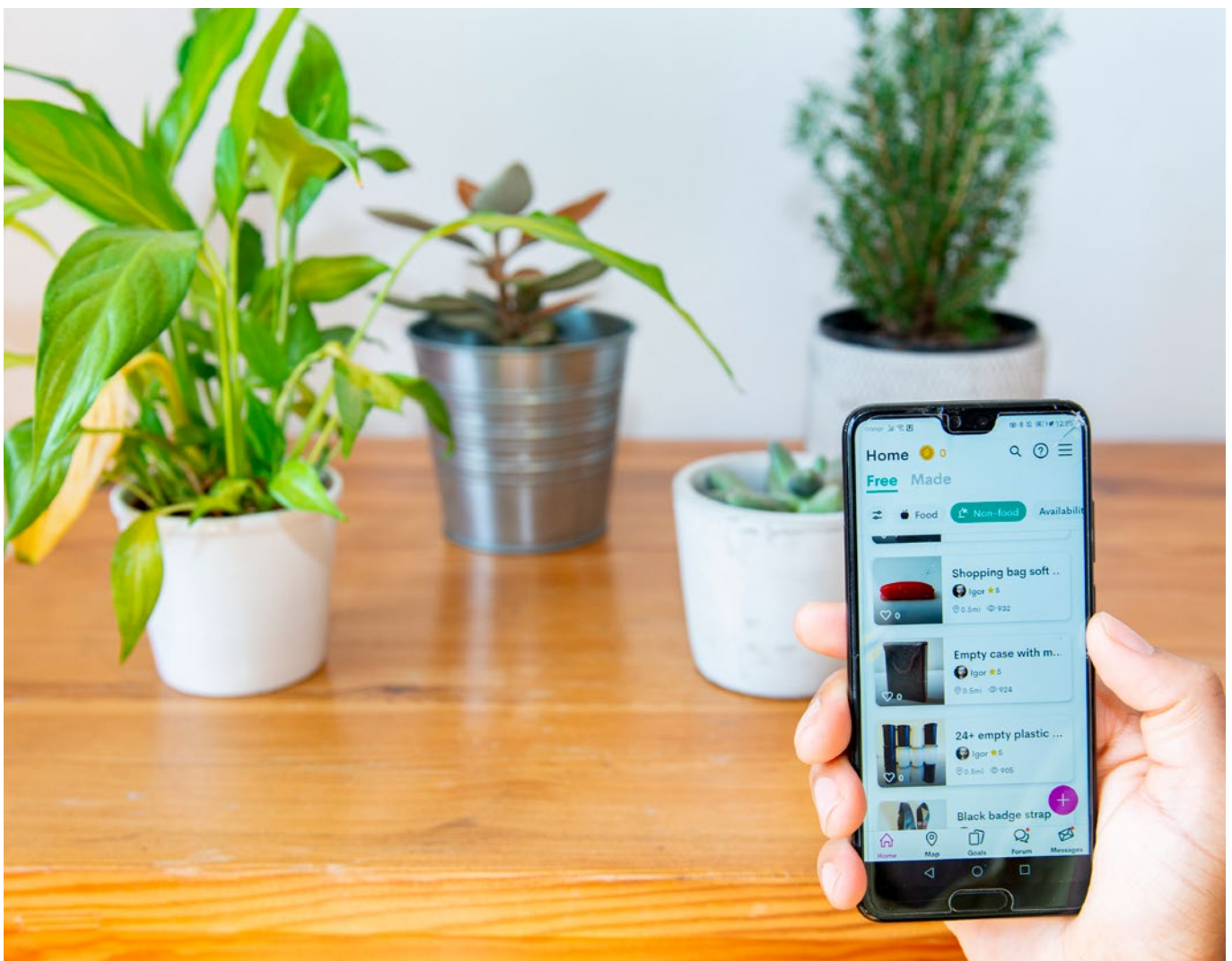# *OLIO*

The new business paradigm

OLIO is a mobile app designed to reduce food waste by facilitating food sharing. It connects people with each other and volunteers with local businesses so that surplus food can be shared, not thrown away. We spoke to Tessa Clarke, one of OLIO's co-founders.

Where did OLIO first come from?

I had a lightbulb moment six years ago when moving from Switzerland back to the UK. I had food that we couldn't use before I moved but hated the idea of throwing it away; I grew up on a farm, so I know how much hard work goes into producing food. I tried to find someone to give it to but failed so I began to think about how I could make sharing food possible.

Over <u>one-third of food produced</u> for human consumption goes to waste. This is worth around US $1 trillion – more than enough to feed the 800 million people who go to bed hungry every night. If food waste were a country, it would be the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions after the USA and China. The problem is vast and OLIO was built to help solve it.

How do you view design in the process of building OLIO?

I'm not from the world of design and held what is probably a very common misconception – that design is all about aesthetics. When I looked into it, I realised that design is exactly what we are doing: being relentlessly creative, persistent and experimental when trying to solve a problem. We innovate, but in a systematic way, constantly testing, measuring and learning.

"The old business models are no longer fit for purpose. Our current economic system is based on a linear, wasteful model of consumption whereby we extract resources from the planet, use them for five per cent of their life, toss them into landfill, and then rinse, wash and repeat. In many ways this means that the retail industry today is in fact in the landfill industry."

Do you think a design-based approach has been important for productivity?

I think a lot of people would have jumped straight into building an app. But for us, the design process was an essential prerequisite to building. We had a core hypothesis that we had to test first: that people would share food with a stranger. We needed to prove that before we could invest our life savings into building an app that quite possibly nobody would want. We ran a proof of concept using a Whatsapp group. Making sure to test your hypotheses via an MVP [minimal viable product] saves time and money in the long run, which is especially critical when you don't have much access to capital. We've also had to think a lot about the user experience and behavioural psychology, as we couldn't just create something and expect people to use it.

In what way is the OLIO business model innovative?

There are several ways! The first is that our core growth engine is our volunteers, specifically our 50,000 Ambassadors who are spreading the word about OLIO in their local communities, and our 20,000 Food Waste Heroes who are collecting and redistributing unsold food from local businesses. The second is the way in which we're melding profit with purpose – OLIO's purpose isn't a retrospective add-on, it's fundamental to why we exist, and we're determined to prove that profit with purpose will be the next paradigm for all successful businesses.

"In the desire to scale, it can be really easy to jump straight into automation and automate for the wrong thing. We always do our work manually first to understand what the requirements really are, so that we then scope and build properly."