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Agility in high growth tech

50 | Technology Fast 50
2020 UK

Contents

Foreword

The Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 programme recognises and celebrates the achievements of the fastest-growing technology businesses in the UK. We are proud to champion this competition, and our commitment to it remains as strong as ever.

I would like to congratulate each and every one of this year's winners on their outstanding performance. Cumulative revenues of over £2.2bn in the most recent financial year and employment of over 10,400 staff, including over 2,000 dedicated to R&D, highlight the great contribution that the Fast 50 winners make towards the UK's technology sector. Financial performance has been outstanding across the winners, with average revenue growth of 2,898 per cent over the last three years.

We are delighted to have winners from all across the UK, with special congratulations to the overall winner DivideBuy, the Newcastle-under-Lyme-based interest-free credit provider, who achieved a staggering revenue growth of 20,733 per cent over the last three years. It continues to be a leading innovator within the sector, as demonstrated earlier this year with the launch of a unique soft search credit check function that lets customers know whether they will be approved for interest-free credit purchases without affecting their credit score.

In this 23rd edition of the programme, we take a deeper look at the theme of agility, and the Fast 50's ability to quickly make and execute decisions. As global markets and consumers continue to evolve, the Fast 50 have demonstrated their ability to respond and position themselves for success. This year has been, and continues to be, particularly challenging, with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting the livelihoods of consumers and businesses globally. The Fast 50 have demonstrated agility in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where they have implemented changes to products, service, and ways of working rapidly and successfully. We consider the impact of these changes and their permanence. Our findings derive from over 100 survey responses, one-to-one interviews with CEOs and insights from the wider tech ecosystem. We would like to thank all of them for their support and participation.

I hope you will enjoy the findings of this report and will join me in celebrating the success of this year's winners. These organisations are shaping the technology landscape and look set to continue being some of the UK's most exciting and inspiring companies in the years to come.

The growth rates set out in this report, and the stories behind them, are an inspiration and tell a tale of hard work, commitment and in some cases a bit of good fortune. While it is right to celebrate the success of these companies and the pioneers behind them, we do so in the knowledge that there are parts of the economy (as there are parts of the UK) that are facing more troubling times. COVID-19 has caused a level of upheaval we have not seen before. With the pandemic rearing its head again, and Brexit only weeks away, we face a long and challenging winter.

We look ahead to the Spring with hope that things are better. And in the meantime we will plan, adapt, respond and execute in order to make them so.

Wishing you all a safe path to Christmas and the New Year.

Duncan Down

Duncan Down
Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 Programme Lead

Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 winners 2020

Rank	Company	Growth	Region	Sector
1	DivideBuy	20,733%	North West	Fintech
2	Bulb	14,288%	London	EnvironmentalTech
3	Popsa	10,576%	London	Software
4	Revolut	6,786%	London	Fintech
5	iProov	6,351%	London	Software
6	Landbay	5,520%	London	Fintech
7	Moneybox	5,270%	London	Fintech
8	Patch	4,499%	London	MediaEnt
9	Goodlord	3,678%	London	Communications
10	Beamery	3,541%	London	Software
11	VoCoVo	3,217%	South West and Wales	Communications
12	Velocity Mobile Limited	3,107%	London	MediaEnt
13	Cloudhouse	3,087%	London	Software
14	WhiteHat	2,896%	London	Software
15	Gophr Ltd	2,208%	London	Software
16	Chattermill	2,201%	London	Software
17	Lendable	2,200%	London	Fintech
18	Privitar	2,178%	London	Software
19	Cutover	2,027%	London	Software
20	Construct	1,978%	London	MediaEnt
21	Elvie	1,939%	London	HealthCare
22	Thunderhead	1,933%	London	Software
23	MyWorkpapers	1,891%	London	Software
24	Qmee Limited	1,693%	South East	Software
25	Seeker Digital	1,683%	South West and Wales	MediaEnt

Rank	Company	Growth	Region	Sector
26	Cera	1,678%	London	HealthCare
27	Thriva	1,600%	London	HealthCare
28	Trint	1,571%	London	Software
29	Plentific	1,570%	London	Software
30	Dayshape	1,539%	Scotland	Software
31	Paddle	1,408%	London	Software
32	Vidsy	1,402%	London	MediaEnt
33	Omnisend	1,392%	London	Software
34	Elder	1,348%	London	HealthCare
35	Quantexa Ltd	1,297%	London	Software
36	Yoyo Wallet Limited	1,291%	London	Fintech
37	OakNorth	1,261%	London	Fintech
38	Divido	1,250%	London	Fintech
39	OXGENE	1,062%	South East	HealthCare
40	ComplyAdvantage	1,051%	London	Fintech
41	CrowdProperty	1,008%	Midlands	Fintech
42	Blue Prism	947%	North West	Software
43	Matillion	922%	North West	Software
44	Moteefe	915%	London	MediaEnt
45	Arctic Shores	892%	North West	Software
46	LoyaltyLion	831%	London	Software
47	Phrasee	825%	London	Software
48	Sofar Sounds	816%	London	MediaEnt
49	LendingCrowd	779%	Scotland	Fintech
50	Lending Works	740%	London	Fintech

Note: Three-year growth rate = (revenue in year four – revenue in year one) / revenue in year one


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Tech stays strong in changing times

Since our last report, the UK has faced a period of great change, shaped by factors including Brexit negotiations, shifting consumer behaviours, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts have been widespread, creating a level of uncertainty for businesses and consumers. Against this backdrop, the performance of the UK technology sector has been relatively robust, demonstrating agility to adapt to these challenging dynamics. The Fast 50 are at the forefront of this sector, having delivered an inspiring average revenue growth rate of 2,898 per cent over the past three years, with £2.2bn overall revenue in the last financial year.

The UK is going through a period of unprecedented change. After the sharpest contraction in activity in more than a century, there is significant uncertainty around the strength and timing of the return to pre-pandemic levels of outputs. According to the Q3 2020 Deloitte CFO survey, UK businesses have pushed back the timing for a full recovery, with more than 60 per cent expecting demand to remain below pre-pandemic levels, until the second half of next year or beyond. In this environment, expansion has largely taken a back seat. Business transformation is prevalent with a strong focus on accelerating digital capabilities, automation and streamlining to strengthen businesses and drive productivity.

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Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK technology sector was flourishing, with strong growth attracting significant investment. Since the start of the pandemic, business decline and social restrictions have slowed the economy, challenging supply chains and limiting investment, and the technology industry has not been immune to this[i]. Despite this, the sector has proven to be comparatively robust, particularly in HealthTech, EdTech and Cyber, with companies responding to the disruption and capitalising on digital acceleration.

Within the technology sector, the 2020 Fast 50 winners have delivered outstanding growth, achieving an average three-year growth rate of 2,898 per cent. They employ over 10,400 people, including 2,000 in R&D functions, and generated total revenues of over £2.2bn in the last financial year.

This year's Fast 50 winner is DivideBuy, the interest-free credit provider based in Newcastle-under-Lyme. It deserves special congratulations having moved up from third place last year to claim the top position, with a revenue growth rate of 20,733 per cent over the past four years of financial performance.

FinTech businesses, including DivideBuy, make up 24 per cent of the overall Fast 50 winners this year, compared to 30 per cent in the 2019 edition. This includes four of the top 10 businesses, including last year's winner Revolut, the digital alternative to established banking institutions (4th place overall, three-year growth rate of 6,786 per cent). The others in the top 10 are Landbay Partners, the specialist buy-to-let mortgage lender (6th place overall, three-year growth rate of 5,520 per cent), and Moneybox, the savings and investment company (7th overall, three-year growth rate of 5,270 per cent).

Figure 1. UK Technology Fast 50 winners; headline statistics, 2020

Winning three-year growth rate
20,733%

Average three-year growth rate
2,898%

Total revenues generated
£2.2bn

Total employees
10,400

Software remains the leading sector, accounting for 46 per cent of all winners. Popsa, the photobook specialist, leads, ranking third overall with a revenue growth rate of 10,576 per cent. iProov, the biometric authentication technology company, also places in the top 10 with a revenue growth rate of 6,351 per cent (5th place overall).

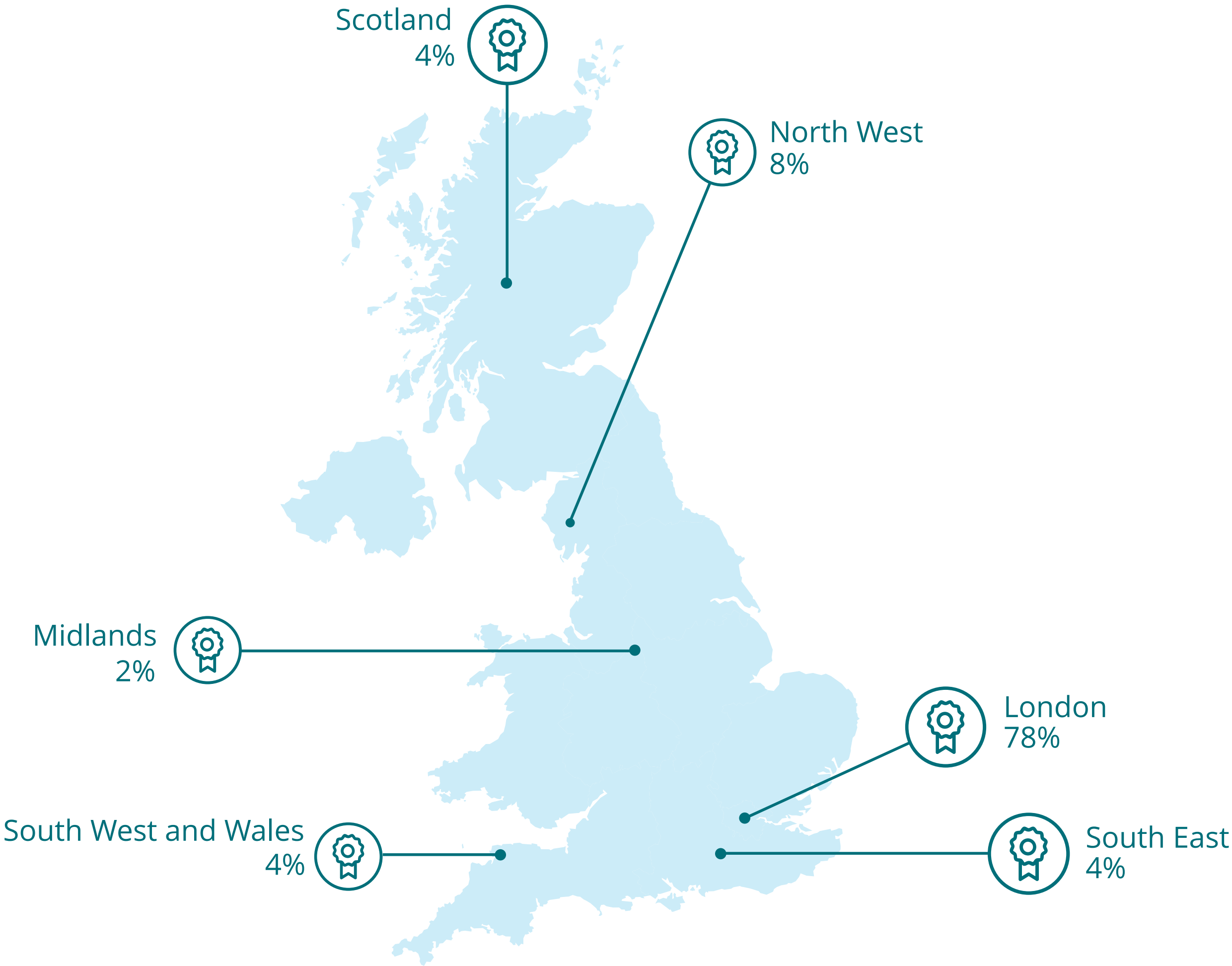
Geographically, London continues to dominate as the leading region, with 78 per cent of all winners headquartered in the capital, including nine of the top 10 winners. Leading the London cohort, and in second place overall, is Bulb Energy, the renewable energy specialist, which achieved a three-year growth rate of 14,288 per cent. Access to a strong talent pool and the proximity of financial institutions and investors continue to support the role of the capital in the scale-up landscape.

Outside of London, stand-out performances across the other regions include the overall winner DivideBuy, VoCoVo, the communications specialist (11th place overall, three-year growth rate of 3,217, South West and Wales winner) and Qmee, the rewards and surveys provider (24th place overall, three-year growth rate of 1,693 per cent, South East winner). Dayshape, the planning tool for professional services (30th place overall, three-year growth rate of 1,539 per cent, Scotland winner) is one of two winners from Scotland, and CrowdProperty, the property project finance specialist, heads up the Midlands region (41st overall, three-year growth rate of 1,008 per cent).

In this, the 23rd edition of the programme, we take a deeper look at the theme of agility, and how the Fast 50's ability to make and execute decisions has fuelled their impressive performance. As global markets and consumers change, the Fast 50 have demonstrated their resilience and ability to position themselves for success. This is evident in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where they implemented alterations to products, service, and ways of working rapidly and successfully. We acknowledge the term agility is commonly used to reference a specific approach to software development. However, for the purpose of this report we examine agility as the ability for companies to rapidly respond to change in the development of strategy, business action and empowerment of their people.

We should also acknowledge that the growth rates and financial performance for the Fast 50 considered in this report aren't reflective of the impact of COVID-19. The impact of these actions will be evident in next year's results and it will be interesting to examine this in a following edition.

Figure 2. UK Technology Fast 50 winners by region, 2020



● Dots show the location of 2020 Fast 50 winners

Note: Entrants from Northern Ireland could select whether to enter the UK or Ireland editions of the Technology Fast 50.

Adjusting strategic horizons

Business strategy is at the core of the Fast 50 performance; respondents identified strategy as the key factor to both their incredible historical growth and expected future achievements. In the last three years, many of these strategies have evolved, temporarily or permanently, as global markets and consumer behaviours have changed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, over half of the respondents decided to adapt to focus on a shorter-term horizon for their strategy.

In this section, we consider the importance of business strategy to the Fast 50, the time horizon it is set over, and the agility shown to adapt that strategy. As highlighted previously, we have defined agility as the ability for a company to respond to change.

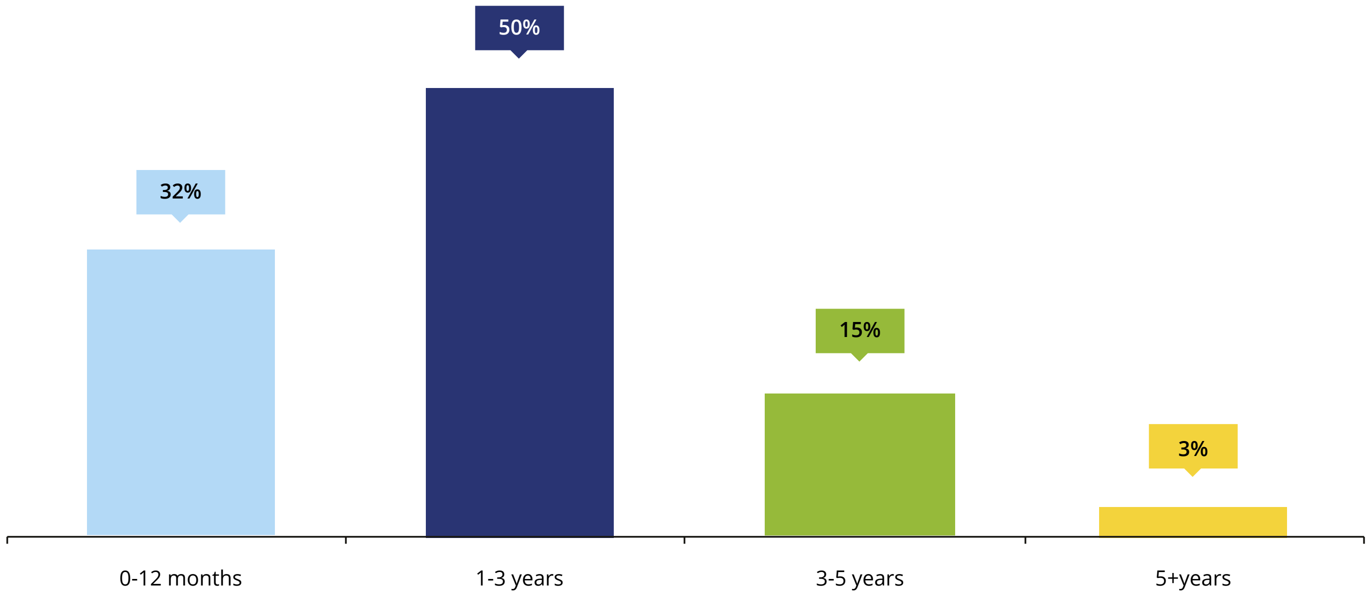
A clear and well-executed business strategy is central to the success of any high-performing company, and the Fast 50 is no exception. In this year's survey, respondents identified it as the key factor driving their resilient performance historically, ahead of customer relationships and product innovation. A strong strategy sets a company apart, through its choices regarding ambition, where it plays in the market, how it wins, its capabilities and how it operates.

Companies set their strategy with consideration given to different time horizons; these frame market scenarios, position consumer trends, and guide investment decisions. Looking at the Fast 50 entrants, half consider 'one to three years' the key horizon, 32 per cent of entrants value a shorter time horizon, up to a year, with the remaining 18 per cent setting strategy for beyond three years (Figure 3). Reasons for differing time horizons may include the experience and relative maturity of the business and leadership team, the pace of change in the market, and the importance of achieving quarterly forecasts. Our analysis shows that the primary source of funding (i.e. self-generated vs. external equity investment) does not materially affect the time horizons used to set strategy.

In comparison to smaller organisations, market studies suggest larger organisations veer away from these shorter term horizons when setting strategy. Some reasons cited are that smaller organisations adopt more agile and lean approaches (e.g. quickly testing and validating ideas and concepts) and have fewer management layers. They believe they are well-positioned to action change with shorter approval processes for implementing new initiatives[ii].

Figure 3 – Breakdown of time horizons used to set strategy

Question: *"When you set your strategy pre-COVID-19, what time horizon did this typically cover?"*



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

Reacting to change: A shift to shorter-term time horizons

A successful strategy may need to evolve, permanently or temporarily, due to market changes. The pandemic has created uncertainty and brought a host of new requirements for how businesses operate and serve customers.

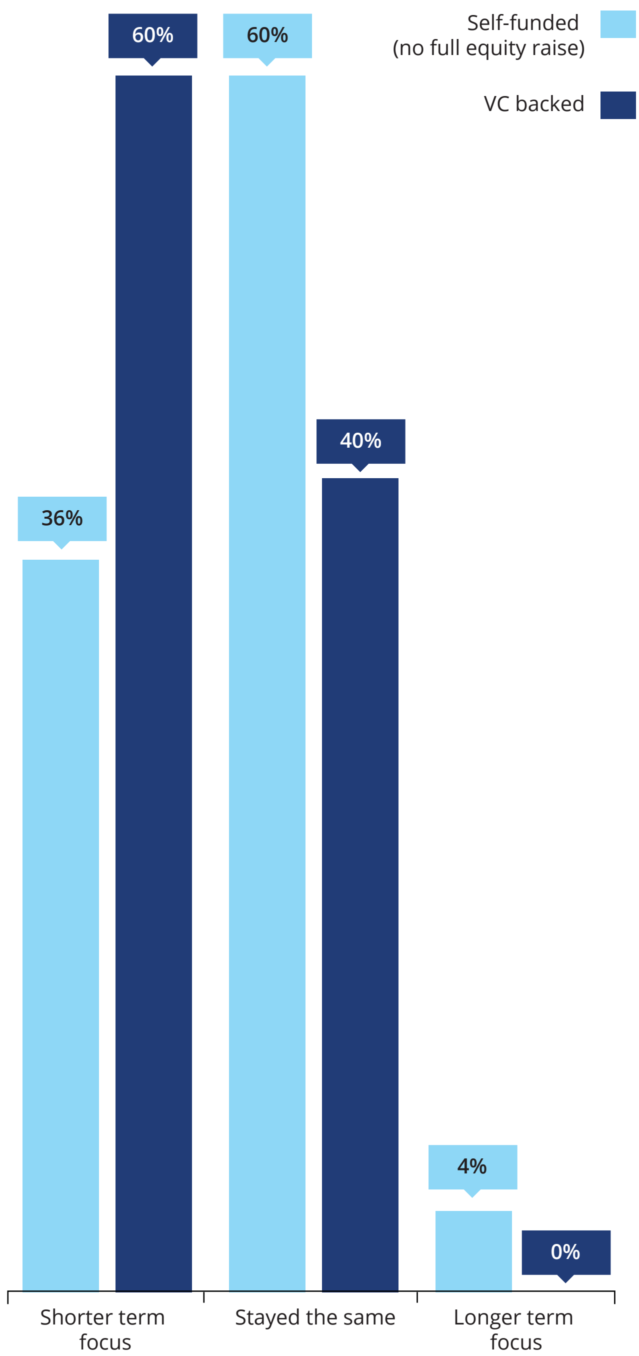
Many of the respondents quickly adapted their strategy-setting horizons in response to the pandemic, with over half (56 per cent) stating that they reduced theirs. Liam Houghton, CEO of the photobook specialist, Popsa (3rd place overall, three-year growth rate of 10,576 per cent), remarks "In response to the pandemic, we placed an even greater emphasis on being agile. We have been able to react quickly to changing circumstances by analysing our data in real-time and then rapidly adapting our messaging and strategy in each market as restrictions are imposed and relaxed".

Increased barriers (primarily organisational, operational and technological ones) within larger organisations may mean adopting this level of change is more challenging. However, they can look to adopt more streamlined processes that enable quicker decision-making and execution during times of exceptional change, highlighted in the Deloitte's report on [Unlocking the Flexible Organisation][iii]. This can also be reflected in how the role of the CEO and divisional leads evolve to better enable decision-making under these circumstances.

Differences in adjusting time horizons exist between Fast 50 companies primarily self-funded and those that are primarily Venture Capital (VC) backed. 60 per cent of companies that were primarily funded through VC investment reduced their strategy-setting time horizons, compared to 36 per cent of companies who were self-funded (Figure 4). One potential reason is that self-funded companies have greater autonomy to update annual performance targets without affecting their long-term funding trajectory. In addition to this, self-funded companies are primarily reliant on internal capital, so they have less pressure to show immediate returns to meet external investors' expectations[iv].

Figure 4 – Change in time horizons used to set strategy in response to COVID-19 pandemic

Question: *"Has business focus shifted to prioritise different time horizons in response to COVID-19?"*



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

What will be fascinating to see over the next year is how this slight divergence in strategy plays out. Will the longer term view help drive competitive advantage and longer-term success, and will the (temporary) reduction in time horizon implemented by VC backed companies help keep funders on board through the pandemic and beyond?

Of the Fast 50 companies that developed shorter-term strategies, only 5 per cent expect this change to be permanent (Figure 5). The majority expect this to be a temporary, direct response to the pandemic. They expect their behaviours and processes around setting strategy prior to the pandemic to remain resilient and ultimately return. In conversations with the CEOs, they highlighted the importance of having both a well-defined strategy and the ability to evolve.

In the following sections, we focus on the impact of agility within these fast-growing businesses. We first consider how they have used agility to help them succeed both historically and in responding to the pandemic through their Business Actions and Workforce measures.

Figure 5 – Expectation around longevity for reduced time horizons to set strategy

Question: "*Do you think your time horizon change for strategy setting will be permanent?*" *Asked to those who changed time horizon*

Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

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Liam Houghton,
CEO of **Popsa**

[1] A company's primary funding source is defined as: The main source of funding a company has used over the last 5 years (as selected by respondents).

Developing an agile workforce

Workforce is a core driver of business performance and Fast 50 respondents have continued to evolve their workforce makeup and structure. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the Fast 50 successfully executed a move to a fully remote-working model, likely fuelled by the agility already embedded in the business and availability of remote-working technology. In addition, over half added more flexible working or part-time solutions for their employees. The balance between home working and office working is a topic being considered. In our discussion with CEOs, the benefits of home-working are appreciated, whilst there is a recognition of how office working can support in-person collaboration and team culture.

In this section, we consider the importance of talent to the Fast 50, the ways of working that increase agility, and how they have evolved in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Echoing the findings in previous editions of the Fast 50 report, this year's respondents place talent at the centre of their success. The team supporting the CEO to build and run these organisations bring a range of ever-evolving skills, from strategy to marketing, to sales and finance. As explored in previous editions, a diverse and inclusive talent base, with different cultures, skills and experiences brings a number of benefits to organisations, including driving product development and easing market expansion.

Many of the Fast 50 use flexible ways of working to set up their workforce for success, with 45 per cent offering three to five days of remote-working to at least a fifth of their workforce before the pandemic. They also offer flexible working, allowing employees to adopt different, more tailored work patterns. A wider market survey found that 90 per cent of employees consider a flexible working policy a key motivator of their productivity[v]. Employees cite fewer distractions and shorter breaks as reasons for this and enjoy added perks, such as the flexibility to look after their family.

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Reacting to COVID-19: Transitioning to a fully remote model

On the 16th March 2020, the government advised that all employees should 'work from home' if possible, to curb the rising impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This forced many companies into a fully remote-working model with limited or no planning. Whilst there are many well-documented challenges that companies faced during this transition as highlighted in the Deloitte 2020 Global Human Capital Trends report[vi], our conversations with Fast 50 CEOs surfaced their encouragement in their company's ability to transition into this remote model relatively smoothly.

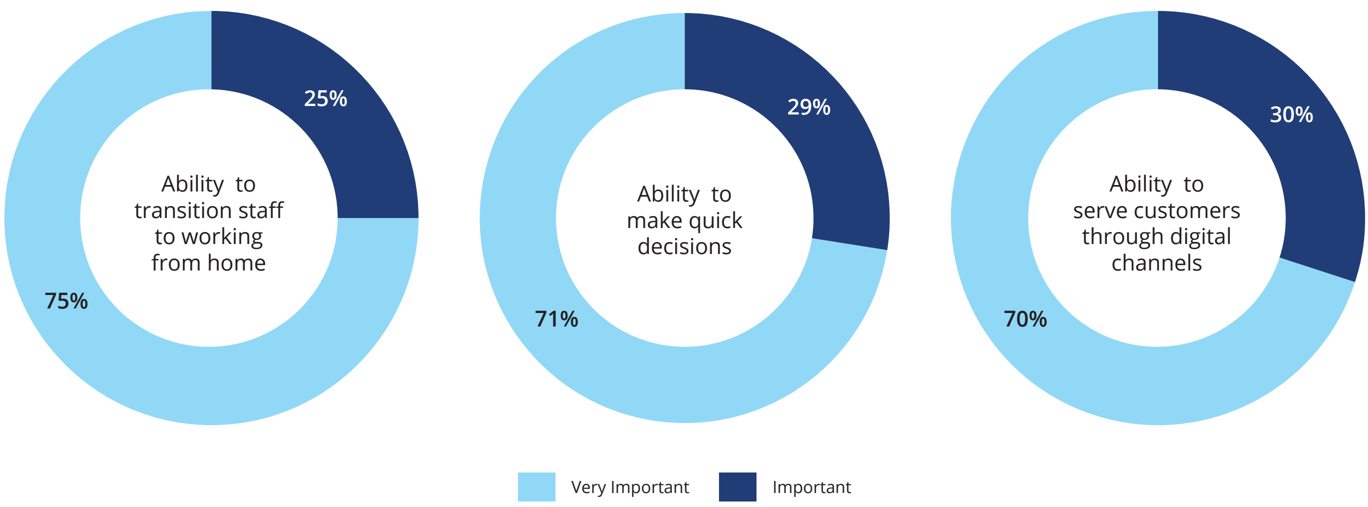
The respondents cited the ability to transition to remote-working as the most important factor that enabled their overall response to the pandemic (Figure 6). Reasons for increased ease of transition included the high level of existing remote-working, and the tools in place to support this – notably the use of virtual software to collaborate and conduct meetings.

The Fast 50 respondents also offered employees additional flexible working options to help with transitioning to a fully remote-working model (see Figure 7). Furthermore, the respondents were quick to offer these changes. 89 per cent launching these initiatives within four weeks of responding to the UK lockdown measures'. Other initiatives to help with the workforce transition cited during our CEO interviews included an increase in internal communication to help keep employees informed, to promote employee wellbeing for remote-working and support team collaboration. An example highlighted by Andrew Bone, CEO of the AI-powered planning partner that boosts business agility and resilience, Dayshape (30th place overall, three-year growth rate of 1,008 per cent, and Scotland's winner), mentioned that "We have used a range of tools to drive internal collaboration, alongside adopting a virtual coffee pairing tool to help sustain our culture and morale".

> “We have used a range of tools to drive internal collaboration, alongside adopting a virtual coffee pairing tool to help sustain culture and moral.”
>
> Andrew Bone,
> CEO of **Dayshape**

Figure 6 – Importance of factor enabling response to COVID-19 pandemic

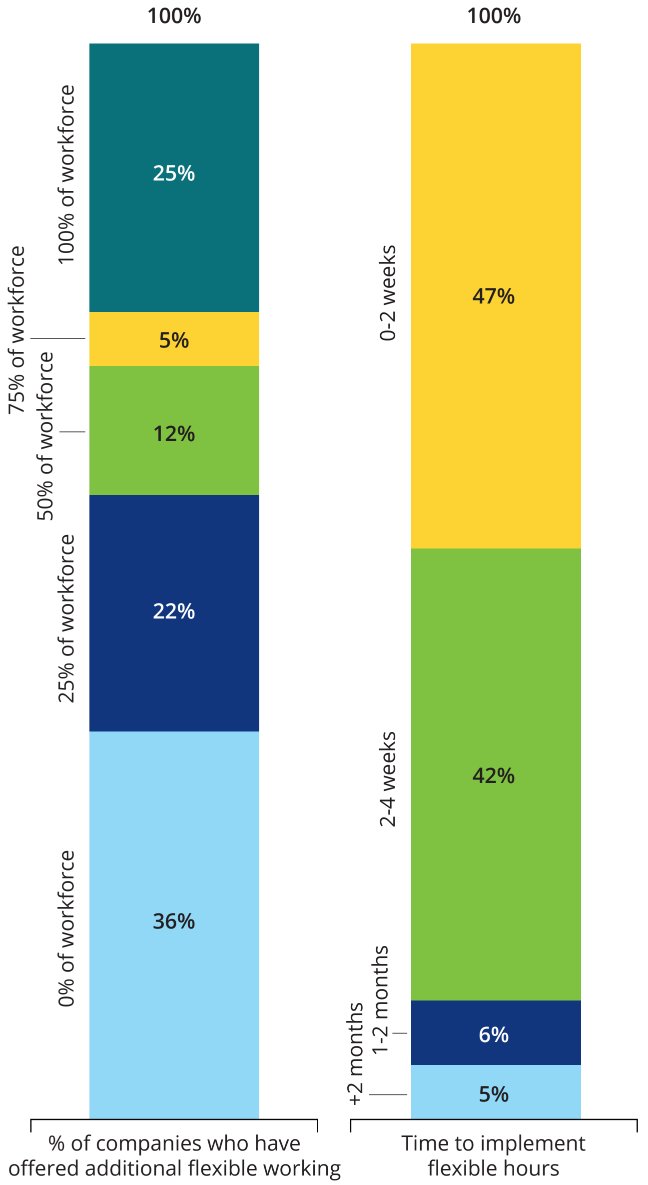
Question: *"How important have the following factors been in enabling your response to the COVID-19 pandemic?"*



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

Figure 7 – Companies that have adopted additional flexible working options in addition to pre-existing agreements

Question: *"In response to the COVID-19 pandemic have you adopted additional flexible working hours (in addition to pre-existing agreements)?"*



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

Optimising for home and the office

Remote-working has potential positive and negative impacts. Market studies suggest it can lead to higher productivity, reduced office space costs, and the ability to access a geographically diverse talent pool. However, market studies indicate this could come at the expense of employee health and wellbeing and work-life balance[vii]. Additionally, remote-working is potentially a more challenging environment to foster collaboration. This collaboration is important to promote culture, build networks within the company, and harness the power of group idea generation and discussion. This was referenced by Mike Bistrow, CEO of funding property projects through peer to peer lending's partner, CrowdProperty (41st place overall, three-year growth rate of 1,008 per cent, Midlands winner), who remarks that "The ability to speak face to face allows you to be nimble, agile and free-thinking in developing and creating new innovative ideas, something that is very difficult to completely replicate in a remote environment".

The anticipation from the Fast 50 respondents is that they will, when permitted, transition back to offering employees access to work in an office environment. Despite this, the expectation is that employees will work remotely for, on average, two and a half days each week, an increase from one and a half days a week before the pandemic.

The pandemic is influencing decisions companies are making in relation to their workforce, work patterns and locations. Many CEOs across our interviews noted the benefits and increased availability of a diverse talent pool given the lack of restrictions to a single office location. It will be great to see how this evolves and if this begins to impact the proportion of scale-ups that are based outside of London, a topic we will look to revisit in later editions.

[2] Respondents were asked to highlight pre-COVID-19 and expected future remote-working levels across the business. Averages analysed for the full set of respondents to calculate the 2.5days remote-working as future expectations.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Agility in action

The Fast 50 demonstrated agility in their response to changing markets. Many implemented alterations to their product/service offering, pricing, business models and/or target market, with the majority successfully doing so within four weeks of hearing about the pandemic. Product/service offering alterations were the most popular, with over half of those who did so expecting the changes to remain going forwards.

In this section, we examine how the Fast 50 have demonstrated agility through business action historically, its importance to long-term success, and how they have adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the underlying themes amongst the respondents has been their resilience, alongside their ability to adapt and thrive as global market conditions and consumer expectations have continued to evolve. This has been evident historically, with one example highlighted by Andrew Bone, CEO of Dayshape (30th place overall, three-year growth rate of 1,008 per cent, Scotland's winner) "Dayshape evolved through a series of iterations from focusing on developing a logistics planning and optimisation tool, to become an AI-powered planning platform for professional services firms".

This ability to adapt is one of many factors alongside strategy, talent, and customer relationships that contributes to the performance of a business and is expected to play a more prominent role now, given the speed at which UK consumer markets are evolving.

This ability to adapt is one of many factors alongside strategy, talent, and customer relationships that contributes to the performance of a business and is expected to play a more prominent role now, given the speed at which UK consumer markets are evolving. Notable changes include the rapid acceleration of digital channels and the shift in consumer preferences. An example of this manifesting itself was highlighted by Jo Balsamo, Chief Marketing Officer at DivideBuy, this year's Fast 50 winner and interest-free credit provider, stating "We saw increased levels of demand as a result of the pandemic, with more individuals purchasing internal and external home furnishings". The speed of change has seen companies benefit, as Zoom announced that profits had increased to £138m in the second quarter of 2020, compared to £4.1m a year ago[viii]. Conversely, many businesses have been negatively impacted, with an estimated 51,498 dissolutions across the UK in March 2020 (a 70 per cent increase from the same period last year)[ix].

[3] Note: The survey asked respondents to identify change across 7 different business areas. 95 per cent of total respondents identified change in at least one area. For the purpose of the analysis in Figure 9, we analyse change identified across a sub-segment of these, four segments in total.

Reacting to change: Altering the offering, pricing and business models

95 per cent of the respondents made at least one change across business areas including: Product/service offering, pricing, business model, target customer base, target market, workforce and supplier payments. In this section we will focus on four of these areas including: 1) Product/Service Offering, 2) Pricing, 3) Business Model and 4) Target Market.

Product/Service offering

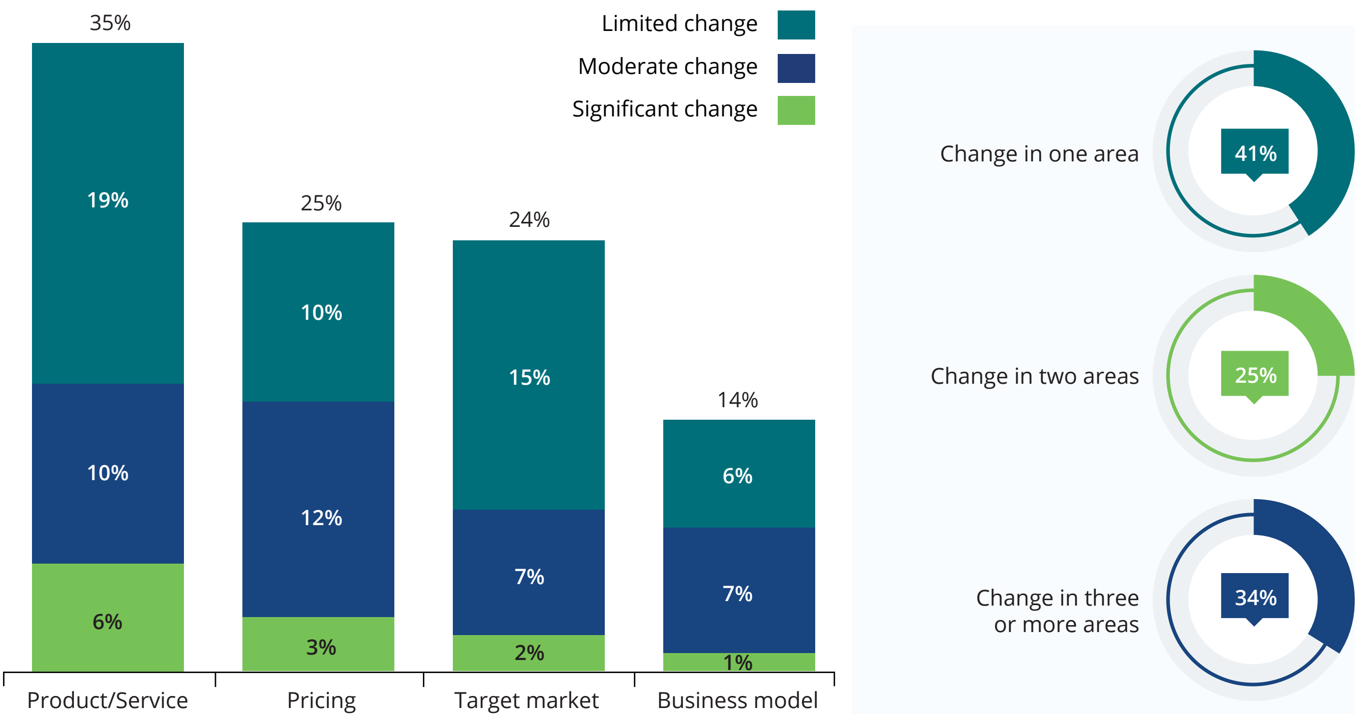
Product/service was one area impacted by COVID-19, with 35 per cent adjusting their range, or focus within it. Respondents indicated that a key benefit of a change to offering was to capitalise on new and emerging customer demand[x].

Rob Gamlin, CEO of the communications specialist, VoCoVo (11th place overall, three-year growth rate of 3,217, South West and Wales winner), said "The pandemic and the introduction of social distancing has increased focus on the self-service part of our business. It's a growing part of customers' demand, and we are reacting to that".

Large organisations should also ensure they monitor and track how their consumer preferences are evolving. Accurately tracking this evolution using digital channels can embed more of a test and learn culture within these companies, enabling them to make informed decisions around innovating their product and service offerings. Alongside this, potentially implementing devolved decision-making practises during extenuating circumstances in an attempt to enable quicker decision-making to drive change.

Figure 8 – Changes made to business areas in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Question: *"In response to COVID-19, what changes have you made to the business?"* [4]



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

[4] Note: The survey asked respondents to identify change across 7 different business areas. 95 per cent of total respondents identified change in at least one area. For the purpose of the analysis in Figure 9, we analyse change identified across a sub-segment of these, four segments in total.

The respondents demonstrated an ability to make changes quickly, with over half (51 per cent) of the companies bringing changes to market within four weeks of the initial pandemic. According to the Deloitte report on [The Heart of Resilient Leadership][xi], prompt action over perfection is key during crises. This is also referenced by a range of businesses, with some seeing significant reductions in customer demand practically overnight due to restrictions put in place because of the pandemic[xii]. Evidence across other businesses include Hexigone, a chemical manufacturing start-up, creating anti-corrosion coatings for buildings. However, its core business was impacted by restrictions enforced by the pandemic and so it shifted fully to the manufacture of sanitiser. The company mentioned that this manoeuvre allowed them to avoid furloughing staff by charging hospitals on a non-profit basis[xix].

Another example includes Cheeky Food Events, a company that offers corporate team-building activities orientated around cooking, which shifted to offering delivery-based catering to remote workforces. It was able to generate demand for this new offering from its current customer base when demand for their original product had significantly fallen[xiv].

Looking to the future, over half (67 per cent) of the companies that have made changes to their offering expect these to be permanent (Figure 9). The reasons for this highlighted in our interviews with the Fast 50 CEOs, include bringing forward updates previously on their longer-term roadmaps, into current production.

Figure 9 – Expected time for product/service changes to remain in place

Question: *"How long do you expect these product/service offering changes to remain in place for?"*

Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

Pricing

Across the respondents, 25 per cent adjusted their pricing in response to COVID-19. There have been examples of pricing adjustments across businesses, many of which are within the restaurant industry. The UK government launched the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme throughout August to support UK restaurants[xv], with a range of restaurants funding additional discounts across September. An example of this is Bill's, rolling out further discounts onto its new set menu[xvi]. Restaurants have implemented additional discounts for select workers, such as Krispy Kreme, offering free doughnuts and hot drinks for NHS and key workers.

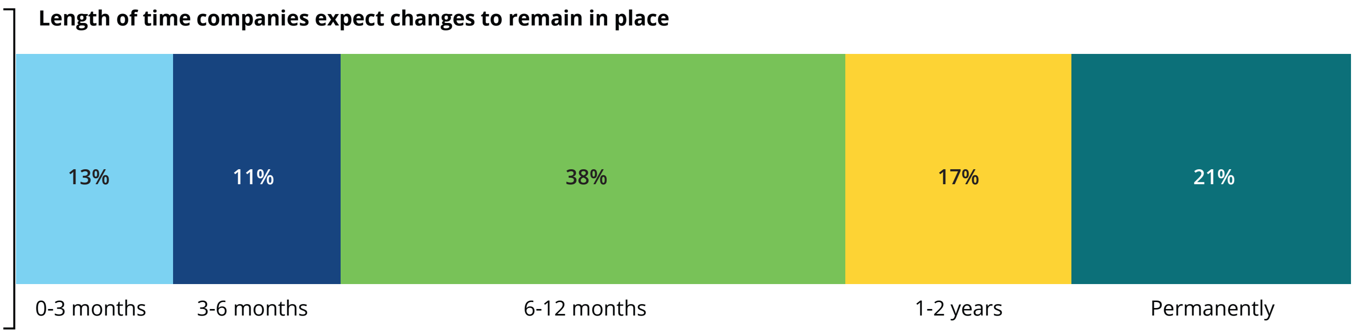
A few of the CEOs described pricing changes as smaller adjustments for specific customers as opposed to wholescale pricing updates across the business. Unlike other changes made during the pandemic, only 21 per cent of respondents anticipate pricing changes to be permanent (Figure 10). These changes have been seen as a short term response to encourage demand for their offerings, however the expectation remains for prices to eventually return to pre-pandemic levels.

Extensions to supplier payments is another action the respondents have implemented in response to the pandemic. 28 per cent confirmed an extension in supplier payments between 15 to 90 days. 77 per cent of the respondents expect these extensions to remain in place for less than 6 months, however it will be interesting to see how this evolves given the rapidly evolving conditions within UK consumer markets.

Unlike other changes made during the pandemic, only 21 per cent of respondents anticipate pricing changes to be permanent. These changes have been seen as a short term response to encourage demand for their offerings, however the expectation remains for prices to eventually return to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 10 – Expected time for pricing changes to remain in place

Question: *"How long do you expect these pricing changes to remain in place for?"*



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

Business Model

A smaller total number of the respondents (14 per cent) initiated changes to their business models in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have defined changes to the business model as any change in how a company aims to make a profit.

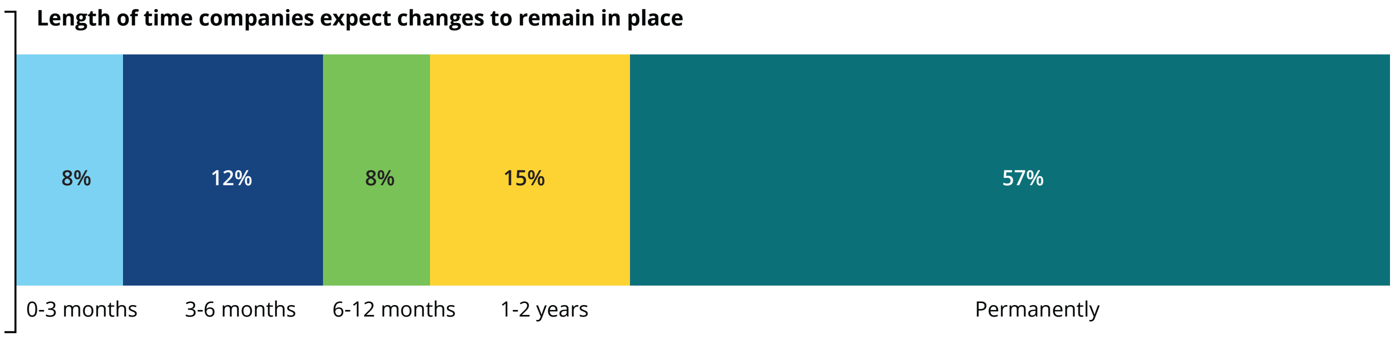
There are some well-publicised examples of companies that have evolved their business model including Pret a Manger. In addition to selling individual cups of coffee, they launched a coffee subscription model in September 2020[xvii], allowing consumers to have unlimited coffees for a monthly fee. This offering saw 16,500 signups in the first day[xviii].

Of the Fast 50 respondents that made changes to their business model, 64 per cent were able to bring these to market within 4 weeks of hearing about the pandemic. Over half of our survey respondents expect these changes to be permanent (Figure 11). During our CEO interviews the financial implications and benefits of being able to implement these changes quickly was referenced as important in their overall response to the pandemic.

Of the Fast 50 respondents that made changes to their business model, 64 per cent were able to bring these to market within 4 weeks of hearing about the pandemic. Over half of our survey respondents expect these changes to be permanent.

Figure 11 – Expected time for business model changes to remain in place

Question: *"How long do you expect these business model changes to remain in place for?"*



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

Target Market

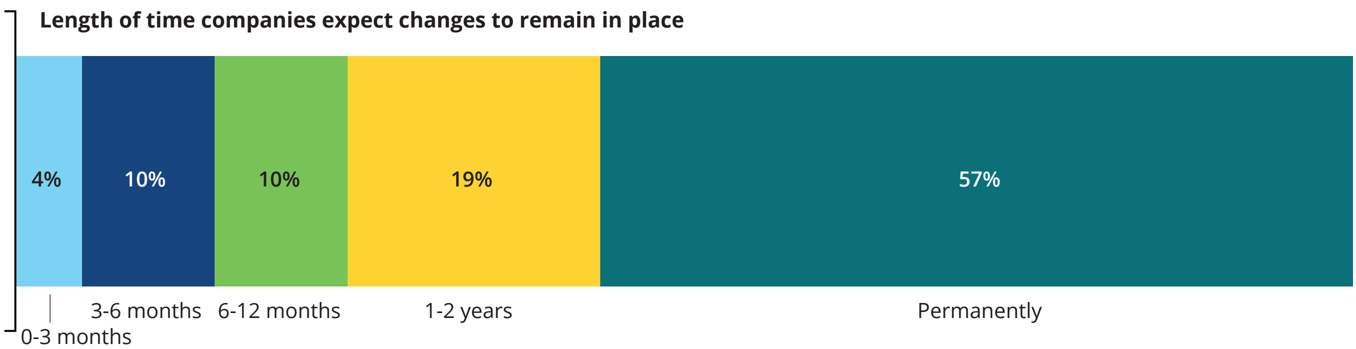
This year saw a truly global makeup of Fast 50 respondents with only 53 per cent generating over half of revenue from within the UK. A quarter of the respondents made changes to their target market in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples from other businesses include Decorte Future Industries, a company that makes wearables that provide real-time, 24/7 measurements of the users' vitals. Before the pandemic, their target consumers had been the Ministry of Defence and the wider public looking for preventative or predictive health tracking. In response to the pandemic, the company changed course and began rapidly developing a more basic version of the product that can remotely detect COVID-19 among the vulnerable and elderly within the care sector[xix].

For the Fast 50 respondents that implemented these changes, 76 per cent successfully did so within one month of hearing about the COVID-19 pandemic and over half (57 per cent) expect these changes to remain in the business on a permanent basis. Some of the reasons cited in our Fast 50 CEO interviews reflected on how markets and consumer habits have changed for the long term and by adjusting their business model, these companies are lining up for success in the future.

For the Fast 50 respondents that implemented these changes, 76 per cent successfully did so within one month of hearing about the COVID-19 pandemic and over half (57 per cent) expect these changes to remain in the business on a permanent basis.

Figure 12 – Expected time for target market changes to remain in place

Question: *"How long do you expect these target market changes to remain in place for?"*



Source: Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 CEO survey, October 2020, Sample: All respondents (102)

Outlook

Agility has been a key enabler for the outstanding growth seen by the Fast 50 cohort over the last three years, and a central driver in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this period of change and uncertainty, our CEOs' outlook on the future remains positive, yet they acknowledge they will need to adapt and innovate quicker than ever before. As these continues to grow, we expect to see them responding to consumer and market developments, positioning themselves for success.

The UK technology sector has been synonymous with agility, experiencing enviable growth in recent years. Increasingly, more companies are embracing lean and agile methodologies, for product testing and development, customer engagement, as well as ways of working. We have seen agility taking the form of large, permanent changes, exemplified by YouTube's evolution from a dating site to a video content platform, and small, temporary adjustments, such as Secret Cinema's "Secret Sofa" weekly home-entertainment series[xxi]. What's important in both cases, is the identification and execution of the change itself.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the UK landscape, and challenged businesses across all sectors and geographies. In response, the Fast 50 made clear changes to how they serve and engage customers, and to their ways of working. It is great to see so many examples from CEOs actively adapting to drive employee wellbeing during the pandemic, including; virtual quizzes and wine tastings, assigning dedicated wellbeing champions and offering a financial contribution to employee home office furniture, to name a few. Enhanced agility in the workforce is here to stay and will likely challenge the very notion of what businesses are in the future from big to small.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to severely test all businesses but the most agile and adaptable will be those that survive and thrive in the future.

The impact of COVID-19 will continue to severely test all businesses, but the most agile and adaptable will be those that survive and thrive in the future. Larger organisations have always admired agility of smaller fast-growing businesses, but post-COVID-19, we expect them to redouble efforts on incorporating these practices into their businesses.

The Fast 50 winners have achieved outstanding growth in financial performance over the past three years, and they acknowledge that there are uncertainties in the future. As the global market changes, affecting strategy, products, commercial terms and workforce, we hope to see their ability to adapt spurring them onto further fantastic growth.

Winners' Case Studies


3 2 1

01

DivideBuy

DivideBuy is back in the Fast 50 for the second consecutive year. Its revolutionary approach to 'interest-free lending' has allowed consumers to spread the cost of all kinds of purchases, from sofas to artificial grass. Lending decisions are made in real time using DivideBuy's lending checkout technology.

> " To stand out from the crowd, we invested in our technology, our lending platform, and our retailer partnerships "

The business was founded in 2014 by serial entrepreneur Robert Flowers, and has grown from a small team to 50 people over the last two years.

Growth has come from the acquisition of new retail partners, a broadening of its consumer base, and a major shift in consumer attitudes towards credit, according to chief marketing officer Jo Balsamo, who joined the business last year.

She explains: "Customers are able to pay for goods and services outright but they are choosing to spread it because it helps them to manage their money on a monthly basis. They think, 'It's interest-free, so why not?'"

DivideBuy benefitted from the boom in homewares and furniture purchases during the UK lockdown, as people sought to improve their homes and gardens. "The global pandemic has seen consumers changing their shopping habits and we've seen that in our retail sales," says Jo. "Due to lockdown, many consumers were confined to their homes, staring at the same four walls, uncertain about the months ahead. This has lead to lots of home improvements and furniture upgrades."

DivideBuy works with more than 500 retailers and works with multiple brands within each category. "This provides consumer choice and value," says Jo. It now works with many well-known brands, such as online mattress companies Emma, Simba and Otty. It has a diverse mix of companies on its books, from small independents to mid-sized firms to big corporations: Jo estimates that 50% are corporations and 50% are SMEs. In 2018, DivideBuy raised £60m from a mix of private equity investors, banks, and high net worth individuals. "To stand out from the crowd, we invested in our technology, our lending platform, and our retailer partnerships," says Jo. "We would love to continue to grow the team by utilising local talent." Several high-profile competitors have entered the so-call 'lendtech' space in recent years.

DivideBuy is headquartered in Newcastle-under-Lyme. "We are proud to be investing in the area," says Jo. "There are many benefits: the local talent is great and plays a huge role in our success, plus office costs are lower and there's investment in the region. The downside is that most lendtech skills move out of the area to the south east.."

DivideBuy will maintain its focus on online retail over the coming years. "We are exploring new sales channel opportunities and researching new markets that will continue the growth momentum," says Jo. The uncertainty in 2020 has spurred management to think more strategically about DivideBuy's next move: "Are there things we could do better, faster?" she says. "This year has given us the opportunity to evaluate our performance. We're now ready for the next two years."

FIRST PLACE OVERALL
NORTH WEST
REGIONAL WINNER
20,733% GROWTH

> "Due to lockdown, many consumers were confined to their homes, staring at the same four walls, uncertain about the months ahead. This has lead to lots of home improvements and furniture upgrades"

02

Meet Bulb, the fastest-growing energy supplier in Britain. In 2015, when Bulb was formed, less than 1 per cent of consumers were buying renewable energy. Now, more than 10 per cent of the market is purchasing renewables. “That’s an incredible shift over a short space of time,” says Hayden Wood, Bulb CEO.

> “We’re solving a really important problem for people”

Bulb has been instrumental in driving this change; the business boasts 1.7m customers across the UK, France, Spain and USA. Wood says: “We are solving a really important problem for people: we’re helping them reduce emissions while driving down their energy bills at the same time.”

Wood, a former management consultant, and co-founder Amit Gudka, who was an energy trader, created the business to meet demand for greener energy from increasingly sophisticated consumers, who were fed up with price rises and opaque billing from incumbent providers. “We knew we were taking on something major,” says Wood. “Residential energy usage represents around half of an individual’s lifetime carbon emissions. We wanted to help millions of people and have a real impact.”

Technology has been key to Bulb’s success; the incumbents are “weighed down” by their legacy systems, Wood claims, which

“We’re setting up the structure within the company, creating a great place to work for hundreds of people, while doubling in size every three months”

means they are unable to offer the kind of user experience and service that modern consumers expect. “Those monolithic systems were built in the early nineties,” he says. “They can’t be adapted.”

At Bulb, a quarter of the company’s 800 staff work in software development: “Innovation is at the heart of everything we do,” says Wood. “Every week, we look at the manual tasks being completed within the company and think how we can automate them.” Wood is a fan of ‘kaizen’, a Japanese word that is roughly translated as “continuous improvement”. This model of working, popularised by Toyota in the fifties, involves making consistent small improvements to processes and strategies to drive efficiency. “In addition to our kaizen improvements we are making some big bets on the future,” he reveals. “We are moving towards becoming an energy manager rather than an energy supplier.” This will see the brand developing and scaling its electric vehicle products and home battery offering. Bulb is also extending its geographic reach for the first time: it is currently live in France, Texas and Spain.

The COVID-19 crisis didn’t hit Bulb as hard as some businesses but there was an impact. “Fewer people are switching energy supplier, which is a real shame,” says Wood. To offset this softening in demand, Bulb created a new 100% green energy pay-as-you-go product. “This was one of my proudest moments,” says Wood. “It’s the first smart pay product of its kind. We always planned to launch something like this but we accelerated development because of lockdown.”

With a growth rate of 14,288%, Wood says that managing the speed of Bulb’s expansion is his biggest challenge. The business raised £60 million from private equity in 2018 but internationalisation took losses to £129 million in FY 2018-2019. “You’d be surprised how complicated it is to scale a business like this so quickly,” Wood explains. “We’re setting up the structure within the company, creating a great place to work for hundreds of people, while doubling in size every three months.”

SECOND PLACE OVERALL
LONDON REGIONAL WINNER
14,288% GROWTH

03

Popsa

Popsa was founded on the idea of having a photo album simply pop into existence every time you did something significant in your life.

> “We saw the opportunity to disrupt an existing market that was not innovating”

“We saw the opportunity to disrupt an existing market that was not innovating,” explains Popsa CEO Liam Houghton. “The incumbents were forcing consumers through a long and complicated design process every time they wanted to record their memories. We have differentiated ourselves through user experience and data science, simplifying and automating this process as much as possible.”

The business is evolving into an even more ambitious venture, becoming an automated-personalisation and curation specialist, powered by machine learning and proprietary algorithms. “Long term, we will go beyond print,” Houghton reveals. “Many of the biggest names in social media have shifted their focus away from content with long-term value in favour of ephemeral media that disappears after 24 hours. We believe this shift diminishes the value of people’s experiences. We want to be the antidote to this disposable culture, to uncover the meaning and stories that each of us carry locked away in our devices, to preserve them and bring them back into the light of day.”

Houghton, an architect by training, founded the business in 2016 with engineer Tom Cohen, who used to work for BAE Systems, building software for nuclear submarines. This isn’t the pair’s first

THIRD PLACE OVERALL
10,576% GROWTH

> “We want to be the antidote to this disposable culture, to uncover the meaning and stories that each of us carry”

venture together: they have a track record of creating start-ups within the technology industry, having previously run an incubator of mobile-first businesses for almost a decade. “We decided to go out on our own and stay with just one business for the long-term,” explains Houghton. “Popsa has become the fastest-growing venture of them all.” Houghton believes that starting businesses across multiple verticals was an invaluable experience. “When you help start a lot of companies in short succession, you see the same mistakes being made again and again,” he says. “We invested the learnings from all of those industries into Popsa.”

The business, which now employs more than 50 people, has attracted an enviable list of investors, raising almost £10m across multiple rounds from the likes of advertising mogul Sir John Hegarty and Silicon Valley investor 500 Startups. The latest tranche of funding – £3m – will be used to accelerate growth in the US and Germany, and enter the Australian and New Zealand markets. “We launched in the US last November and it’s not far off becoming our biggest market,” says Houghton. Fewer than a fifth of Popsa’s users are UK-based.

Future growth will also come from new ways in which people interact with technology – a big shift is already becoming mainstream, according to Houghton. “We’ve always been looking ahead to serving a ‘post-app’ economy, where you might buy something through a command to Alexa or Siri, without touching a screen. Companies such as Popsa will do all the hard work in the background and deliver you the finished result.”

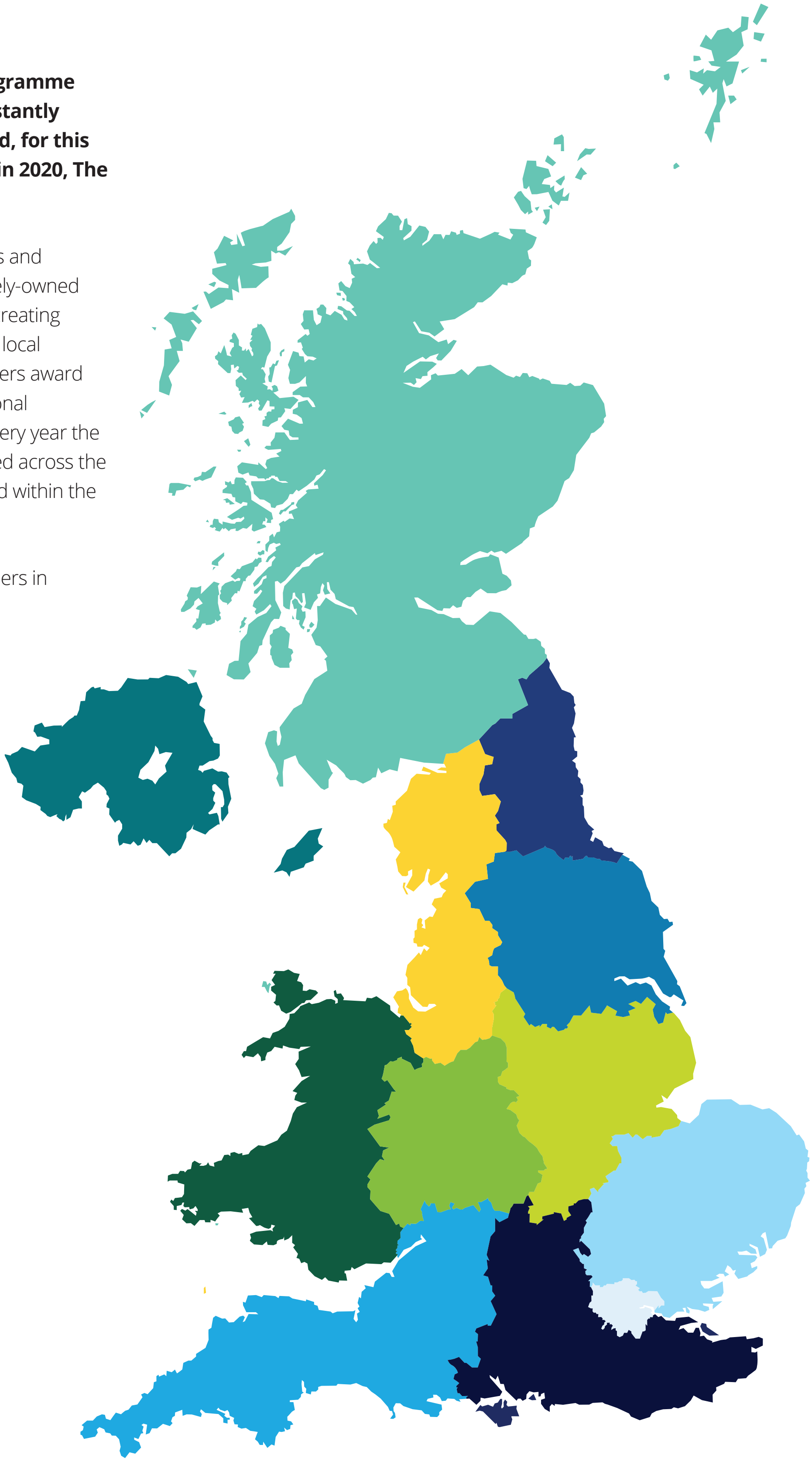
Popsa’s growth has not been affected by the pandemic. Its international outlook means that the business is not overexposed in any one territory and can easily pivot to sell into countries with higher consumer confidence. “Although, we did notice that in the UK, people spent more time on the app during lockdown,” says Houghton. “That was striking given that our messaging was all about saving time, so we adapted our marketing to focus on remote gifting: if you can’t see the people you love, you can still send them a thoughtful gift.” Houghton, 31, began building businesses when he was just 14 years old. “I sold tourist attraction tickets over the internet,” he said. “That business taught me coding and design skills that have proved really useful.” His next goal for Popsa? “To reach £100m in revenue in the next few years.”

The Regional Winners

The Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 awards programme has now been running for 23 years. We are constantly looking for ways to improve the programme and, for this reason, we have created an additional ranking in 2020, The Regional Winners.

The UK has over 6 million privately-owned businesses and over 80% of those are in the regions. Regional privately-owned business are hugely important for the UK economy, creating local jobs and making a broader contribution to their local communities. The purpose of the new Regional Winners award is to mark the contribution that privately-owned regional businesses make to the economy and ensure that every year the achievements of high growth tech organisations based across the regions are appropriately represented and celebrated within the Fast 50 programme.

The following case studies explore our Regional Winners in more detail.



Qmee

SOUTH EAST REGIONAL WINNER 1693% GROWTH

Qmee was founded by former Goldman Sachs trader Jonathan Knight and serial entrepreneur Nick Sutton in 2012. The business collects data, insights and opinions from the public on behalf of brands and polling organisations in exchange for cash and other benefits, using a sophisticated tech platform powered by machine learning.

Knight and Sutton met when the financier became an early investor in Sutton's last venture – Greenstone, an environmental software business. "By chance, we lived close to one another so we would meet often," says Knight. "We started talking about the value of people's data and how, typically, we are not rewarded for parting with it online.

"When we started Qmee, we offered rewards in exchange for online searches. Since those early days, we have added other ways to get rewarded online, such as using hashtags, shopping online, or taking online surveys."

The app currently boasts "millions" of users, according to Knight. "Last Friday, our users answered 90,000 surveys, spending an average of 10 minutes per survey. That's nearly a million minutes of activity."

The uncertainty in 2020 prompted many brands to up their engagement with Qmee. "Businesses wanted to know what users were thinking because everything was changing so fast," explains Knight. "We have grown really strongly over the last few months." Brands launched more campaigns in response to the fast-changing retail environment and users, typically, had more time on their hands during lockdown: the perfect storm. Qmee is headquartered in Reading, and this base has contributed to the success of its technology, according to Knight. "There is a lot of talent here," he says. And we have access to a lot of international talent, which has been really good for us." Qmee has been funded by friends and family to date, and has also financed growth organically. This is possible because of the structure of the organisation: Qmee is incredibly lean and agile and running operations as far afield as Australia with just 22 staff. Qmee is currently focused on English-speaking countries – three-quarters of turnover currently comes from the US – but will licence its technology to players in other geographies next year. "It's all about our technology stack," said Knight. "And it's about our ability to scale that stack to service users."

> "Last Friday, our users answered 90,000 surveys, spending an average of 10 minutes per survey. That's nearly a million minutes of activity"

Knight attributes Qmee's success to two things: respect for customers and its tech muscle. "Respect is a core tenet of the business," he says. "We direct people to the right opportunities, so we don't waste their time. They get the right content and brands access the right demographics." On Qmee's technology stack, he says: "We're like a swan: we appear to be gliding smoothly along the surface but underneath the water, all our machinery is paddling like crazy."

CROWDPROPERTY
together we build

MIDLANDS REGIONAL WINNER 1008% GROWTH

In 2013, part-time property developers Michael Bristow, Andrew Hall and Simon Zutshi were lamenting the state of property finance in the UK. "We were all in the 'SME' category of property developer," explains Bristow. "Traditional sources of finance were failing us. We decided to do something about it." The trio created CrowdProperty that year to "unlock the power of the SME developer" through peer-to-peer lending and technology to serve SME developers better. "Fundamentally, we match the supply and demand of capital more efficiently and effectively," says Bristow, CEO, who gave up a successful consulting career to develop CrowdProperty.

The fast-growth firm has now lent £100m to property professionals through 230 loans across 170 residential projects. "We selected that £100m of lending from £3.8bn-worth of project applications," reveals Bristow. "We are very picky." Even the COVID-19 crisis couldn't dent growth: "We have funded 65 projects since lockdown," says Bristow. "Those projects sold out in less than a minute on average after listing them on our platform."

Our technology, data and analytics is only part of the project assessment process, according to Bristow. "If you're lending small sums to individuals, you can rely on an algorithm to auto-lend. But the best property project in the world could be stuffed up by poor management so it's critical to understand the capabilities, ambitions and motivations of the individuals involved." CrowdProperty has an experienced team of property developers working alongside the algorithms to pick winners. CrowdProperty has already paid back £50m to its portfolio of armchair investors and professional funders. According to Bristow, the power of the CrowdProperty brand comes from being both a "strong, reliable and predictable brand that has a 100% capital and interest payback record" and also for its positive impact on the UK economy. "We have funded the construction of 1,100 homes worth £195m," he claims. "We have also funded an £80m spend on labour, materials and services in the UK."

Being based in Birmingham has been a "huge advantage", according to Bristow. "Recruiting technology developers in London is expensive and, often, short-lived. "In Birmingham, there is a strong talent pool and less demand. As an innovative proptech/fintech business here, we stand out. People walk in the door and want to work here. They are not off visiting 20 other FinTechs on Old Street Roundabout." Bristow estimates that CrowdProperty's fixed costs are 55% lower in Birmingham than if it were headquartered in London. "We've been profitable since 2019," he says.

CrowdProperty is scratching the surface of an absolutely enormous asset class. The UK property development lending market is worth around £45bn a year if we built the Government target of 300,000 homes. The pain amongst SME developers is clear in their housing output – in 2008, SME developers represented 30 per cent of output but in 2017 this was just 10 per cent, whilst in both years only 200,000 homes were built. "We're not only taking huge swathes of market share off traditional providers that have failed SME developers for years, we're unlocking the potential of the segment to build much needed homes and to drive spend in the economy," says Bristow.

Institutional capital is now piling into CrowdProperty alongside retail investors because of its promise of 8.74% average returns. "These diverse sources of capital will allow us to scale rapidly," says Bristow. "There are no limits on how big we could get."

VoCoVo

SOUTH WEST AND WALES REGIONAL WINNER 3217% GROWTH

Staff at Asda, Wickes and Halfords are no longer carrying cumbersome walkie-talkies or calling for a "Cleaner on aisle one!" over the tannoy; they use wireless headsets from VoCoVo to stay in constant contact and deliver exceptional customer service.

The West Oxfordshire based technology firm, which appears in the Fast 50 for the second consecutive year, has a suite of products aimed at all kinds of large retailers. Founder Rob Gamlin explains: "Among this year's new features, we have voice-enabled self-checkout interventions, allowing colleagues to boost throughput while observing social distancing. We also allow head office colleagues to send messages using DM tools such as Teams and Slack, which we voice enable for teams on the shop floor."

> "COVID has taught us that we can hire from anywhere"

Gamlin is taking the business from a straightforward hardware supplier to more of a subscription model: "Our solution is transforming, becoming less reliant on capital expenditure and moving toward a recurring revenue model," he says. "That makes the product stickier and opens up additional and diverse revenue streams."

Gamlin has a developing market in Europe with a customer base in 21 countries and is now making inroads into North America. "We have done a lot of ground work," he says. "Ongoing conversations with some large retailers look very promising for VoCoVo in this region". The global COVID-19 pandemic has presented some friction to international growth, however. "It's difficult to break new markets when you can't fly into that country – that said, the pandemic has not reduced demand in the UK and Europe." Gamlin observes.

The former electronics and software engineer is driven by his passion for progress. While global expansion plans maybe on hold he has shifted his focus to expanding the VoCoVo offering with new innovations including a unique solution for smaller retailers: "I'm spending a lot of time making sure the product is right for all environments not just enterprise."

Being a technology innovator based in West Oxfordshire has its benefits – and downsides. Gamlin explains: "The heart of our business is our fast-growing team in the middle of the Cotswolds. There's a lot of love for that. It differentiates us. But it can present challenges when it comes to bringing talent in from further afield."

The rural base belies true international ambition; "We are a globally-minded business," says Gamlin." COVID-19 has taught us that we can hire from anywhere."

The market for VoCoVo solutions is truly vast, according to Gamlin. "When it comes to workforce management or back-office stock control for example, someone always has to hold some kind of device, which removes your eyes and one hand from the retail environment." he says. "We give those faculties back."

Gamlin is driven by two things: a passion for progress and a fear of failure. "I love the growth, the prospects, the innovation here," he says. "And I hate failure. I hate anything less than perfect. If I can see a way of doing something better, I want to do it. That's innate."

Dayshape

SCOTLAND REGIONAL WINNER 1539% GROWTH

Before COVID-19 struck, many professional services firms were split into geographic or sector-based teams. Once everyone was forced to work from home, these companies began to see the benefits of moving work and resource between different teams, no matter where individuals were based.

This is good news for Edinburgh-based Dayshape, which has built an AI-powered platform for optimising project planning and resource management. "Companies have realised that it's crazy to have one team overwhelmed with work while another, in a different location, has nothing on," says Dayshape founder Andrew Bone. "Even smaller teams, who used to work purely on a regional level, are now being brought onto the platform because companies want them to work as part of the larger talent pool."

Dayshape, formerly Airts, was the fastest-growing company in Scotland last year, and has taken the top spot for the region in 2020 too. "We have seen some good growth within existing customers," Bone says. "We have expanded into other countries, and we are seeing growing interest from US firms."

Dayshape secured one of its biggest ever deals just after lockdown was announced in the UK. "We were worried that the customer would get cold feet but that didn't happen," says Bone. "Resource managers were never more in demand than during lockdown, when staffing needs suddenly changed." To cope with the increased demand, Dayshape has almost doubled the size of its team over the past year to 45 people. Dayshape now has the processes and structure in place to cope with multiple customer implementations at once, he adds: "We did four in October."

Historically, finding top talent within the local area had been a challenge; Dayshape faces competition from other fast-growth technology firms. This year, Bone tweaked the Dayshape recruitment model. "Our attitudes have changed," he says. "We have hired people based around the UK, and are open to have more remote workers for other roles too."

As headcount rises, Bone and his co-founder Dr Alastair Andrew have to work hard to maintain the company culture. "It all comes quite naturally when you're in an office," says Bone. "But now we can't have team drinks and all that good stuff. So, the best thing about this year is how little we've changed, in terms of culture."

When new people join Dayshape, they are given a buddy, explains Bone. "That role has now been formalised and is less about showing people where the kitchen is and more about checking in a few times a week." The company has also introduced a 'Virtual Donut' initiative through its communication app, Slack. "It randomly pairs you with someone else in the company and you have a half-hour coffee together," explains Bone. "It simulates the whole 'bumping into each other in the kitchen' thing."

Bone has big plans for 2021. "We're considering raising investment next year to feed the growth and we're getting a lot of approaches from private equity at the moment," reveals Bone. "We have an ambition to hit £200m valuation by 2025, which means doubling revenue every single year."

SoPost

NORTH EAST REGIONAL WINNER 459% GROWTH

This is SoPost's third consecutive year in the Fast 50 programme. The Newcastle-based business has become the go-to partner for brands who want to find new customers and showcase their wares to the public.

SoPost handles sampling campaigns for the likes of L'Oréal, Cadbury and Estée Lauder and business has boomed this year. "Brands that used to sample in supermarkets and department stores had to find a new channel," explains founder and CEO Jonathan Grubin. "I think the days of a consumer walking into a shop and swiping lipstick on the back of their hand are long gone."

Unlike traditional sampling, SoPost allows its clients to carefully target consumers from the right demographics, dramatically increasing conversion rates. The firm feeds back insights and data to brands, influencing everything from marketing decisions to product development roadmaps. Grubin is investing heavily in the data and analytics side of the business, and is also opening up SoPost's API, which will allow brands to build bespoke functionality on top of the technology platform.

> "In the early days we had to fight for everything, every bit of growth, now growth feels really manageable, which allows us to plan for next year and beyond with real optimism"

Grubin, who launched the first iteration of the business in 2012, has turned SoPost into an international player, with customers across Europe, the US, the UAE and beyond. "We launched in Switzerland and Mexico during lockdown," he says. "And we have a new joint venture in South Africa."

Headcount is currently at 43 but will hit 70 by September next year. It is challenging but exhilarating to run a fast-growth business that is acquiring new staff at pace. Grubin says: "There were just five of us in 2014. We had a board meeting back then and I said that once we reached 30 people, I wouldn't be the right person to be CEO. The board thanked me for my honesty but told me I was wrong. Now, though I'm daunted by the idea of running a 500-person company, I suspect I'll grow into the role, just as I have over the last few years."

Revenue growth has accelerated in 2020, reveals Grubin. "We surpassed all of 2016's volumes in the first 16 days of this financial year," he says. "After 21 days, we'd beaten 2017's volumes, and we're not far off hitting 2018 now." The market has finally caught up with the proposition, after eight years in business. "In the early days we had to fight for everything, every bit of growth," says Grubin. "Now, growth feels really manageable, which allows us to plan for next year and beyond with real optimism."

FEATURE SPACE

OUTSMART RISK

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND EAST REGIONAL WINNER 624% GROWTH

Developers of fraud prevention software have to walk a fine line: they must stop genuine fraud from taking place, without causing too much disruption and loss of revenue. Few players manage to strike this balance. Cambridge-based enterprise financial crime buster, Featurespace, with its real-time Adaptive Behavioral Analytics (which it invented) software, has achieved worldwide acclaim for doing just that. "Before we arrived into the market, fraud systems were unable to accurately differentiate between genuine transactions and fraud attack," says Martina King, chief executive of Featurespace. "Our system uses machine learning for the real-time identification of anomalous behaviour. We outsmart the risk."

The business boasts HSBC, NatWest, TSYS, Worldpay and some of the world's biggest banks and insurers as customers. In recent years, it has also diversified into money laundering prevention. "Analysts must investigate every single alert," says King. "By improving accuracy and reducing the number of alerts, we are having a dramatic impact."

Featurespace has achieved annual growth of over 100% for the past four years. The business recently raised £30m to help sustain this growth rate, taking its total investment to date to more than £80m. It now employs 320 people across Cambridge, Singapore and Atlanta. Talent is vital in the war against financial crime, says King. "People today want to work on society's important challenges. That has helped us attract brilliant people."

Featurespace was started in 2005 by Cambridge University professor, Bill Fitzgerald, and his PhD student, the Australian maths prodigy David Excell. The pair applied Bayesian mathematical principles to datasets, creating the underlying architecture that powers Featurespace to this day.

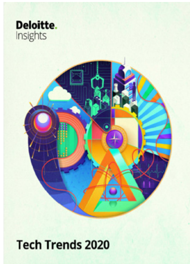
Sadly, Professor Fitzgerald died of a brain tumour in 2014. King, who joined the business as CEO in 2012, is determined to honour his legacy. "Before he died, Bill told me to make this a great commercial success," she says. "To this day, I keep that at the forefront of my mind in my day-to-day work. I think Bill would be really proud of our achievements."

King is currently on her third career, she reveals. "My first was in media. I ran commercial teams at The Guardian for 10 years. Then I became managing director at Capital Radio before moving to Yahoo, where I ran the European business." Her second career was as a serial non-executive director, advising companies from across the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250. Her third career was running augmented reality business, Aurasma, where she was introduced to Professor Fitzgerald. "Featurespace is the crowning glory of my career," says King. "I have applied everything I've learned throughout my life to this business."

King credits her ambition and drive to her upbringing. "I am the eldest child from an immigrant family," she says. "I just can't help myself. Whether it's building a display advertising business for The Guardian, or rebuilding Yahoo after the dotcom bubble burst, or commercialising machine learning – and using it to do good in the world – I love a mission."

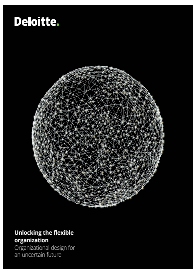
Other Deloitte thought leadership

Human Capital Trends Report, 2020: *Returning to Work in the Future of Work*
As the COVID-19 drives profound societal and organisational shifts, leaders have the opportunity to return to work by designing the future of work, building on the lessons and practices their organisations executed during the crisis.



Tech Trends 2020: *The Digital Journey Ahead*
Deloitte's 11th annual Tech Trends report provides insights and inspiration you will need for the digital journey ahead. Several of this year's trends are responses to persistent IT challenges. Others represent technology-specific dimensions of larger enterprise opportunities. All are poised to drive significant change and transform business in unpredictable ways....

The Heart of Resilient Leadership: *Responding to COVID-19*
Five fundamental qualities of resilient leadership distinguish CEOs as they guide their enterprises through the COVID-19 crisis. Learn specific steps that can help blunt the crisis's impact – and enable your organisation to emerge stronger.



Unlocking the Flexible Organisation: *Organisational Design for an Uncertain Future*
As the drumbeat of business disruption grows, organisations can become more adaptable by unlocking the power of networked teams. Today's global operating environment is too unpredictable to rely on organisational structures devised over a century ago in order to adapt and respond to new challenges.

The Future of Growth Capital: *Research by Innovate Finance, the ScaleUp Institute and Deloitte:*
Access to appropriate Growth Capital is the fuel to maintain a vibrant, innovative economy. It is one of the key foundations to building world beating global companies and a dynamic economy that in every locality seizes opportunities and fosters jobs and sustainable growth for the long term.

Mission-based Teams: *Reconstructing businesses as an evolving network of teams and outcomes*
2020 has provided business leaders with another example – if one were needed – of just how unpredictable today's world can be. Business leaders at all levels therefore need to be able to solve unknowable problems, many of which represent opportunities for growth as well as existential risk. Mission Based Teams draws on the philosophy and structure of companies that have thrived in the Digital Economy and is designed to enable effective and rapid response to evolving opportunities.

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Contacts

Researched and written by

Nathan Thompson
Director
Monitor Deloitte
nathanthompson@deloitte.co.uk

Dominic Edwards
Senior Consultant
Monitor Deloitte
doedwards@deloitte.co.uk

Zach Elsawey
Senior Consultant
Monitor Deloitte
zachelsawey@deloitte.co.uk

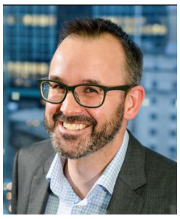
Marketing and Business Development

Tom Rees
Head of Business Development
Deloitte Private
trees@deloitte.co.uk

Kariel Parian
Marketing Lead – Fast 50 Programme
Deloitte Private
kparian@deloitte.co.uk

Technology Partners

Duncan Down
Lead Partner
UK Technology Fast 50
ddown@deloitte.co.uk



Matt Henderson
Partner
Deloitte Private – Growth Ventures Lead
mahenderson@deloitte.co.uk

Abi Briggs
Partner
UK Head of Technology
abbriggs@deloitte.co.uk

Ryan Carey
Director
Tax and Legal in North West Europe
rcarey@deloitte.co.uk

Deloitte.

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