Face, Body and Spa Days & Breaks – and customers can search for a salon according to region, city or neighbourhood.

Once a customer has found a salon they like they can book an appointment online and, after their visit, post a review. Wahanda has built a lively online community: besides posting reviews, registered users can ask beauty and health-related questions and there are beauty and wellness-related articles written by well-known bloggers.

Wahanda offers its salon customer two different account types: the free account covers the basics – a listing on the website and the free Wahanda Connect salon booking software. For bookings that are made through the website, Wahanda receives a 20% commission plus VAT. The premium account costs £30 per month and offers additional features such as premium placement, real-time bookings, checking and managing appointments online and allowing customers to book a treatment with a specific employee.

Wahanda also makes a point of distancing itself from discount and voucher booking websites like Groupon. The company clearly states that its customers are looking for quality treatments, not super-cheap deals, so there is no pressure for the salons to discount their services. This ensures a high quality standard which customers and salons both seem to appreciate: the company is currently

Co-founded by CEO Lopo Champalimaud in 2008, Wahanda offers a full range of beauty and wellness services from massages and facials to yoga and pilates and even cosmetic surgery



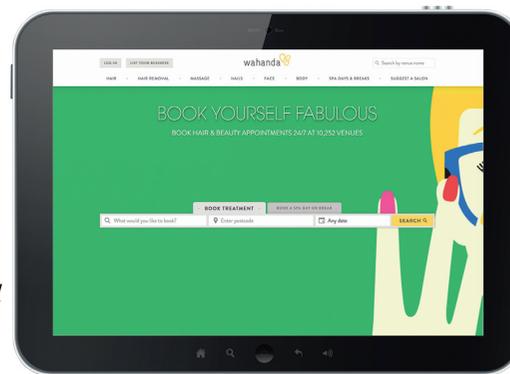
Fact file: Wahanda

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growing by 300% year-on-year. As of June 2015, over 15,000 salons and spas throughout Europe were listed on Wahanda – although with the recent acquisition of French online beauty booking website ZenSoon this figure will rise to 20,000 venues across Europe. Wahanda now has a product offering in ten countries, with further plans for European expansion in the months ahead.

Acquisition spree

Wahanda began a strategic European acquisition spree in 2012. The first purchase was Salonium, a Lithuanian company specialising in booking software for beauty salons and spas. With this basis, Wahanda continued to expand its business in the UK and in 2014, the company started to pick up further key acquisitions from across Europe.

The first major takeover was the German online salon booking market leader Salonmeister (which is also the biggest salon booking site provider in Switzerland and Austria) in October 2014. In January 2015, Wahanda purchased Lithuanian beauty app developer LemonLabs, which had already built some of the mobile applications for Wahanda's business, making this more of an acquire rather than a straightforward acquisition. In April 2015, Wahanda acquired Austrian beauty booking website Beautycheck and renamed it Salonmeister.at, followed by Dutch salon booking website Treatwell (which also has country websites for Germany and Belgium) a month later. Then in June, Wahanda picked up ZenSoon, a company which is growing at 30% month-on-month.

In May 2015, Wahanda's owner Hotspring Ventures was itself acquired by Japanese investor Recruit Holdings. In July 2014 Recruit Holdings purchased a 10% stake in Hotsprings and in May 2015, the company added another 70% of shares to its investment. At the time of the takeover, Wahanda was valued at US\$220m. Wahanda has also raised €42m in May from its Japanese owners to grow the UK and German markets, and a further €65m in June which has been assigned to develop France, Spain, Italy and Benelux.

Wahanda, which employs 210 people across Europe, now owns the online salon booking market leaders in France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands. These countries, together with the UK, account for the biggest slice of the European online salon booking market. And with further acquisitions clearly in its sights, Wahanda is on the way to achieving its goal as a global leader in the online health and beauty booking market.