

# Boot-scooting: the little bikes rescuing merry partygoers

Larissa Ham

September 29, 2011 - 11:14AM



Drivers On Scoot owner Yan Flageul outside Flinders Street station. *Photo: Supplied*

It's fair to say small businessman Yan Flageul is a little sleep-deprived.

After 14 months of juggling a teaching job with his own after-hours business, Flageul - whose business is yet to turn a profit - might be forgiven for throwing in the towel.

"Every week I'm thinking of giving up because it's so hard," he says.

Advertisement: Story continues below



The fleet of scooters has now grown to eight, with two more on the way.

"There are times when you're just exhausted and I say 'stuff it'... But I'm not a giver-upper. It's hard but it's my choice."

In July last year, Flageul and wife Marian launched [Drivers on Scoot](#), a business that collects car owners who have had a few drinks. His drivers travel to the job via scooter, fold the scooter into the passenger's car boot, and then drive them home in their own car.

While many Australians have never heard of such a service, Flageul, originally from France, said it had existed in Europe for years.

He and Marian had been casting around for a business idea for a long time, but none seemed quite right.

It was while organising their wedding ceremony and reception, to be held at two different locations, that the idea began to form.

"That's where people rely on cars and that's a problem and it's a problem that a lot of people have. Who wants to be a designated driver at a wedding?" Flageul says.

Not long after, a friend overseas was killed in a car accident by a drink driver.

"We put that together and thought if no one's doing that (a scooter business) maybe we should."

The business started with one Italian 50cc scooter ridden by Flageul, working nights and weekends. Three months later, they employed another driver. Now they have eight, with another two planned.

"I reached a point where I was needing to employ and that's where you've got to invest," Flageul says.

"At the moment I'm working to repay the loan and any money that we make goes into paying that down.

"Within a year we need to be able to earn enough to not only repay what we owe but start making a profit."

The business has proved popular among business clients, people who have driven out for a nice meal or a few drinks, young families going to parties and men who are out with friends or associates.

"We also have a growing number of tradies because they can't lose their licence and they can't leave their tools in the ute," Flageul says.

Customers pay a minimum call-out fee of \$45, plus a charge per kilometre, which Flageul says is usually cheaper than a return taxi.

He says running, marketing and expanding the business have all brought massive challenges.

"The first challenge is the concept. People just don't understand - you drive me in my car? How does it work? Then you've got to create awareness as a niche concept."

As a first mover in the sector, the business is also at risk of being copied. Flageul says they had to buy out an early competitor, who was going to start up, but put the business on sale after a management wrangle.

"They had big money so they could have really killed us," he says. "We're really still at the birth stage so that was a real eye-opener."

It has also proven very difficult to find the right employees, who have to be over 25, have a bike licence, be up to speed on directions and have a clear driving record.

Flageul says that while some Melbourne taxi drivers earn as little as \$10 an hour, Drivers on Scoot pays its contractors \$22-\$25 an hour, another drain on resources which is necessary if they want to attract good-quality drivers.

"They (customers) go with us because we're not taxi drivers," he says.

Flageul says drink driving is a major issue, but the culture is changing.

"I think it's getting a lot better because my business would have died in the egg 10 years ago. It's not socially acceptable to drink drive anymore."

Flageul is now eyeing the Sydney market, and also has plans to eventually set up in country Victoria.

In the meantime the teacher - and one-time Sergeant Medic in the French Army - will be relying on determination to get through the business' early years.

"If you can manage a classroom of 25 ferals who don't want to be there...if you can do that I think you can do anything," he laughs.

## **Yan Flageul's tips for success**

- 1.** Do not work for the money, work for the business. If you work for the money you're doomed - you won't make any money at the start.
- 2.** Don't count the hours. You've got to walk the walk and talk the talk
- 3.** Be ready to learn. You've got to be open-minded and learn to trust people who are experts in their field (for example PR people, web designers). You've got to find the right people and then you've got to trust them.
- 4.** Believe in yourself and have that confidence that what you're doing is the right thing. Try it for one year. If within the year you see it's not going to work, it's not going to work.
- 5.** It's not all about managing the birth, it's about managing the growth. There's a point where you've got to take the leap of faith and there's no going back.

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/small-business/growing/bootscooting-the-little-bikes-rescuing-merry-partygoers-20110929-1ky4a.html#ixzz1ZL4BWrD5>