

Business Models of Multi-Sided Platforms

A.3.4

Aim of the Study

To develop the ideal business model for the FoodCycle.ai platform, an extensive study was conducted on comparable B2B platform providers across Europe. The primary objective was to systematically analyse existing business models, identify best practices, and evaluate their applicability. Based on these insights, a well-informed decision could be made regarding the most suitable model for the platform, taking into account the specific constraints and conditions of the project.



Sample Description

Between September 2024 and January 2025, the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg conducted an interview series with multi-sided platforms that trade food waste and food byproducts. The platforms all originated from Central Europe. Of the 50 requested interviews, 16 CEOs and/or co-founders of the respective platforms were interviewed, resulting in over 12 hours (735 minutes) of recorded interview material. The respondents were mostly male (82,4 %). The company sizes varied considerably from owner-led to multinational organisations.

Time Frame

09/24 - 01/25

50

interviews
requested

16

interviews
conducted

735

minutes
transcribed

number of employees

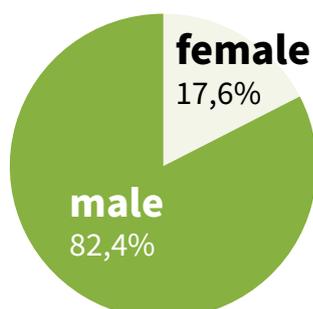
1-1250

founded in

Central Europe

Roles

mostly CEOs &
(Co-) Founders



Results I

Dimension	2nd order theme	1st order concept
Market Structure & Logic	Revenue Model	Performance-linked pricing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commission-based model - No fixed or hidden fees - Low risk - Low entry threshold
		Fixed subscription fees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual participation fee - No per-transaction costs - Requires upfront financial commitment - Might be difficult to get companies on board
		Hybrid pricing model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subscription + success fee - Mix of recurring and performance-based components
	Target Groups	Industrial-scale sourcing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - large industrial producers - provide high-volume material flows
		Multi-sector application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Broad spectrum - Not economically feasible for very small entities
Value Creation & Impact	Social Value Proposition	Social impact goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on environmental good & problem awareness - Mission-driven rather than purely profit-oriented - Ethical motivation around waste reduction
	Data-driven Transparency	Precise transaction data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exact tracking of product volumes - Supports sustainability reporting
		Data Exposure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enables impact communication - Enhances transparency
	Offerings & Capabilities	Logistics Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decentralized user-organized logistics system - Centralised partnership systems
		Flexibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customizable trade specifications (quality, pickup, etc.) - Scalable packaging and portioning - Adaptability to customer needs

Results II

Dimension	2nd order theme	1st order concept
Value Creation & Digital Infrastructure	Platform Interaction & Benefits	Company Matching - Direct link between providers and recipients - Replaces manual brokers
		Process automatisation & digitalisation - Automated transactions and reporting - Technology lowers transaction costs - Modernisation of outdated practices
	Platform Architecture	Desire for Integrated Solutions - Centralized management of diverse material types - Few interfaces required - Embedding of verification tools

Summary

The interview data reveals a **diverse set of business models** and operational practices among digital platforms addressing food waste and food surplus. Most of our interviewed platforms adopt a commission-based revenue model, often complemented by subscription fees, aiming to balance accessibility with sustainability. The **emphasis on low-risk**, low-barrier entry points is evident, especially for sellers, while hybrid pricing models attempt to stabilize revenues and align incentives. In terms of target groups, platforms primarily serve **industrial-scale** food producers and institutional buyers, with some extending into multi-sector applications, though economic viability often excludes small entities.

Platforms generate value beyond economic transactions by prioritizing social and environmental impact, framing themselves as **mission-driven** ventures. They further differentiate through **data-driven transparency**, enabling precise tracking and impact reporting, which enhances credibility and supports clients' sustainability narratives. Regarding logistics and operational flexibility, solutions range from decentralised, user-organised transport to scalable packaging and customisable trade terms, illustrating adaptability to diverse client needs.

Finally, digital infrastructure and architecture play a central role: Platforms facilitate automated processes, reduce transaction costs, and replace manual brokers, while also aspiring to offer integrated, **centralised solutions** that streamline regulatory compliance and data management. Collectively, these results depict platforms not just as marketplaces, but as **digital enablers of circular economy principles**.

Based on these insights, a well-informed decision could be made regarding the most suitable model for the platform, taking into account the specific constraints and conditions of the project.