

# Hemancipation in Chicago Serving 'Unmated' Male Professionals

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The mission of *Dvorak's MindMeld* is to offer stimulating business-building ideas to aspiring technology entrepreneurs. These ideas reflect the views of successful entrepreneurs and the investors who back them. They are always tough-minded, usually provocative and occasionally terrifying.

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CHICAGO – When some folks look at the world, they see only problems. Consider this jaundiced view:

“The most threatened group in human societies is the unmated male. He is more likely to wind up in prison, an asylum or dead than his mated counterpart. He is less likely to be promoted at work and is considered a poor credit risk.”<sup>1</sup>

From this point of view, single men are best avoided, jailed or mourned. Still, many entrepreneurs have built successful businesses serving them. How did they see things differently? How did they spot opportunities where others only saw problems? What lessons do they offer aspiring technology entrepreneurs?

For some answers, let's look at the unfolding example of Akilah Kamaria and her Chicago-based company [Hemancipation](#). Founded less than a year ago, the company provides lifestyle management services for “unmated” men and already has paying customers and prospective investors. Her entrepreneurial saga is instructive.

As a professional woman, Kamaria's world was filled with other professionals. Being a keen observer, she saw that the lifestyles of many single professionals were amazingly unsatisfying particularly in light of what they could certainly afford.

These folks were unhappy and frustrated because satisfying lifestyles don't just happen. They have to be planned, created, nurtured and updated. Single professionals, though, have little free time or help in creating these lifestyles. Kamaria concluded that there was a nascent business opportunity helping single men improve their lifestyles and it could potentially be a huge market.

With this view of her world, Kamaria was starting to do what every smart entrepreneur does first: identify a target market composed of potential customers who share a deep pain. Fortunately, she was savvy enough to realize that huge market was also so diverse that she couldn't possibly capture it with a focused strategy.

She knew she needed to segment those needy souls down to a much narrower target.

After a great deal more research, Kamaria began homing in on a target market of single, upscale, urban and male professionals who aspired to live satisfyingly upscale lifestyles. Not only was this target more manageable but Kamaria and her partner, Nancie Walsh, narrowed their niche further by identifying industry verticals wherein the professionals would be more eager for help and thus become early adopters of their services.

Now that they had a clear market niche, Kamaria and Walsh set about assembling an offering of lifestyle management services.

Among the great variety of lifestyle choices, they had to find those that would especially appeal to their target

customers and could be easily orchestrated, customized, delivered and enjoyed. In entrepreneurial parlance, they had to assemble services that their target customers would consider “must-have services”.

While their scope of services is still evolving, it currently ranges from routine daily shopping to more exotic services such as lifestyle consulting, personal shopping, image consulting, organizing a weekend getaway, interior design and decorating. Hemancipation delivers these services with a small team of experienced professionals and a network of proven service provider partners.

Hemancipation’s progress so far is a classic illustration of how to create a great business opportunity: identify a specific class of customers who all suffer from the same pain and offer them a must-have solution to that pain. Though the company has a long way yet to go, having paying customers in less than a year is a major achievement.

Is the secret to entrepreneurial success seeing the world differently and seeing opportunities where others see only problems? In truth, no. After all, creative people in general see the world differently, too, and successful military leaders can spot opportunities where others see only problems.

Seeing the world differently is merely the first step for an entrepreneur. Because potential customers, their pains and solutions come in infinite varieties, getting things right usually depends primarily on an entrepreneur’s talent, hard work and luck.

That infinite variety of potential market niches is the perfect fodder for rare, sudden, unexpected – and sometimes famous – business successes and for spotting an opportunity before anyone else. Everyone knows the famous ones – like eBay, Yahoo! and Starbucks – because (like Hemancipation) no special technical knowledge is required to understand or enjoy them.

In fact, those famous ones usually evoke pangs of envy in most of us because in hindsight the pain and solution was so obvious, so seemingly simple and so right in front of us that we moan: “Why didn’t I think of that?” Of course, the reason we didn’t think of any of them is because – doggone it – we weren’t good enough, smart enough or lucky enough.

You go, girls.

<sup>1</sup> Penned by angry feminist Germaine Greer.

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