

## **Curato Baskets: When Student Creativity Meets Market Reality**

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### **Abstract**

The case study is about Curato Baskets, a non-business educational project of classroom entrepreneurial activity among the students of the University of Sargodha. The initiative was organized as a part of an entrepreneurship course, which was a mandatory part of HEC, and students who had varying academic backgrounds were given an opportunity to create gift baskets that were creative, prove their ideas by means of field insights, and discuss their prototypes with industry professionals. Despite the high creative power and the initial customer excitement in the project, the students encountered a number of challenges in balancing the designs with the market expectations. Ineffective pricing, imprecise segmentation, design constraints, and incomplete value creation placed commercial barriers in readiness. The case reveals that student entrepreneurship usually lacks an understanding of customer needs, and evidence-based decision-making, refining and structured market knowledge are crucial. It provides a useful insight to entrepreneurship pedagogues and students of the complexities that occur in practice when classroom learning is translated into practice in the real world of entrepreneurship.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship education, student startups, experiential learning, prototype development

**Subject Area:** Entrepreneurship / Innovation

**Difficulty Level:** Beginner–Intermediate (Undergraduate)

### **Introduction / Background**

The formation of Curato Baskets was one of the key projects in the Spring 2025 semester of the entrepreneurship course tailored to non-business students. The aim was to have an experience-based learning that would enable the students in other domains like Statistics, Zoology and English Linguistics to realize that entrepreneurial thinking is not limited to business subjects. The majority of the participants had little exposure to entrepreneurial ideas and most of them were brought into the course with the belief that business operations were complicated and something they were unable to achieve. The course was meant to break this illusion through an immersive learning experience.

The initial phases of the project were initiated with brainstorming where students examined their environment, found out what people usually need and what issues worries people in their daily lives. Through such discussions they were able to see some gaps in the market that small innovative

solutions could be designed. The students were asked to talk to their friends, hold brief surveys, and collect unofficial information among people. This was not aimed at creating flawless data but rather developing the habit of listening to customers and knowing what they would prefer.

Once the idea generation process was complete, the class proceeded into prototyping whereby groups of members composed of different departments were created. This interdisciplinary organization was a strategic move because it enabled students to incorporate their strengths. Statistical analysts aided in interpreting survey feedback, linguistics majors were useful in coming up with product descriptions and presentation narratives, and sciences students were used to think observatively and analytically. They had a common goal to come up with both functional and attractive products.

An important stepping-point was given through a planned visit to the Waheed Vain Incubation Center. Students were exposed to the current entrepreneurial initiatives, engaged with start ups, and learned how small enterprises turn ideas into market offerings. This exposure opened their eyes to the fact that they do not have to be business majors to become an entrepreneur. The meeting also enlightened them on the real-life issues that business people go through in their day-to-day activities, including cost management, design improvement and customer value creation.

As the semester went on, the groups came up with a set of prototypes that eventually became the idea that became Curato Baskets. They were gift baskets that were tailored to fit certain audiences, such as CEOs, brides, babies and grandparents. The baskets had a theme, a tale and a symbolic design. The students felt that their innovative method, and visual presentation would have a great appeal to the customers.

The project was finalized at the CEO Forum Exhibition of Malik Firoz Noon Business School. CEOs and entrepreneurs working in the industry were invited to review the work of the students. The event itself not only generated exposure, but also acted as a check that proved to be the reality. Although the visitors admired the aesthetic value and the creativity of Curato Baskets, they indicated too a number of weaknesses that would not make the product successful in a real market. This is a combination of gratitude and constructive critique that was at the basis of the central issue of this case.

### **Key Issue: Misalignment Between Creativity and Market Expectations**

Curato Baskets was innovative and had an artistic endeavor, but the project had a failure of matching with market expectations. The students paid much attention to the artistic aspect of their designs and failed to translate customer insights into their final works. Their models were quite attractive but not offering a clear value proposition that could be straightforwardly used to explain why customers need to use their baskets over the current solutions. This was caused by poor knowledge on pricing logic, variation in differentiation across different designs and little focus on customer segmentation. The key problem faced by the students was that they were only going to

be creative without basing their judgments on market evidence to convince the customers. Consequently, this project did not place itself in a strong competitive position, although there was potential and initial interest.

### **Challenges and Strategic Errors**

A number of strategic issues arose as the students shifted their creativity in the classroom to the scrutiny of the market. One of the biggest weaknesses was pricing because the teams did not have a systematic way of estimating prices or how far customers will be willing to pay. Some of the baskets were over-priced against their material and finishing quality whereas some were low priced, casting doubt on their sustainability. The reviewers mentioned that in the absence of an adequately explained pricing, the customers would not perceive the product as reliable and properly designed.

The other difficulty was the sameness in the design of baskets. Each basket had a theme, but this did not differentiate much, as the structural format was similar. Differentiation is imperative in persuading a buyer to choose one gift basket over the other in markets where gift baskets are a norm. The failure of the students to produce separate characteristics of each product resulted in a poor customer understanding.

The customer segmentation was also not clear during the project. The students were not sure whether they should target up-end buyers who wanted to receive elegant gifts or low-end customers who wanted to receive simple offerings. Such focus caused the messaging of the product to be decentralized and this did not allow the students to create a marketing story that would appeal to a particular audience.

Further refinement was needed in the packaging and finishing. Although the idea behind the storytelling of each basket was valued, the aesthetic performance was not always worth the cost. Reviewers in the industry pointed out that high quality products should have high quality finishes and that customers tend to determine the value by the looks.

One small, yet significant problem was the overconfidence induced by initial informal evaluation. Classmates and friends encouraged students to think that their product was already in the market. This trust was shaken in the CEO Forum, which also involved professional feedback that identified areas that they had not thought of not doing so well. The lesson they learned is that the first appreciation should not equate with the market approval.

### **Outcome and Lessons**

Nevertheless, Curato Baskets obtained significant results despite these difficulties. A number of prototypes were pre-ordered, which proved that the idea had the potential of being sold commercially. The interdisciplinary partnership made students work together better and understand the significance of using different skills in entrepreneurship. The project made

students perceive that entrepreneurship is a process, it needs to be tried, to be subjected to feedback and to be improved continuously.

The CEO Forum feedback has turned into a valuable learning experience, and has underlined the necessity of a better understanding of the market. Students understood that any product should serve a specific purpose, have a specific audience and a specific value proposition. They had the understanding of the value of polishing prototypes and integrating the views of stakeholders to ensure that products are more competitive.

The project helped to assert that entrepreneurship is learnable and practicable by engaging in practical activities, particularly among students who do not belong to the traditional business fields. It has showed that creativity has to be supported by strategic thinking, cost analysis, and customer insight. The experience of Curato Baskets can teach the student to think more maturely and realistically about any future entrepreneurial endeavors.

### **Case Questions**

1. What is the central strategic issue faced by Curato Baskets, and how did it emerge?
2. How did pricing inconsistencies influence customer perception of the product?
3. Why is market segmentation essential for products such as Curato Baskets?
4. How could the design and packaging be improved to match customer expectations?
5. What does the Curato Baskets project reveal about the difference between creative confidence and actual market readiness?