

# NORTHERN TECH 100

THE NORTH'S FASTEST GROWING TECH COMPANIES

## 1. THE CAR BUYING GROUP

**The Car Buying Group might be one of the youngest companies on the Northern Tech 100 league table, but it's also the fastest growing.**

### VICKI SHIEL

A store cupboard in Bradford surrounded by toilet rolls might not seem like a fitting environment for a promising young startup. But that's where The Car Buying Group began operating in 2014.

"It really was a startup story," says managing director Tom Marley. "I remortgaged my house, my parents remortgaged theirs – the lot."

The idea came from spotting an opportunity in the online space for car sales. Tom and a few friends discussed a large deal that had recently taken place between We Buy Any Car and British Car Auctions and realised there seemed to be plenty of room in the market.

"We looked at that deal, knew that online car purchasing was still in its infancy, that there was only one big monopoly player, and that they were only taking up between 5% and 10% of the marketplace, so it was ripe for someone to come in and give them a run for their money. We realised we could probably make a nuisance of ourselves," he explains.

That was back in 2014. Within weeks of starting out in the store cupboard, developing a test and trial proposition with the company's now tech director James Branton, and switching on their pay-per-click advertising, the leads started rolling in.

He quickly realised that convenience was going to be their USP and set about capitalising on it. "We looked at how convenient the selling process was for sellers at that time and decided we could take that to a new level. Rather than getting customers to drive their car hundreds of miles, we could collect it from their doorstep. Rather than make them wait three days for payment, we'd pay them immediately with an online transfer."

Of course, an easy sale might sacrifice some of the money you could make but that's just part of the business, Marley says. "That's the market we operate in. It's not about getting the highest sale price possible for your car, but it's more convenient through us, and everybody knows that – we all know where we stand in the market."

The thing that powers all this for the end user is the tech the Car Buying Group has developed. Getting that right was their number one priority before going live with the online platform. "Our biggest asset, our IP if you like, is the valuations engine we've developed. It's a living, breathing organism, constantly interrogating data, pricing and what we're buying."

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## 2. TVSQURED

In 2012 Calum Smeaton, the former CEO of data analytics firm Sumerian, founded TVSquared to bring state-of-the-art analytical capabilities to TV advertising.

Now more than 360 brands, agencies and networks across 48 countries use TVSquared to measure and optimise TV.

The company has helped organisations improve TV efficiency between 20% and 80% by determining the effectiveness of a single spot, improving the performance of on-air campaigns and optimising media spend. Headquartered in Edinburgh, TVSquared has opened offices in London, New York and Los Angeles.

## 3. THELADBIBLE GROUP

Founded in 2012 by Solly Solomou and Arian Kalantari, TheLADbible Group is redefining entertainment and news for a social generation. Based in Manchester's Northern Quarter, their flagship brand TheLADbible Group is followed by half of all UK men aged 18-24, and a fifth of women in the same age group.

Their brands include TheLADbible Group, SPORTbible, Pretty 52, branded content agency Joyride and licensing arm CONTENTbible. In the past five years, their team has grown to just over 140 people, with a second office in Shoreditch.

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# THE NORTHERN TECH 100

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NORTHERN TECH AWARDS

	Company	Sector	HQ Location	Growth rate	Information
1	THE CAR BUYING GROUP	Ecommerce	Wakefield	191%	UK-wide car buying service with regional offices across the UK
2	TVSQUARED	Enterprise Software	Edinburgh	163%	More than 360 brands, agencies and networks across 48 countries use TVSquared
3	THELADBIBLE GROUP	Digital Media	Manchester	133%	Their flagship brand is followed by half of all UK men aged 18-24
4	DOUBLE ELEVEN	Betting & Gaming	Middlesbrough	119%	Worked on games for Sony, Microsoft and Warner Brothers
5	TRAK GLOBAL GROUP	Telecoms Services	Crewe	108%	Founded by Nick Corrie; an economics graduate, former RAF officer and experienced businessman
6	PURPLE WIFI	Enterprise Software	Oldham	105%	Allows businesses to monitor their physical spaces and promote their brand
7	PROFILE FINANCIAL	Fintech	Preston	101%	Improved retirement prospects for over 12,000 customers so far
8	ACCESSPAY	Fintech	Manchester	93%	In 2016, they were awarded £1m funding from Barclays
9	ZEROLIGHT	Enterprise Software	Newcastle	90%	Clients include Audi AG, Pagani Automobili, VW and Toyota Motor Europe
10	CONTROL F1	Enterprise Software	Huddersfield	87%	Clients include Globavista, Johnson & Johnson, the NHS and Risk Technology
11	HEDGEHOG LAB	Enterprise Software	Newcastle	87%	Offices in London, Boston, Austin, Copenhagen and Hyderabad
12	BIGCHANGE APPS	Enterprise Software	Leeds	85%	They have 15,000 paid subscribers serving over 600 SMEs and enterprise customers
13	HYPERDRIVE INNOVATION	Hardware	Sunderland	84%	Designed the battery technology used in the world's quickest street legal electric car
14	PIMORONI	Ecommerce	Sheffield	80%	Pimoroni's first product, Pibow, has now sold over 175,000 units
15	TYRES ON THE DRIVE	Ecommerce	Holmes Chapel	80%	Founded in 2011 by Dominic Clark, a former senior manager at Michelin.
16	RESIDIARY.COM	Enterprise Software	Glasgow	76%	Their system processes 2.5M bookings each month.
17	3SQUARED	Enterprise Software	Sheffield	73%	Won the Queen's Award for Enterprise in Innovation
18	REDU GROUP	Enterprise Software	Seaham	72%	Delivers high volume incremental sales for brands and retailers
19	RRADAR	Enterprise Software	Hessle	69%	Trains and advises its clients to help them avoid risks
20	CLOUD TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS	IT Services	Manchester	65%	Deliver tailored digital transformations to organisations in 47 countries
21	INVENTORY	Enterprise Software	Leeds	63%	The market leader for site access and visitor management products, trusted by over 3,000 schools
22	CURRENTBODY.COM	Ecommerce	Cheadle	62%	Partners with leading brands in the market, including L'Oreal and Unilever
23	TRIBEPAD	Enterprise Software	Sheffield	62%	Their software is currently used in over 120 countries
24	GIACOM WORLD NETWORKS	IT Services	Hull	62%	Provides over 4,000 IT professionals and resellers with access to cloud services
25	PERFORMANCE HORIZON	Enterprise Software	Newcastle	59%	Based in Newcastle, with offices in the U.S.A., Japan and Australia
26	DEGREE 53	Digital Media	Manchester	58%	Based at The Sharp Project in Manchester; a creative digital business hub
27	EVOLUTION FUNDING	Fintech	Chesterfield	58%	Provides market-leading motor finance products to consumers
28	LPW TECHNOLOGY	Hardware	Runcorn	56%	Uses its leading 3D printing software to develop and supply metal powders
29	AZZURE IT	IT Services	Sheffield	53%	Sells and deploys Microsoft business software products to support SME's
30	SHIELD SAFETY GROUP	Enterprise Software	Manchester	53%	The No. 1 provider of Food, Fire and Health & Safety services and software
31	GODEL TECHNOLOGIES EUROPE	Enterprise Software	Manchester	53%	Employs over 300 people; more than half of their management team are female
32	THE FLOW	Hardware	Sheffield	53%	Operates globally from Sheffield, helping make vehicles safer and cheaper for all
33	BEDE GAMING	Betting & Gaming	Newcastle	52%	Process over 200 million transactions per month
34	PANINTELLIGENCE	IT Services	Leeds	52%	The only Sage certified BI solution for Sage 200 and Sage CRM
35	INTECHNICA	IT Services	Manchester	52%	Its co-founders implemented and optimised the system that sold tickets for Glastonbury 2005
36	TELCOM NETWORKS	Telecoms Services	Manchester	51%	Clients include Cirque du Soleil, the NHS, LADBible, Allied London and Uber
37	ENGAGE INTERACTIVE	Digital Media	Leeds	51%	Works with Northern household names including Yorkshire Tea, Jet2 and Leeds Building Society
38	REASON DIGITAL	Digital Media	Manchester	46%	Works with the UK's biggest charities, social enterprises and corporate responsibility departments
39	INTERACT	Enterprise Software	Altrincham	46%	Headquartered near Manchester, Interact has offices in New York, San Francisco and Sydney.
40	HIRING HUB	Enterprise Software	Manchester	44%	Hiring Hub's clients include Morrisons, Capita, Nisa, Iceland and Ascribe.
41	THE HUT GROUP	Ecommerce	Northwich	43%	The Hut Group serve over 400 million website visitors annually.
42	ZUTO	Fintech	Macclesfield	43%	Zuto currently employ over 300 people, affectionately known as 'Zutonites'.
43	SKY BETTING AND GAMING	Betting & Gaming	Leeds	43%	Sky Betting & Gaming has offices in Leeds, Sheffield, London and Rome.
44	MPD GROUP	Enterprise Software	Manchester	43%	Manchester-based MPD Group has secured £6.5 million in funding since 2013.
45	TEAM17	Betting & Gaming	Wakefield	42%	In 2016 they secured a £16.5million investment from LDC
46	RESULTING	IT Services	Warrington	42%	Strategic suppliers to a number of large consulting firms
47	CONNEXIN	Telecoms Services	Hull	41%	Founded and is currently led by Furqan Alamgir, an Imperial College graduate
48	EVOKE CREATIVE	Digital Media	Bromborough	38%	Staff numbers have almost doubled over the past 18 months
49	PARALLAX	Digital Media	Leeds	37%	Clients include British Airways, Nespresso, Hisense, American Express, Kerry Foods and easyGym
50	UTILIGROUP	Enterprise Software	Chorley	37%	Market leading provider of SaaS software to the utilities and energy industry
51	IMPULSEPAY	Fintech	Jesmond	37%	Clients include SpareRoom, Cross Country Trains, 192.com and Virgin Trains
52	MOBYSOFT	Enterprise Software	Manchester	36%	Help over 70 housing organisations maximise income, create efficiencies and mitigate welfare reform
53	AIRANGEL	Enterprise Software	Warrington	36%	Airangel's products cover nearly 100,000 rooms or units in twenty-seven countries.
54	METRONET (UK)	Telecoms Services	Manchester	36%	The business operates from Manchester, UK and Bucharest, Romania.
55	ANGEL SOLUTIONS LTD	Digital Media	Liverpool	36%	In 2012 their Liverpool-based office underwent a circus-themed refurbishment.
56	MANDO	Digital Media	Liverpool	36%	Customers include Transport for London, TalkTalk, Thomas Cook Group and Warburtons
57	CHESS	Telecoms Services	Alderley Edge	35%	In 2016 awarded 2nd place in 'The Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work for'.
58	MTECH IT SOLUTIONS	IT Services	Leeds	35%	Their customers include the Leeds Rhinos, Summer Boarding Courses and Springfield Care Homes.
59	CONTRACTHIREANDLEASING.COM	Ecommerce	Hazel Grove	34%	Employees enjoy free Nespresso coffee machines, regular fruit deliveries and a car allowance scheme.
60	ADVANCERY	IT Services	Bingley	34%	Clients include Safestyle UK and leading milk logistics company, SJ Barch.
61	SUMO DIGITAL	Betting & Gaming	Sheffield	32%	Studios in Leeds, Nottingham and Pune, India.
62	AMPERSAND COMMERCE	Digital Media	Manchester	31%	Their clients include Harvey Nichols, Poundland and Bensons for Beds.
63	OPENCAST SOFTWARE EUROPE	IT Services	Newcastle	31%	Their clients include HM Revenue & Customs, Belfair, Barclays, Catapult, Sage and the NHS.
64	ASPIRE TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS	IT Services	Gateshead	29%	Since 2013, the company has grown their workforce from 40 to over 100 employees.
65	FAT MEDIA	Digital Media	Lancaster	29%	Founded in Lancaster, the company has opened two more offices in Bristol and London
66	SAFEGUARD	Enterprise Software	Sandbach	28%	Caters to companies of all sizes in mature and emerging international markets.
67	ELEMENTARY TECHNOLOGY	Enterprise Software	Leeds	27%	An audio visual and interactive technology reseller working in education and enterprise marketplaces.
68	PINK BOUTIQUE	Ecommerce	Newcastle	27%	Pink Boutique ship between 2000 - 4000 items of glam clothing worldwide each day.
69	MOBICA	IT Services	Wilmslow	26%	Based in Wilmslow, Mobica has eleven R&D locations around the world.
70	TPP	Enterprise Software	Leeds	26%	Their software has supported NHS services for nearly twenty years.
71	APADMI	Enterprise Software	Manchester	26%	Develops applications for iOS, Android, Windows Phone and BlackBerry devices.
72	EBECS	IT Services	Chesterfield	26%	Works with sectors including finance, insurance, manufacturing, distribution, retail and not-for-profit
73	SYKES COTTAGES	Ecommerce	Chester	25%	Provide a cottage booking and management service to over 8,000 cottages in the UK and Ireland
74	BETTER2KNOW	Ecommerce	Lancaster	25%	Helped thousands of people around the world get health-tested discreetly and quickly
75	PROVU COMMUNICATIONS	Telecoms Services	Huddersfield	24%	The principal distributors for many leading brands of IP phones
76	THE ESP GROUP	Enterprise Software	Hull	24%	Assists major transport operators, local and metropolitan transport authorities and national schemes
77	WMG	Digital Media	Harrogate	22%	Employs over 120 people across the group, with offices in London, Harrogate and Wetherby
78	C365CLOUD	Enterprise Software	Wakefield	22%	Their customers include Bupa, Co-op, Sainsbury's, Heineken, RSLs and NHS Trusts
79	VAIONI	Telecoms Services	Manchester	21%	Manchester-based Vaioni is a market leading provider of connectivity
80	EVERYTHING DIFFERENT	Digital Media	Newcastle	20%	Their clients include Sky, L'Oreal, Sage, Nexus and the NHS
81	VENN DIGITAL	Digital Media	Wilmslow	20%	Global platform allows users to edit content on their website from anywhere
82	OPENCRM	Enterprise Software	Richmond	20%	The company has worked with with customers in 14 countries with over 6000 users
83	FRESH GENERATION UK	Digital Media	Manchester	20%	Fresh Generation UK launched 452 websites and generated over £515m in revenue for their clients
84	PURE TECHNOLOGY GROUP	IT Services	Leeds	20%	A leading provider of ICT services and solutions to SME, corporate and public sectors.
85	VISUALSOFT	Digital Media	Stockton-on-Tees	19%	Their client list includes TJ Hughes, Carpet Runners UK, Charles Clinkard, Gabor and Beauty Base
86	RESPONSETAP	Enterprise Software	Manchester	19%	Supports more than 2000 clients worldwide, including British Gas, Aviva, Mercedes Benz and Virgin
87	UKFAST	IT Services	Manchester	17%	The firm has offices in Manchester, London and Glasgow
88	PARCEL2GO.COM	Enterprise Software	Bolton	17%	The company runs websites and customer services for couriers such as TNT, Hermes, DPD and UPS
89	UNIFORM	Digital Media	Liverpool	16%	Uniform now employs 54 people, mostly in Liverpool but with a small outpost in London
90	WAX DIGITAL	Fintech	Manchester	15%	Their web3 software is deployed via the cloud to 260,000 users in over 100 countries
91	NITESITE	Hardware	York	15%	Nitesite's products are exported to thirty-one countries, with a presence on every continent
92	SIMPLEUSABILITY	IT Services	Leeds	15%	Their clients include EE, Playtech, Asda, Jet2.com, the NHS, McDonald's and Hermes
93	SONOCENT	Enterprise Software	Leeds	15%	Develops software that visualises speech from audio recordings
94	BLUE LOGIC	IT Services	Leeds	14%	Worked with industry leading vendors like Microsoft, Sonicwall, Sage, Netapp and Veam
95	DELETE AGENCY	Digital Media	Leeds	14%	Operates out of London, Leeds and Munich.
96	AXON	IT Services	Macclesfield	14%	Began as a single-source IT company and in 2011 shifted its focus to cloud computing
97	CONTEXT PUBLIC RELATIONS	Digital Media	Macclesfield	13%	Services include media relations, content marketing and social media management
98	4040 MEDIA	Digital Media	Southport	13%	Created over 1,750 videos for over 1,000 clients around the world
99	YOOMEY	Digital Media	Sheffield	13%	Designs and develops new digital services for social good
100	INVOSYS	Telecoms Services	Worsley	13%	Recently expanded globally with the launch of its market-leading platform, Number Manager

...Continued from page 1

He then cautiously elaborates, trying not to give too much away. In essence the tool they've developed gathers data from various industry sources and applies a complex set of algorithms that factor in the minutiae of the car before offering a guide value.

The tech team is so good that they even build their own products for internal use, such as a scheduling tool for the company's call centre.

Contrary to what many say about a lack of technical talent in the sector, Tom says he had no trouble there. "We're firmly rooted in the Yorkshire area which puts us in a unique place. Our location near the M1 (the company now operates from Wakefield) means we have access to people living in Sheffield, Wakefield, Leeds and Bradford. We've got some really good people who don't want to have to move to a London startup or commute to Manchester and we're able to capture that wealth of talent."

He adds: "It's easier to say it's not out there. I think you just need to think about it differently and allow people to work differently, remotely if necessary. Our tech director lives in Plymouth." In fact, he says hiring the right sales staff quickly is actually his biggest business challenge.

Having a good tech and market intelligence team is what's enabling the company to run as efficiently as possible, diversify and grow fast. 18 months ago The Car Buying Group decided to accelerate its growth by selling white-label solutions to other websites, as well as forging

commercial partnerships based on the online valuation tool they've developed. This means they now have two sets of customers – consumers and corporates.

Tom is confident about the year ahead. With a number of big projects in the pipeline he expects the company to at least double its growth rate this year. Quite the trajectory from its humble store cupboard beginnings.

## 4. DOUBLE ELEVEN

Double Eleven is a niche publisher and developer of interactive entertainment; publishing and developing video games on Xbox, PlayStation and PC. The Middlesbrough-based company was founded in 2009 by Lee Hutchinson and Matt Shepcar, former developers at Rockstar Games.

Double Eleven have worked on games for Sony, Microsoft and Warner Brothers. Their titles include LittleBigPlanet, Nom Nom Galaxy, Goat Simulator, Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4 and Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7. In 2016 Shahid Ahmad, previously head of PlayStation UK's strategic content division, joined Double Eleven as an advisor.

## 8. ACCESSPAY

AccessPay is a Manchester-based tech firm founded by Ali Moiyed in 2012. The firm works with businesses and banks to adopt next-generation payment services and tear up the bricks and mortar concept associated with finance as well as the traditional nature of bank-customer-business relationships.

accounts and major payments networks to talk to one another. The service is delivered in one portal, negating manual intervention across multiple platforms and interfaces, providing resource and cost savings as well as supporting management information and security. In 2016, AccessPay were awarded £1m funding from Barclays.

AccessPay's team of developers have created a cloud-based connectivity layer, enabling business finance systems, bank

## 5. TRAK GLOBAL GROUP

Operating in five countries, Trak Global Group is one of the world's largest telematics companies, gathering and interpreting data from connected devices to help organisations manage driver and vehicle risk. The Crewe-based company was founded by Nick Corrie, an economics graduate, former RAF officer and experienced businessman.

To date, the company has gathered and interpreted over 500 million safer journeys; in 2015 it received the Prince Michael International Road Safety Award for its work in reducing young driver accident frequency.

## 9. ZEROLIGHT

Darren Jobling founded Newcastle-based ZeroLight in 2014. The company are pioneers in the field of commercial 3D visualisation for the automotive industry using virtual reality; their omnichannel platform empowers OEMs and partners to create and deliver compelling customer experiences that drive engagement across all touch points, leading to higher specification sales in-store and online.

Deployed in multiple markets worldwide by clients including Audi AG, Pagani Automobili, VW and Toyota Motor Europe, ZeroLight's technology is revolutionising the automotive retail landscape.

## 6. PURPLE WIFI

In May 2012 Gavin Wheeldon founded Purple, a WiFi and location SaaS solution offering analytics and marketing tools to businesses. Their software allows businesses to monitor their physical spaces and promote their brand, while providing insights into customer behaviour within venues.

The Oldham-based company is observing growth in multiple sectors, including hospitality, retail, healthcare and cities. Since 2014, Purple has received two major investments: to £3.3m in January and £5.4m in September 2016.

## 10. CONTROL F1

In 2010, Andy Dumbell and Carl Howarth founded Control F1, a digital software company that specialises in telematics and the Internet of Things. The Huddersfield-based team are currently working on software projects including i-Motors, a commercially viable platform for connected vehicles, and My ICU Voice, a tablet-based system that allows

hospital patients to communicate clearly with hospital staff.

Control F1's clients include the RAC, Globavista, Johnson & Johnson, the NHS and Risk Technology.

## 7. PROFILE FINANCIAL

Preston-based Profile Financial was co-founded by Ian Floyed and Steven Naylor. A leading pension adviser in the UK, the company has switched almost £500m of pension assets and improved retirement prospects for over 12,000 customers so far.

The company takes a hybrid approach to customer service, balancing technology and scalability with human interactions.

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### 11. HEDGEHOG LAB

In 2007, co-workers Sarat Pediredla & Mark Forster left their positions as senior developers to co-found hedgehog lab, a global enterprise app developer & post-PC technology consultancy. Specialising in digital applications for smartphones, tablets, desktops and wearables, the Newcastle-based company now have offices in London, Boston, Austin, Copenhagen and Hyderabad.

Their clients include Channel 4, Mitsubishi, Hult International Business School and the Financial Times.

### 12. BIGCHANGE APPS LIMITED

Martin Port launched BigChange Apps on New Year's Day, 2013. Based in Leeds, BigChange is a cloud based Mobile Workforce Management software serving the service, transport, construction, hire and waste industries. Their all-in-one JobWatch platform is the paperless way to plan, manage, schedule and track a mobile workforce; it combines a cloud based back-office, an Android mobile app and real-time tracking.

Notable customers are Hargreaves Services, Serco, Baxi, Silentnight, Komatsu and John Deere. It is also used by 2015 Apprentice Winner Joseph Valente and Lord Sugar in their Impr-a-Gas home services business. By the end of 2017, BigChange will have 15,000 paid subscribers serving over 600 SMEs and enterprise customers.

### 13. HYPERDRIVE INNOVATION LTD

Established in 2012 in Sunderland, Hyperdrive develops innovative technologies to power electric vehicles, homes and businesses. Hyperdrive has developed a range of high specification Battery Management Systems (BMS) and supports customers in defining and integrating systems.

Recent projects have included collaborations with the British Antarctic Survey and OXIS Energy to design and develop battery technology that operates at -80 degrees Celsius. Hyperdrive also designed the battery technology used in the world's quickest street legal electric car, the Flux Capacitor, in partnership with Jonny Smith.

### 14. PIMORONI LTD

Founded in 2012 by Jon Williamson and Paul Beech, Pimoroni aims to make electronics accessible by making kits for the Raspberry Pi. Its first product, Pibow, has sold over 175,000 units.

The Sheffield-based business has grown from one laser company and its co-founders, to more than thirty employees, with five laser cutters and several circuit-building robots. They've also successfully completed two fundraisers on Kickstarter.

### 15. TYRES ON THE DRIVE

Tyres On The Drive is a mobile tyre-fitting company that allows customers to book online or over the phone and have new tyres fitted, or punctures repaired, at any suitable location. The company was founded in 2011 in Holmes Chapel by Dominic Clark, a former senior manager at Michelin.

In January 2017, Tyres On The Drive secured an investment of up to £8m from Halfords, the UK's leading retailer of motoring, cycling and leisure products as well as Halfords Autocentres, a leading independent operator in vehicle servicing, maintenance and repairs.

### 16. RESDIARY.COM LIMITED

Founded in 2006 by Mike Conyers, ResDiary.com provide software to restaurant operators to help maximise their yield through reservation and table management. With 6,500 restaurants in 60 countries using ResDiary, their system is used to process 2.5 million bookings each month.

Headquartered in Glasgow, ResDiary have sales and support staff in the UK, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong, with resellers in South Africa, Norway, Switzerland, Portugal, Malta, Indonesia, Canada and Uruguay.

### 17. 3SQUARED

3Squared, a technology consultancy based in Sheffield, has over 15 years experience offering a range of software products, services and consultancy. Co-founders Tim Jones and James Fox met during a course in computer software engineering at Sheffield Hallam University; they formed the company in 2002, shortly after graduating.

In 2016, 3Squared won the Queen's Award for Enterprise in Innovation for their licensed RailSmart software suite, now used by the majority of the UK's rail freight sector. They currently employ 45 full-time members of staff in Sheffield, and have plans to become the leading software supplier to the UK rail sector.

### 18. REDU GROUP

Redu is an award-winning provider of social, mobile and data-driven affiliate marketing. The Seaham-based company was founded by Darren Williams, Sam Morton and Gary Hunter; it delivers high volume incremental sales for brands and retailers through its Ashleigh Money Saver and Ashleigh Plus Size Brands. The company also has its own proprietary software IP in its affiliate manager system, NLite.

Ashleigh Money Saver is an established and profitable affiliate model operated by Facebook, websites and emailing, promoting offers from leading retailers including Very, John Lewis, Asda and Boots.

### 19. RRADAR

rradar is a new kind of law firm, training and advising its clients to help them avoid risks ranging from health and safety to fraud prevention. rradar was founded by Gary Gallen in 2014, who resigned from his job at a traditional law firm to set up the company.

The Hesse-based firm has recently launched a legal Virtual Assistant called Grace, the first of its kind, using bespoke coding and content designed in-house in partnership with IBM Watson.

### 20. CLOUD TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

Cloud Technology Solutions is a Manchester-based tech company that provides G Suite and Google Cloud platform solutions. They are one of the world's leading Google Cloud Premier Partners, delivering tailored digital transformations to organisations in 47 countries. Their CloudMigrator and CloudPages software has close to 10 million users.

The driving force behind CTS' growth is CEO James Daggart; prior to CTS, James ran a software solutions and services business where he doubled the turnover and profitability of the organisation. Their clients include organisations such as AG Barr, Yahoo!, Majestic Wine and Manchester City Council.

### 21. INVENTORY LTD

InVentry was established in 2010 in Leeds, with a goal to streamline and perfect the school sign in process. InVentry are now the market leader for site access and visitor management products, trusted by over 3,000 schools.

With a fully integrated system allowing its users to accurately monitor who is on-site at any one time, InVentry speeds up the signing in process, keeps identity information secure and leaves senior leaders in schools feeling confident that their students are safe.

### 22. CURRENTBODY.COM LTD

CurrentBody was the first ecommerce company to recognise the fastest growing niche in the beauty industry over the last two years; the rapid introduction of professional devices miniaturised into handheld units for consumer use. CurrentBody partners with leading brands in the market including L'Oreal's highly acclaimed facial cleanser Clarisonic and Unilever's hair removal systems.

Co-founders Laurence Newman and Andrew Showman, alongside a senior management team lead by Chairman Mike McGrath, have grown the company to 20 staff in a hybrid office and warehouse, purpose built in Cheadle.

### 23. TRIBEPAD

Dean Sadler, a former CIO and CTO at Plusnet, founded TribePad in 2008. The Sheffield-based company's award-winning recruitment software allows candidates to apply for jobs from any device, at any location.

TribePad's software is currently used in over 120 countries in seventeen languages and has processed over 35 million job applications. Their customers include the BBC, KFC, Tesco, Sweaty Betty, Skipton Building Society and Bupa.

### 24. GIACOM WORLD NETWORKS

Founded in 1991 by CEO Nick Marshall, Giacom is a service provider based in Hull. The company was initially built as an ISP serving tens of thousands of consumers and businesses.

Giacom now operates MessageStream Cloud Marketplace which provides over 4,000 IT professionals and resellers with access to cloud services. It is Europe's largest cloud marketplace exclusively for IT support professionals.

### 25. PERFORMANCE HORIZON

Performance Horizon was founded in 2010 by a team of Affiliate Marketing veterans, including Malcolm Cowley and Paul Fellows.

In 2011, they launched their core product: Performance Horizon Enterprise. They are now the leading provider of SaaS software for partner marketing, and the team has grown to 100 employees. Based in Newcastle, with offices in the USA, Japan and Australia, Performance Horizon is backed by top-tier investors, including Mithril, Greycroft Partners and DN Capital.

## INTERVIEW

# THE- LADBIBLE GROUP

**You may not follow them on Facebook or visit their website, but chances are you've seen (and laughed) at something published by TheLADbible Group.**

## VICKI SHIEL

Started by school friends Solly Solomou and Arian Kalantari in 2012 when they were still at university (Solomou was at Leeds and Kalantari at Liverpool), TheLADbible Group has filled the void left following the demise of lads' mags such as Loaded in the nineties and is now followed by half of all British males aged 18 to 24.

"We were just producing funny content for the younger audience," says co-founder Kalantari of the early days. But the duo have always seen it as a business. Following early success on Facebook they built a website and heavily promoted it through advertising networks. "We found that what we were doing really resonated with our audience," he adds.

It seems so. To date they've accumulated 23 million followers on Facebook and ladbible.com is now the 10th most-visited website in the UK according to Alexa. Since growing that community TheLADbible Group has gone on to build a portfolio of other brands including SPORTbible, Pretty 52, branded content agency Joyride, and licensing arm CONTENTbible, used by TV networks, brand and publishers.

That's their core business, Kalantari tells me. They also run a number of 'incubator channels' — new brands they treat as startups, constantly testing and learning what works for that particular audience. These include LENSbible (Instagram-only photography content), GAMINGbible and FOODbible, all typically aimed at a youth audience.

How do they manage all this? They've grown the team over the past five years to just under 140 people and have offices in both Manchester and Shoreditch. Not bad considering they're both 25 years old. Just don't use the term millennial to describe their target audience. "I'm 25 and I behave quite differently to most 16-year-olds," he explains.

Of the 140 employees they have a tech team of just under 30 and they've custom built everything from the website and submissions platform to their editorial management system.



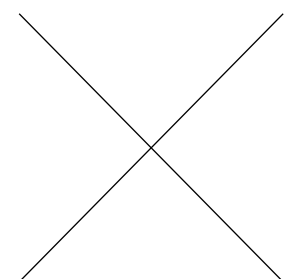
**"WE WERE JUST  
PRODUCING  
FUNNY  
CONTENT FOR  
THE YOUNGER  
AUDIENCE"**

"From the off we've seen the importance of tech. We position our companies as a combination of tech and media," says Kalantari.

The secret of their success seems to be a combination of good timing, listening to their audience, and an ability to carve out a niche in this new and evolving publishing space. "There's no traditional way of doing this, we're kind of writing the book."

"The thing we do that traditional publishing doesn't is look at tech and data closely with creative. We provide writers with data on topics and encourage them to get creative within that framework. Authenticity is very important to us. We listen to comments, look at the data, and feed it back to creative — it's full circle."

Already popular in the US, Australia and Ireland, the team's plan this year is to further expand globally. So expect to see even more from TheLADbible Group.





## OPINION

**RICHARD GREGORY**

DIRECTOR OF TECH NORTH

**One of the first things that jumped out at me from the table was the diversity of the sectors. In the largest six companies alone, there's everything from ecommerce, transport, telecoms and gaming.**

Something that's really exciting is the age of some of these companies. Twenty-six of them have been created in the last five years. TheLADbible Group, for example, is a really fast-growing, young business with impressive revenues, who have used social media in exciting new ways; so that's an interesting trend to watch.

Of course, you can't help but get drawn into some of the things that are still holding companies back. One of the challenges we find in the North is that there's relatively less access to funding at early stages. It is disproportionately hard in the North of England to get funding. There's a real job to increase awareness of tech opportunities in the region with angel investors. Sixty-eight percent of the businesses on this table have had no VC backing; they're still growing at a phenomenal rate – which of course, is a wonderful thing. Imagine how great that list could be if we had more access to funding?

We're seeing more connectivity between Liverpool and Manchester in the Northwest and Sheffield, Leeds and Hull in Yorkshire; but we've still got a challenge to get people thinking cross-region. There are still very few pan-Northern organisations on the list; something I find odd. A lot of the companies are very big in one location.

One of the big challenges in the tech space is procuring more talent. I think Sky Betting & Gaming is a good example of how pan-northern growth can help resolve this issue. They launched in Leeds and grew to the point where they had over 1,000 employees, which is wonderful. When they realised there's only so much in the talent pool, they opened a second office in Sheffield where they employ another 150 to 200 people. I wouldn't be surprised if they opened another office in the North at some point. With a pan-Northern mindset, they'll continue to grow.

It's extremely important to acknowledge the lack of gender diversity in this table. The owners, founders or majority shareholders of companies on the table are predominantly men. That's got to change; we've got a lot more work to do in this space.

Gender diversity is one of the areas the whole industry has to focus on, so that this table is much more representative in years to come.

Historically, the league table has been a top 50, so the fact that we've extended it to 100 this year – that there's so many opportunities to talk about – is really reassuring. We're talking about a growth market that feels really sustainable.

## **"WITH A PAN-NORTHERN MINDSET, COMPANIES WILL CONTINUE TO GROW"**



## OPINION

# HUGH CAMPBELL

CO-FOUNDER & MANAGING PARTNER AT GP BULLHOUND

**The tech scene in the North is more robust than ever. Over the past twelve months we have seen high profile transactions as well as growth from key regional players.**

Behind these private sector successes, there is a visible recognition from the public sector regarding the importance of technology to the Northern economy. Furthermore, there has been a flow of people and funding from corporates to the North as they seek to develop their technology platforms and offerings. The momentum is with the North when it comes to technology. The story we have all long believed is starting to become reality. Technology is coming home to the North.

Skyscanner stole the headlines with its sale to the Chinese travel firm Ctrip for £1.4bn – a fantastic and pioneering journey for the Northern tech scene which saw a business go from back bedroom to global unicorn. Skyscanner is no flash-in-the-pan experience, as demonstrated by the likes of BooHoo.com, MoneySupermarket.com and AO.com which have all achieved Unicorn status. Critically, these businesses are all underpinned by strong revenues and have been able to show sustained growth over a number of years.

Beneath the Unicorns, there is a plethora of smaller, but no less ambitious companies, the Northern Foals, with the aspiration, the ambitions, the capability and the products to become the next Unicorns. It should be the aim of everyone involved in the tech scene in the North to help these businesses achieve their obvious potential. This includes companies like On the Beach, GB Group and Zuto which have used a digital platform to transform more traditional industries. Although based in the North, their scope is very much UK-wide and they are looking to roll out their models overseas too. Others like Performance Horizon and LADbible Group have already established a significant international footprint. Like SkyScanner before them, they too have caught the eye of international corporates and investors for the real innovation and value they can bring to their customers.

The success of these private sector companies has spurred on the policy makers in the region. This infrastructure is vital to support, maintain and grow the tech ecosystem. It is also recognition of how important technology is and will continue to be for the region. This support is focused on three key areas: funding, promotion and education.

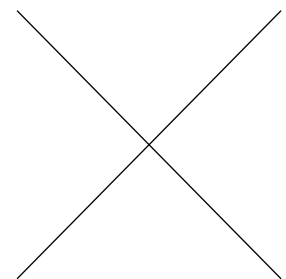
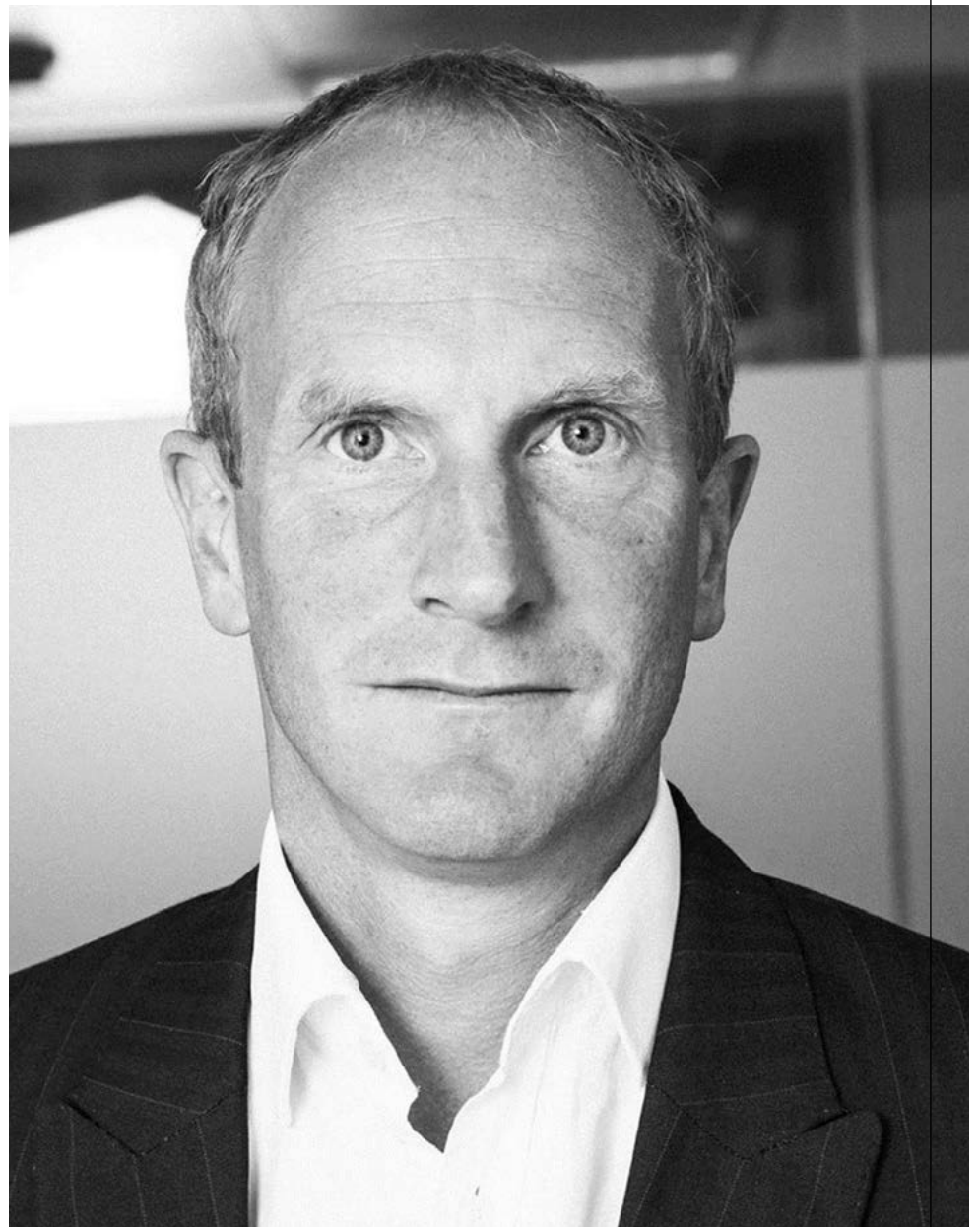
There has been consistent feedback about funding gaps within the North, however this is slowly being addressed. Amongst other organisations, there has been the launch of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund and Accelerated Digital Ventures which receive both private investment alongside funding from the British Business Bank.

Across the North, there are now a number of organisations, particularly at a local government level, looking to shout about the achievements both locally and regionally. Tech North, Sunderland Software City, Dot Forge, Dynamo and Digital Union are all examples of organisations which are focused on developing and promoting the tech ecosystem in their specific regions. Crucially, as these ecosystems develop, it also encourages the skills developed in the region to remain.

Ultimately, tech in the North is about the people and equipping those people with the skills to create globally successful companies. We are lucky to have some of the best universities in the world which are producing highly skilled graduates. Nevertheless, there is still an identified shortage of key technology skills. A number of apprenticeship schemes are being promoted across the region to ensure the talent pool is available to ensure continued tech investment in the region.

Finally, we should not forget the North has a lot more to offer the tech community: an excellent transport infrastructure, good international airports, a relatively inexpensive standard of living, the opportunity to live and work in a city, yet have some of the most stunning countryside on your doorstep. The reasons for the continued success of tech in the North are compelling.

## "THE MOMENTUM IS WITH THE NORTH WHEN IT COMES TO TECHNOLOGY."





**26. DEGREE 53**

Degree 53 is an award-winning digital agency specialising in mobile app and website development, UX, design and consultancy services. Founded in 2013 by Andrew Daniels, the company offers development, design, research and consultancy to a number of industries, including online gambling, sports, finance, retail and education. Degree 53 holds the Remote Gambling Software licence accredited by the UK Gambling Commission, allowing them to provide comprehensive and secure digital services to its clients in the gambling industry.

Degree 53 is based at The Sharp Project in Manchester, a creative digital business hub.

**27. EVOLUTION FUNDING**

Established in 2002 in Chesterfield, Evolution Funding is an automotive funding and retailing group. Led by company Director Jeremy Levine, Evolution Funding employs over 270 people UK-wide with multiple arms to the operation, including a motor finance brokerage, vehicle rentals, vehicle loans, two car dealerships and a body shop and accident repair centre.

The company provides market-leading motor finance products to consumers via more than 4,000 approved dealer partnerships and groups, with a fleet of 2,000 flexi-rental vehicles.

**28. LPW TECHNOLOGY LTD**

In 2007, Phil Carroll PHD founded LPW Technology. LPW uses its leading 3D printing software to develop and supply metal powders for additive manufacturing and safety critical industries including aerospace, automotive and medical sectors. Known worldwide for its research and development, LPW's respected team of software, mechanical and applications engineers has developed a unique AM powder lifecycle management system called PowderLife.

LPW is headquartered in Runcorn, with operations in the USA, Europe and Asia.

**29. AZZURE IT**

Founded by Craig Such in 2011, Azure IT is a Microsoft Dynamics provider, with a headquarters in Sheffield and offices in Reading and Newcastle. The company sells and deploys Microsoft business software products to support SMEs in the growth and development of their businesses. It works with companies across a range of sectors including manufacturing, professional services, logistics and not for profit.

Azure IT is the UK's leading Microsoft Gold Partner, a two-time Deloitte Fast UK fastest growing tech company and Microsoft President's Club member 2016.

**30. SHIELD SAFETY**

Shield Safety believes in making safety simple for every business in the UK. Founded by Mark Flanagan, Shield Safety is the No.1 provider of Food, Fire and Health & Safety services and software for multi-location businesses within the hospitality industry, with increasing growth across retail, manufacturing and SMEs.

In 2017, Shield Safety was shortlisted for Company of the Year and Flanagan was shortlisted for Business Person of the Year by the Greater Manchester Business Awards. The company is based in Manchester's Northern Quarter.

**31. GODEL TECHNOLOGIES EUROPE**

Godel Technologies is a nearshore software development partner, engaging with some of the UK's leading household names and technology companies to extend their development capacity. The company provides high performance teams for clients, with expertise in agile consulting, continuous delivery, business analysis, software development, quality assurance and digital and business intelligence.

The company is led by CEO Neil Turvin, who has over 15 years of experience in IT and software development. With offices in Manchester and London, Godel employs over 300 people; more than half of their management team are female.

**32. THE FLOOW**

The idea for The Floow came from Aldo Monteforte, an Italian entrepreneur and investor who saw a gap in the telematics market and co-founded the company with Dr. Sam Chapman, a researcher at The University of Sheffield. The Floow designs and operates insightful and user-friendly telematics systems, providing some of the world's largest motor insurers and auto organisations with actionable analytics to increase customer loyalty and ROI.

The Floow operates globally from Sheffield, helping make vehicles safer and cheaper for all.

**33. BEDE GAMING**

Over the past five years Bede Gaming has built a world class platform for the online gambling industry. Headquartered in Newcastle Upon Tyne, with offices in London and Sofia, Bulgaria, Bede processes over 200 million transactions and handle more than £550m of wagers per month, powering some of the largest online gambling operators and lotteries worldwide.

The company was founded in 2011 by Joseph Saumarez Smith, Dan Smyth and Michael Brady, who had previously worked with games suppliers including OpenBet, Playtech and Dragonfish.

**34. PANINTELLIGENCE**

Panintelligence is an independent Business Intelligence software vendor providing data visualisation software to other software vendors and resellers in sectors such as education, document management and fintech.

Led by Managing Director Mike Cripps and based in Leeds, Panintelligence are the only Sage certified BI solution for Sage 200 and Sage CRM; in 2014 they won Sage's Development Partner Innovation Award. Their software partners include Capita, Tribal, RM, Communis and Advanced.

**35. INTECHNICA**

Intechnica enables businesses to improve their website and application performance, reduce hosting costs and technical debt and maximise sales revenues. The Manchester-based company was launched after co-founders Gidlow and Andy Still implemented and optimised the system that successfully sold the tickets for Glastonbury 2005.

The company works across a diverse range of sectors including retail, B2B commerce, gambling, online Gaming, ticketing, media and insurance. In 2015 the company developed TrafficDefender, a product designed to help businesses manage high and variable traffic demands on online systems, and to remove unwanted traffic from bots, crawlers and spiders.

**36. TELCOM NETWORKS LTD**

After travelling the UK collecting startup stories for their site Tech Britain, Doug Ward and Shaun Gibson co-founded Telcom, a Manchester-based ISP providing internet connectivity to businesses across Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and London. Using the latest technology to make installation quicker and more efficient, Telcom provide reliable internet up to 1GB per second to support commerce and innovation.

Their clients include Cirque du Soleil, the NHS, LADBible Group, Allied London and Uber.

**37. ENGAGE INTERACTIVE LTD**

Engage is a full service digital agency in Leeds, providing digital strategy, website design and development, campaign planning and execution, social media management, SEO and PPC. The company was launched in 2007 by Creative Director Alex Willcocks and Technical Director Dave Wrightson, who met working at an agency in Harrogate.

With over twenty-five clients in the UK, the company has worked with northern household names including Yorkshire Tea, Jet2 and Leeds Building Society.

**38. REASON DIGITAL**

In 2007, Matt Haworth and Ed Cox founded Reason Digital, a digital innovation agency working with the UK's biggest charities, social enterprises and corporate responsibility departments to improve social impact.

Reason Digital apply a human-centred design approach to co-produce digital products including websites, online platforms, mobile apps and digital communities to change more people's lives, make efficiencies and deliver critical services at scale. They've developed apps to make it easy to donate unwanted goods to charity shops, built early warning systems to help keep sex workers safer and created platforms connecting volunteers to older people to combat isolation and decline in mental health.

**39. INTERACT**

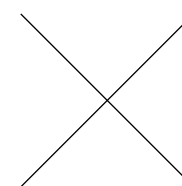
Nigel Danson PHD founded Interact with the aim of connecting people to people, and people to content. They are now a global enterprise software company, providing their product to over 750 customers worldwide, with over one million users. Interact specialise in solving internal communication and collaboration challenges by combining their sophisticated intranet software with outstanding professional services.

Headquartered near Manchester, Interact has offices in New York, San Francisco and Sydney..

**40. HIRING HUB**

Co-founded by Simon Swan and Sara Jones in 2010, Hiring Hub is an online platform helping companies find and work with trusted, independent recruitment agencies. Its mission: to make recruiting talent hassle-free while placing trust and integrity at the heart of the recruitment agency.

The first employer to sign up with Hiring Hub was high street retailer Schuch; their clients now include Morrisons, Capita, Nisa, Iceland and Ascribe. In 2015, Swan was named Software Entrepreneur of the Year at the Digital Entrepreneur Awards, and included in Real Business' Young Guns. The company's story has been featured by The Guardian, The Sunday Times, BBC News and the London Evening Standard.





## INTERVIEW

## RRADAR

**Rradar is transforming how businesses work with the legal profession.**

## MARTIN BRYANT

Next time someone tells you that robots are coming for everyone's jobs, point them in the direction of Rradar. Founder Gary Gallen is shaking up the legal profession by automating as much work as possible. But still, he's hiring lawyers at a fair clip. The East Yorkshire-based firm already employs nearly 100 people, and that headcount is set to double this year.

It's impressive growth for a firm that lawyer Gallen started alone in his conservatory just four years ago.

Today, law works much the same as it always has. The Legal Services Act of 2007 aimed to relax the way the sector worked, but it hasn't led to much in the way of real disruption. Now Rradar is changing that by completely rethinking how businesses work with lawyers and insurers.

Rradar is as much an education company as it is a law firm. Rather than just working with businesses when something goes wrong, it trains them to help stop things going wrong in the first place.

Online training, seminars, one-to-one calls, podcasts and more are provided to help businesses understand and tackle the risks they're likely to face. These risks range from health and safety to fraud prevention. If insurers can cover something, Rradar can offer a training package that helps reduce the risk that a claim will ever have to be made.

Now Rradar has launched a 'Siri for legal advice' app called Grace. If an executive needs to check, say, employment law, they can ask this virtual assistant for answers rather than being charged a hefty hourly fee for the same information from a human.

Gallen says the rest of the legal sector hasn't been too keen on the idea of taking work away from human lawyers. After all, this basic advice is the bread and butter of many law firms. But it seems to be making life more interesting for Rradar's lawyers. Now that it's so easy for customers to get answers to basic questions, they come to the company with more advanced, interesting problems that are more fulfilling to work on.



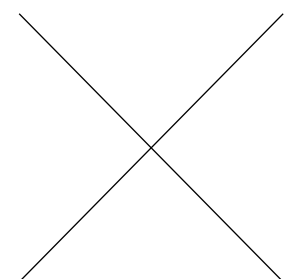
**"TECH DOESN'T  
PUT HUMANS  
OUT OF WORK. IT  
JUST REFRAMES  
WHERE THEY  
PROVIDE VALUE"**

"Lawyers want challenging work. When we commoditise basic info, we get more calls about the more clever second- and third-tier work."

The tech side of Rradar's business is growing — it's explored virtual reality as one way of educating clients, for example. But despite that, its Leeds and Glasgow satellite offices are growing fast as they staff up with legal professionals. "Our customers want local representatives. They want drop-in centres they can come to for a chat and advice," says Gallen.

Gallen argues that if the legal profession doesn't commoditise its most basic knowledge, the likes of Google will come in and do it instead.

"Tech doesn't put humans out of work," he says. "It just reframes where humans provide the true value, using technology to create bridges of trust."



**41. THE HUT GROUP**

In 2004 John Gallemore and Matthew Moulding, former co-workers at The Caudwell Group, founded The Hut Group. The company operates over 100 high-profit websites that sell premium, non-perishable FMCG direct to consumer and the fast growing, global health and beauty markets via its in-house technology and operating platform.

During 2015, The Hut group shipped over 9 million items to 192 countries, and they serve 400 million website visitors annually. They employ over 1,000 people, and are headquartered in Cheshire.

**42. ZUTO**

In 2006, James Wilkinson and Ryan Dignan founded Zuto, an online car finance and loan company, in Macclesfield. The company supports UK car buyers in the search and funding of their vehicle. They have helped more than half a million people find car finance, with one-to-one support for customers through the car buying process.

In 2015, the company expanded into central Manchester; they currently employ over 300 people, affectionately known as 'Zutonites'.

**43. SKY BETTING & GAMING**

Led by Chief Executive Richard Flint, Sky Betting & Gaming was formed in 2001 in Leeds. The company has grown to become one of the UK's leading online bookmakers, with a team of over 1,000 employees.

As one of the first bookmakers to recognise the potential of online and then mobile platforms for betting and gaming, Sky Betting & Gaming operates five major online products – Bet, Vegas, Casino, Poker, and Bingo – as well as leading sports affiliate, Oddschecker. Sky Betting & Gaming also has offices in Sheffield, London and Rome.

**44. MPD GROUP**

MPD Group are a software company that create technology that enables fulfilment and deliveries for businesses and consumers. Founded in 2010 by CEO David Grimes, their brands include Electio, a delivery management platform that enables retailers to rapidly increase the delivery options they offer to their customers, and My Parcel Delivery, a multi-award winning parcel delivery comparison website.

The Manchester-based company has secured £6.5m in funding since 2013.

**45. TEAM17**

Team17 is a games developer and publisher based in Wakefield, best known for the popular Worms franchise. Founded by Debbie Bestwick, the company has a 27-year heritage in games development, retail and publishing. Team17 creates and sells a range of successful titles worldwide, through major digital distributors such as Sony, Microsoft, Apple and Google.

In 2016, Team17 secured a £16.5m investment from LDC to fuel its expansion, and acquired games developer Mouldy Toof Studios.

**46. RESULTING**

Resulting was founded in 2004 by Stuart Browne. Based in Warrington, Resulting designs, builds and runs high-performing IT delivery organisations for businesses. The company are strategic suppliers to a number of large consulting firms and work client-side for large enterprises, globally. Their customers include EY, Nationwide and HMRC.

**47. CONNEXIN**

Connexin is a UK telecoms operator delivering broadband and voice services to SMEs and residential customers. The company is currently delivering broadband services in Hull and offering a national voice service.

Connexin was founded and is currently led by Furqan Alamgir, an Imperial College graduate. Alamgir has assembled a solid operational management team and engaged industry heavyweights to come alongside as Non Executive Directors, including Ed Candy (formerly CTO at Hutchinson Three Group UK), who acts as technical advisor.

**48. EVOKE CREATIVE**

Founded in 2003 by Dean Ward, Neil Clark, Graham Boyd and Iain Quayle, Evoke Creative designs interactive digital products for major blue-chip clients including JD Sports, Debenhams, Google and McDonald's. Based in the Wirral, their solutions include self-service kiosks, video walls, digital signage, information points, payment terminals and interactive experiences.

The company has rapidly established themselves as a market leader in the UK, with products exported to more than a dozen countries. Staff numbers have almost doubled over the past 18 months and the business now employs 56 people.

**49. PARALLAX**

Parallax began as two companies between four friends: Dario Grandich, Lawrence Dudley, Andy Fitch and James Hall. The website and web application companies operated between several bedrooms in York.

In 2009, they took the decision to merge and move to Leeds. The digital agency now works with a diverse range of clients including British Airways, Nespresso, Hisense, American Express, Kerry Foods, easyGym and the Yorkshire Cricket Club.

**50. UTILIGROUP**

Utiligroup is a market leading provider of SaaS software to the utilities and energy industry. Led by CEO Matthew Hirst and based in Chorley, the company makes a complex industry easier to understand, removing competitive barriers and enabling their clients to provide excellent service for their customers.

Utiligroup works with established and new entrant energy suppliers, as well as power traders, asset providers, metering agents and distribution companies.

**51. IMPULSEPAY LIMITED**

Chris Newell started his first business, TextYou, while studying Computing for Business at the University of Northumbria. He later rebranded the company as Interlinked Media, sold it and used the proceeds to launch ImpulsePay; a UK Mobile Payments facilitator in Newcastle.

Most of ImpulsePay's customers are online retailers looking to integrate a mobile payment method; their clients include SpareRoom, Cross Country Trains, 192.com and Virgin Trains. The company are an accredited payment intermediary of EE, Vodafone, O2, and Three.

**52. MOBYSOFT**

Founded in 2003 by Derek Steele, Manchester-based Mobysoft provides a cloud based predictive analytic software called Rentsense to social landlords in the UK.

Their software helps over 70 housing organisations maximise income, create efficiencies and mitigate welfare reform. On average, their customers achieve a 15.8% arrears reduction in the first year as well as an average efficiency saving of 25%.

In 2016 Mobysoft won a Queen's Award for Enterprise in Innovation and the Housing Excellence Best IT system for its RentSense software.

**53. AIRANGEL**

Warrington-based company Airangel provides public and guest WiFi products to the enterprise hospitality market, serviced apartment buildings and large public venues. Led by CEO Dean Wilkinson, Airangel's products cover nearly 100,000 rooms or units in 27 countries. Their customers include Mercedes-Benz, Malmaison Hotel du Vin and the NHS.

Airangel has expanded internationally and opened a second office in Dubai, covering the Middle East and Africa regions.

**54. METRONET (UK)**

Led by CEO Lee Perkins, Metronet is one of the UK's fastest growing connectivity providers, operating connectivity products including wireless, fibre, VoIP, network security and datacentre and cloud services.

In October 2016 Metronet acquired internet infrastructure company M247. Following this acquisition, the Metronet Group now offer a combined portfolio of connectivity and content services across the UK and Europe. The business operates from Manchester and Bucharest, Romania.

**55. ANGEL SOLUTIONS**

Angel Solutions has been building software for the education industry since 1999. Founded by Andy Kent, Angel Solution's web-based software is used by every local authority in England, as well as thousands of schools, children's centres and nurseries. In 2012, their Liverpool-based office underwent a circus-themed refurbishment with a colourful ball pool, popcorn machine, unicycle and a big top, circus tent meeting space.

In 2016, the company were named Business of the Year (up to 50 employees) by the Liverpool Echo.



## INTERVIEW

## THE FLOOR

**The future of car insurance flows straight out of Sheffield.**

MARTIN BRYANT

The future of cars is data, and Sheffield-based The Floor is well placed to be a key player in this new world.

Vehicle insurance premiums used to be based on informed guesses about how likely you were to be a safe driver. Now the industry is taking a more precise approach, and The Floor is leading the way.

If you've installed a data collection device in your car, or engaged with an app to lower your premiums over the past few years, there's a strong possibility The Floor has something to do with the 'scores' you receive.

It's all about better informed insurers and better informed, safer drivers. As well as sending information to your insurer about how you're driving, the company offers advice that helps you make better choices in the future – economically, environmentally, and from a safety perspective.

The Floor works with major insurers around the world, including Direct Line Group and AIG. It also deals directly with car companies like Renault and Nissan.

Now the company is ready for major international expansion. A recent £13 million investment led by China's Fosun will see the company double its headcount to support growth in the American and Chinese markets. But co-founder Sam Chapman is keen to stress that The Floor will stay firmly rooted in Sheffield.

Being based in Sheffield was no accident. The insurance industry is centred around London, Singapore and New York, but serial entrepreneur Aldo Monteforte was convinced the South Yorkshire city was an ideal home for The Floor. Cost of living, quality of life and a pipeline of local graduates with the right skills were strong deciding factors.

The choice of location has paid off. The Floor has no problem attracting staff to relocate from around the world. Sam Chapman says that one team member moved from working on the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland because the problems that The Floor was solving were more interesting.

The Floor is transforming a staid market with a fresh approach, but autonomous

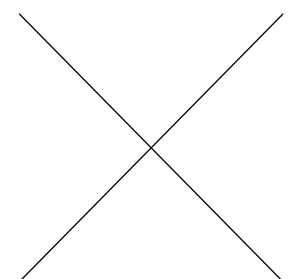


**"LEADING THE WORLD FROM SHEFFIELD FEELS FANTASTIC"**

driving presents the company with exciting new opportunities. Not only will the role of insurance change as we increasingly take our hands off the steering wheel, the amount of information available to insurers, car manufacturers and owners will increase dramatically.

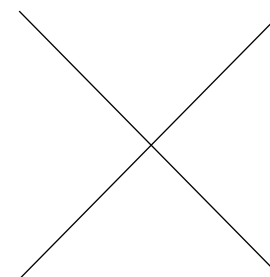
Chapman says he's exploring how technology like LIDAR can help The Floor collect ever more useful data.

The future of how vehicles – and people – are kept safe on the road may come straight out of Sheffield.





# THE NORTHERN TECH 100 IN NUMBERS



## FEATURE

**You've seen the league table. Here's how it breaks down by sector, region, gender and age.**

VICKI SHIEL

The North of England and Scotland is a large and diverse area, and this is reflected in the range of companies on the inaugural Northern Tech 100 league table. We have everything from e-commerce giants like The Hut Group to smaller software businesses like Tribepad who are using machine learning and artificial intelligence in their recruitment software.

Here we delve a little deeper into the research behind the league table and what it reveals about the sector.

### The sub-sectors

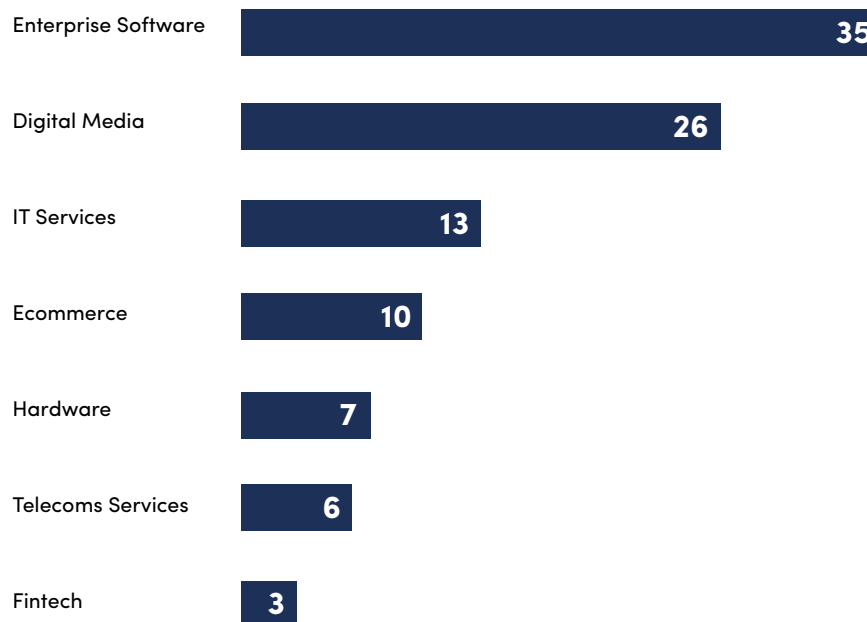
Just over a third of the list (35 companies) is made up of enterprise software providers such as hedgehog lab and Purple WiFi. 26 businesses fall in the digital media category, including TVSquared and LADBible Group. IT services companies account for 13 companies including Cloud Technology Solutions and Azzure IT. E-commerce businesses include The Car Buying Group and Tyres on the Drive.

The remainder of the list is made up of providers of non-telecoms hardware such as LPW Technology, telecoms services such as Telcom Networks, and fintech such as Zuto. Eight of the Top 100 describe themselves as 'digital agencies' (Degree 53, Engage Interactive Ltd, Parallax, Mando, Fat Media, WMG, Fresh Generation UK LTD, Yoomee).

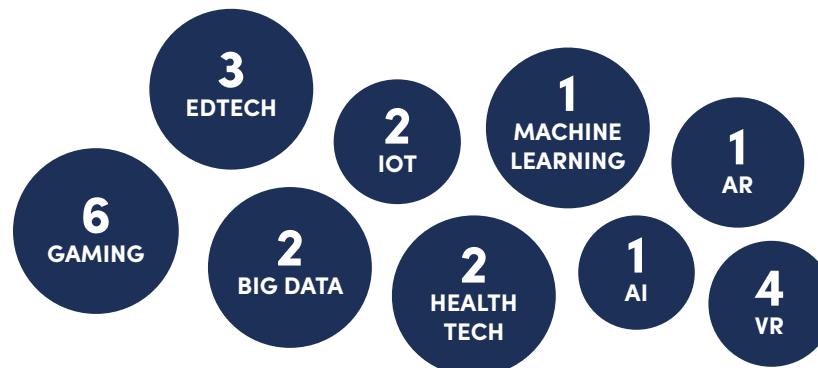
### The young sub-sectors

While their number is low, it's encouraging that a range of younger sub-sectors are represented on the league table, given the criteria stipulates entrants must have been making money for the past three years with a minimum of £500,000 revenue in 2014.

### Top 100 companies by sub-sector



### Young sub-sectors in the Top 100



## Sustained growth

GP Bullhound has ranked the top 50 fastest growing tech companies in the North for the past three years for its Northern Tech Awards. There are seven companies that have appeared on all four lists from 2014 to 2017, indicating strong, sustained growth over a significant period of time. Those companies are Chess, Mobica, ResponseTap, eBECS, Aspire Technology Solutions, Godel Technologies Europe, and Metronet (UK).

The best improvement in ranking between 2016 and 2017 was LADbible Group, which rose from 19th to 3rd, indicating a strong and improving performance over the past four years. On this year's Top 100 league table, 66 of the companies have not appeared in any of those top 50 lists in previous years.

## Data digest

**191%**  
Fastest sales growth

**84**  
Companies founded in or after 2000 (young companies)

**26**  
Oldest company on the league table (Team 17 founded in 1990)

**3**  
Youngest company on the league table (Advancery founded in 2014)

**23**  
Companies where female shareholders account for at least 20% of the shareholding

**1**  
Company wholly owned by women

**68**  
Companies where one of the founders either owns or retains large stake

**7**  
companies where a venture capital investor owns more than half the company

## Women in tech

There are 23 companies where female shareholders account for at least 20% of the shareholding; in ten of these, women own at least half of the company. These include Angel Solutions, Interact, Degree 53, UKFast, Team17, Advancery Limited, NiteSite, Opencast Software Europe, Shield Safety Group, Yoomee and Pink Boutique (the only company wholly owned by women).

Just four of these companies (Team 17, Advancery Limited, Pink Boutique and Yoomee), were founded or co-founded by women who still have senior managerial responsibility. And just three companies have female managing directors or chief operating officers who are neither founders or shareholders (Delete, Panintelligence, Redu Group Ltd).

## Socially driven businesses

Two of the Top 100 companies are driven by a social mission to help those more vulnerable in society. Reason Digital (ranked 38th with growth of 46%) are a social enterprise, which means they reinvest their profits to further their mission, while Yoomee (ranked 99th, with growth of 13%) is more of a 'mission-led business', fully commercial but with a particular emphasis on projects for the community, charities and social enterprises.

## Unicorns

There is one clear unicorn (by GP Bullhound's definition, this is a tech company founded after 2000, with a valuation of at least \$1bn) in this year's list, and one which qualified as a unicorn at the time of the investment, but exchange rate movements have reduced its dollar value.

The Hut Group was valued at around £900m in their last round of investment (equivalent to \$1.1bn at current exchange rates) while Sky Betting and Gaming was valued at £800m, equivalent to \$973.6m at current exchange rates, and \$1.3bn at the time.

## Regional breakdown

**49**  
North West



**36**  
Yorkshire and the Humber



**13**  
North East



**2**  
Scotland



## High-tech manufacturing

While there are relatively few hardware manufacturers and suppliers in the Top 100, they showcase a diverse range of advanced manufacturing specialisms, such as the development of accessories for the Raspberry Pi (Pimoroni), 3D Printing (LPW Technology), powering electric vehicles and battery energy storage systems (Hyperdrive Innovation), audio-visual and interactive tech (Elementary Technology), VOIP technology (ProVu Communications) and night vision products (NiteSite).

**56. MANDO**

Mando are a digital agency in Liverpool. Over the last 20 years, the company have collaborated with some of the world's best-known brands to shape their strategy, grow their businesses and create award-winning digital experiences.

Working with a diverse client-base across a range of sectors, their customers include Transport for London, TalkTalk, Thomas Cook Group, Warburtons, Robinsons Brewery and Pets At Home. In 2015 Ian Finch, founder and managing director of Mando, won Agency Leader of the Year at the Drum Network Awards.

**57. CHESS**

Chess are a Telecoms and ICT solutions provider based in Alderley Edge. Founded in 1993 by David Pollock, Chess have helped over 30,000 businesses grow through their technology and expert advice. The company has relationships with all major UK networks; they help their clients to grow efficiently, work from anywhere, safeguard their businesses and better connect with their customers.

In 2016, Chess's 460 employees voted the company 2nd in 'The Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work For', after eight consecutive years in the top 100.

**58. MTECH**

Leeds-based company MTEch provide over 60 companies with IT support and management advice. Founded in 2008, MTEch are a Microsoft Gold partner in Cloud Solutions and have an active apprenticeship scheme, offering training to their employees with structured Microsoft accredited courses.

Their customers include Leeds Rhinos, Summer Boarding Courses and Springfield Care Homes.

**59. CONTRACTHIREANDLEASING.COM**

ContractHireAndLeasing.com began as a solution for car leasing companies who were frustrated with traditional offline advertising. Owned and operated by Really Good Domains Ltd and led by managing director Dave Timmis, the website advertises millions of deals at any one time from brokers and franchised motor dealers.

Their purpose-built office in Hazel Grove contains a pool table, and employees enjoy the benefits of free Nespresso coffee machines, regular fruit deliveries and a car allowance scheme.

**60. ADVANCERY**

Advancery was founded in 2014 by co-directors Alex Mordey and Jayne Cooper. Specialists in virtualisation, cloud and IT support services, the company has quickly earned a reputation for excellent customer service.

Advancery's clients include the UK's largest uPVC window and door manufacturer and installer, Safestyle UK, and leading milk logistics company, SJ Bargh. In 2016, the company opened an office in Lancaster to provide better service to the North West.

**61. SUMO DIGITAL**

In 2003, Carl Cavers, Paul Porter, Darren Mills and James North-Hearn founded Sumo Digital, an independent games development studio headquartered in Sheffield. The company has partnered with some of the biggest names in games publishing, including Microsoft, Sony, SEGA, Disney, BBC and Konami.

Sumo's team has grown to over 350 people, with additional studios in Nottingham and Pune, India. In 2017 they will release their first self-published title, Snake Pass.

**62. AMPERSAND COMMERCE**

In 2009 Darryl Adie founded Ampersand using the last of his student loan from an incomplete Economics degree. Based in Manchester, Ampersand is an ecommerce agency that works with established high street retailers to create better ecommerce experiences for their customers. Their clients include international retailers like Harvey Nichols, Poundland and Bensons for Beds.

Adie has focused the company on technical strategy, solution design and development; the company have gained a reputation for being one of the most technically able agencies in the digital sector.

**63. OPENCAST SOFTWARE EUROPE LTD**

Mike O'Brien launched OpenCast in 2012 after leaving his job at global digital company Cap Gemini. Based in Newcastle at Hoults Yard, the technology company works in the realms of software development, technology consultancy and staff augmentation services to help organisations work better.

The company's clients include HM Revenue & Customs, Betfair, Barclays, Catapult, Sage and the NHS. OpenCast has seen exponential growth over the past year, doubling its staff in 2016.

**64. ASPIRE TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS LTD**

Nigel Beggs and Chris Fraser launched Aspire in Gateshead in 2006. A managed services company, Aspire improves organisations' existing IT systems in a diverse range of sectors from health, pharmaceuticals, fashion and education to retail, utilities and construction. Their clients include Benfield Motor Group, Sunderland AFC and Barbour.

Since 2013, the company has grown their workforce from 40 to over 100 employees, with a second office opened in London. They have recently invested in a £1m makeover of Heworth Hall; a Grade II listed building they bought in 2010, and home of their Gateshead office.

**65. FAT MEDIA**

Fat Media are a full-service digital agency offering premium website design, digital marketing and brand consultancy services to clients nationwide. Founded in 2005 in Lancaster, the company has opened two more offices in Bristol and London, and employs a team of over 120 people, led by CEO David Durnford. Their website design and development offering covers Wordpress, Umbraco and Magento solutions; they also create bespoke software such as hotel booking systems.

Fat Media's clients include many household names such as Warburtons, Jessops, Lakeland and Imagine Cruising. They work with customers in all industries, but have particular prowess in the hospitality, food and drink and ecommerce sectors.

**66. SAFEGUARD**

In 2008, Bjorn Reynolds founded SafeGuard, a provider of global managed payroll, global employment outsourcing and international HR services. The company, based in Sandbach, caters to companies of all sizes, with small or large employee populations, in mature and emerging international markets.

Reynolds has been recognised in Payroll World's Top 50, as a 'Game Changer' by Workforce magazine, and been nominated as Ernst & Young's 'Entrepreneur of the Year'.

**67. ELEMENTARY TECHNOLOGY**

Elementary Technology are an audio visual and interactive technology reseller working in education and enterprise marketplaces. The Leeds-based company has a team of consultants throughout England that help thousands of schools use the latest education technology to improve teaching and learning.

In 2016, Helene Podmore was appointed Head of Education for the company. With her background as an Assistant Headteacher, as well as experience working at education technology distributor Steljes Ltd, Helene's role is to support the company with an understanding of teaching and learning.

**68. PINK BOUTIQUE**

Pink Boutique is an online womenswear brand and e-retailer. The company was founded in 2012 by Alice Hall with a £90 investment and one pack of dresses.

Pink Boutique now ship between 2,000-4,000 items of glam clothing worldwide each day; they have a social media following of over 1.5 million. Operations are run from a 60,000 sq ft warehouse and offices in Newcastle with almost 70 employees.

**69. MOBICA**

Founded in 2004 by Nick Stammers and Jon Clayton, Mobica is a software services company that provides technology solutions in the connected device market, bringing next-generation, time-critical products to life. Working with top global technology providers, Mobica delivers bespoke consulting, software engineering and testing services.

Based in Wilmslow, Mobica has eleven R&D locations around the world, with customers in a number of sectors including automotive, mobile, semiconductor, fintech, TV and broadcasting, space, medical and the Internet of Things.

**70. TPP**

Horsforth-based company TPP offers software as a service solution for healthcare technology. Founded by Frank Hester OBE, TPP's software has supported NHS services to deliver electronic patient records for nearly twenty years. In the past four years they have expanded the business overseas, focusing on China and the Gulf region.

In 2016, the company moved their office into TPP House, a £22m project that has brought hundreds of jobs to West Yorkshire.



**FEATURE**

**Investment in Northern tech businesses is at a 10-year high, but will the growth in investment keep pace with the ambitions of tech entrepreneurs? We investigate in the first Tech North Investment Index report.**

**VICKI SHIEL**

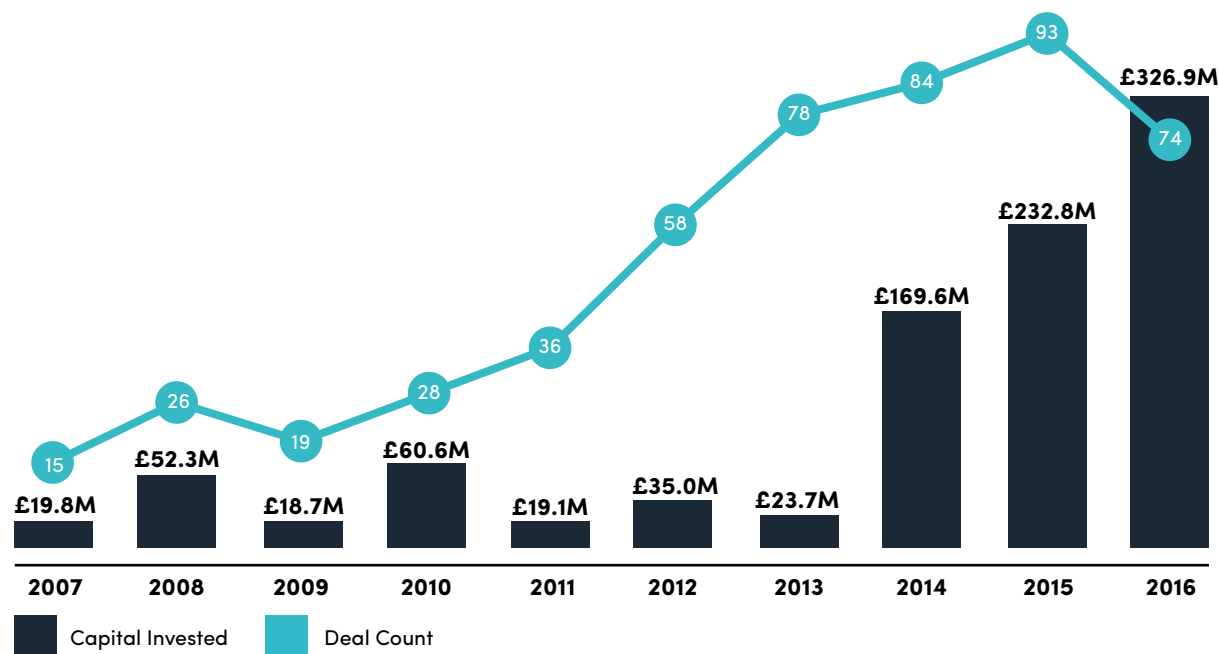
2016 was a record year for investment in Northern tech companies with a total of £326.9m invested, according to the new Tech North Investment Index.

The index is the first of its kind and tracks tech investment trends in the North of England from 2007 to 2016 using data from Pitchbook.

The data shows an increase of 1,551% over the past 10 years, from £19.8m in 2007, with the most significant growth taking place in the past three years as the sector began to take off.

More deals were done in 2015, with 93 deals to 2016's 74 deals. And the biggest jump in capital invested from one year to the next was seen in 2014 when the figure jumped from £23.7m in 2013, to £169.6m in 2014.

# INVESTMENT IN NORTHERN TECH BUSINESSES AT A 10-YEAR HIGH



The data confirms that 2016 marked a promising year for the sector, reflecting a growth in ambition as well as the digital ecosystem of co-working spaces and accelerators. But, as Tech North's head of investment strategy explains, the growth in investment must keep pace with the huge ambitions of the region's tech entrepreneurs. "The North's digital ecosystem is still at an early stage but it has huge potential.

This potential will only be satisfied if the ambitions of the entrepreneurs are matched by an ambitious investment ecosystem. The recent growth is promising but investment is still seen as a key issue by Northern tech companies. This is something we highlighted in our proposal to government for a pan-Northern Co-Investment Fund"

For more data, insight and investor opinion view the full Tech North Investment Index report at

[technorthhq.com](http://technorthhq.com)

**71. APADMI**

Apadmi, a mobile application development company, was founded in 2009 in Manchester by Garry Partington, Nick Black, Howard Simms and Adam Fleming. The team have extensive mobile experience; in the late 1990s, Partington worked on the first smartphone, the Ericsson R380.

Apadmi develops applications for iOS, Android, Windows Phone and Blackberry devices. They have partnered with a whole host of world-renowned companies to improve and broaden their mobile portfolio such as the BBC, The X Factor, The Guardian, BT, Aviva, Skyscanner, EE, AstraZeneca and Lexus. In 2016, Apadmi won Large Digital Agency of the Year at the Northern Digital Awards.

**72. EBECs**

Founded by Stephen Wilson, eBECs is a strategic alliance partner of CSC specialising in total Microsoft Business Solutions, designing and delivering Lean and agile solutions globally. With headquarters in Chesterfield, eBECs works with a diverse range of sectors including finance, insurance, manufacturing, distribution, retail, services and not-for-profit.

Their award-winning solutions cover Enterprise Resource Planning, Customer Relationship Management, mobile, field service, data analytics, Business Intelligence, the Internet of Things and cloud and managed services.

**73. SYKES COTTAGES**

In 1991, Clive Sykes founded Sykes Cottages, an independent holiday cottage rental company. Based in Chester, Sykes provide a holiday cottage booking and management service to over 8,000 cottages in the UK and Ireland.

Over 100,000 holidays are booked through Sykes Cottages' website every year. They were the first cottage company in the UK to offer an iPhone app, with an iPad and Android app in development.

**74. BETTER2KNOW**

Better2Know was founded in 2008. Based in Lancashire, it is the globe's leading private provider of sexual health testing services, covering the UK, Ireland, Spain, Italy, South Africa, Kenya and India. CEO Mike Asher has been working in biotechnology for over 20 years, having previously held the position of Chief Executive at the Centre of Excellence for Life Sciences.

The company provides patients with fast access to appointments, quick, accurate results, and a completely confidential service. Better2Know has helped thousands of people around the world get tested discreetly and quickly.

**75. PROVU COMMUNICATIONS LTD.**

Huddersfield-based ProVu was co-founded by Ian Godfrey and Peter Bryant. As a business-to-business distributor of Voice over Internet Protocol Hardware, ProVu are the principal distributors for many leading brands of IP phones, and other products including door entry and network switches.

The company have developed their own reseller portal, ProSys, an award-winning portal that allows resellers to take control of their orders both pre- and post-deployment. ProVu continues to grow year-on-year, with a passionate team of 22 people.

**76. THE ESP GROUP**

ESP Group was founded by Terry Dunn in 1994. The company makes life simple for millions of transport users by supporting passengers on every step of their journey.

ESP Group assists major transport operators, local and metropolitan transport authorities and national schemes, providing customers with the mobility support they need. Their products include Journeycall, Systex and Viaggio.

**77. WMG**

WMG Group is one of the UK's largest and longest established full service digital agencies with an award-winning client service and blue chip client base. Founded by CEO Dennis Engel, WMG develops longstanding partnerships with its clients, creating targeted digital strategies to dovetail with clients' business objectives.

The company services over 200 key accounts and employs over 120 people across the group, with offices in London, Harrogate and Wetherby.

**78. C365CLOUD**

C365Cloud is a secure, award-winning SaaS providing Health & Safety compliance to reduce corporate risk. Based in Wakefield, C365Cloud was initiated by senior management who designed and built the product entirely in-house.

Their client-led approach has enabled them to grow their service scope to include over 80 separate mobile enabled areas including Compliance & Governance, Assurance & Risk, Facilities Management, Health & Safety compliance, planned and reactive maintenance. Their customers include Bupa, Co-op, Sainsbury's, Heineken, RSLs and NHS Trusts.

**79. VAIONI**

Manchester-based Vaioni is a market leading provider of connectivity. Founder Sachin Vaish launched Vaioni in 2008; the company now owns and operates the Vaioni Ethernet Network, a carrier grade infrastructure that connects London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Newcastle.

V.E.N. is integrated with twelve of the major UK Ethernet providers including BT, Virgin Media and TalkTalk business.

**80. EVERYTHING DIFFERENT LTD.**

Tech-led creative marketing consultancy group Everything Different was founded in 1999 by Ben Quigley, Ian Millen, Mark Martin and Chris Rickaby. The company creates sustained business growth for clients using marketing activity, collaboratively combining creativity, tech and data.

Everything Different employ 55 staff members, with a headquarters in Newcastle and a second office in London. Their clients include Sky, L'Oreal, Sage, Nexus and the NHS.

**81. VENN DIGITAL**

Venn Digital is an independent, fully integrated digital marketing agency with an in-house, proprietary content management system that powers over 100 websites. The global platform allows users (business owners, marketing managers and ecommerce managers alike) to edit the content on their website from anywhere in the world using their cloud based software.

Managing Director Brian Whigham founded the company in August 2010. Venn has offices in Manchester and London with a growing team of fifty employees.

**82. OPENCRM**

In 2005, Graham Anderson founded OpenCRM with one simple aim: to offer a credible UK alternative to Salesforce. Based in Richmond, the Cloud CRM platform company has tailored their software to suit a diverse range of customers including HomeHunts, Distinctive Publishing and Imaging Supplies.

As of 2015, the company has worked with customers in 14 countries with over 6,000 users.

**83. FRESH GENERATION UK**

Manchester-based Fresh Generation UK are specialists in search marketing, with an exceptional Wordpress and Magneto development team. Launched in 2009 by Justin Blackhurst, Mark Blackhurst and Vaibhav Kakkar, the company has since expanded to 250 employees working across seven countries.

Fresh Generation UK have launched 452 websites and generated over £515m in revenue for their clients.

**84. PURE TECHNOLOGY GROUP**

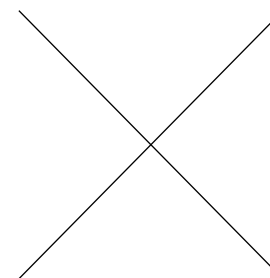
The pure technology group is a leading provider of ICT services and solutions to SME, corporate and public sectors. Led by Group CEO Stephen O'Brien, the Leeds-based company experienced a landmark year in 2016, with a launch of a new business strategy and a group rebrand. They were also awarded Company of the Year at the very first Candlelighters Awards and Group Gold status by Investors In People.

With strategic ambition to continue organic growth, acquire three further companies and double current revenue to £40 million in revenue within three years, the pure technology group aims to be one of the major technology partners in the UK.

**85. VISUALSOFT LTD.**

Visualsoft, headquartered in Stockton-on-Tees, is a digital agency specialising in ecommerce. Founded by Dean Benson and Richard Bendelow, Visualsoft has worked with over 1,000 retailers, helping them to build, grow and sustain their businesses online.

The company has additional offices in Manchester, Newcastle and London, with a client list that includes TJ Hughes, Carpet Runners UK, Charles Clinkard, Gabor and Beauty Base.



## INTERVIEW

REASON  
DIGITAL

**Reason Digital was developing tech-for-good before the term was invented.**

MARTIN BRYANT

One often ignored strength of the North is 'tech-for-good.' Across the region, entrepreneurs here seem more willing than most to think of people over profit.

Reason Digital is a great example of this socially-minded approach to technology. The Manchester-based agency focuses on projects that make the world a better place. A social enterprise, it ploughs its profits back into making a greater impact. Take Gone for Good for example, a mobile app that is essentially 'Uber for charitable giving'. You take photos of items you want to give away, select a charity shop to donate to, then that charity comes and collects the items from you. Bam – it's gone. For good (in both senses of the phrase).

Safety Nets is another strong example of Reason Digital's work. This app is designed to help sex workers share information and stay safe on city streets. The company recently learned that Safety Nets saved the life of a hearing-impaired sex worker.

Reason's client work includes building websites and apps for charities. It generated websites for each of the Trussell Trust's food banks, for example. It also helps corporations with their corporate social responsibility programmes and has developed software to help them keep track of whether they're living up to their targets.

While the company has an international client base, Reason Digital has helped to build a tech-for-good community at home in Manchester by holding regular events. It also records a regular podcast in which team members discuss socially-minded technology in a lightweight, accessible way.

The company began as a plain vanilla web design agency almost a decade ago. Founders Matt Haworth and Ed Cox felt unfulfilled building products for businesses so decided to target the charity sector.

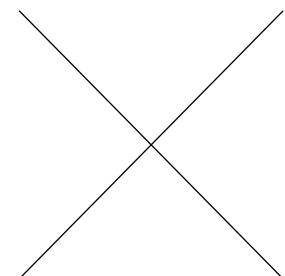
In a world where we usually talk about investment and profit as the key drivers of business progress, Reason Digital shows you can do well if you focus on social progress instead. With £1 million of work in its pipeline, the company is successful, but Matt Howarth says that scaling a tech-for-good business can be hard. "The traditional startup model doesn't work, and it can hard to engage VCs."



**"WITH TECH-FOR-GOOD, THE TRADITIONAL STARTUP MODEL DOESN'T WORK."**

As a result, the company is exploring other methods of growth. For example, it raised private investment for Gone for Good. It secured Comic Relief funding for a peer-to-peer support app that will help those recovering from addiction get support from someone who has been through a similar experience. Meanwhile, it is working on creating a joint venture with a group of charities to help them efficiently support more people at scale.

Reason Digital has been doing tech-for-good for nine years, long before the term became trendy. Now, with international growth in Australia and beyond on the cards, the company looks set to remain a leader in the space.





## THE CITY TALKING

TECH  
IN THE  
NORTH••  
VOL 1

## TECH IN THE NORTH: VOL.1

At the end of last year, The City Talking began interviews for a new film about tech in the North. We were fascinated by the stories we were hearing about people who were changing the world around us with tech; the individuals and teams building their dreams and a Northern tech scene from offices, co-working spaces and bedrooms down the road and across the Pennines. We set up our cameras in front of the people that were making things happen, pressed record, and asked them how they'd done it so far, and what more they wanted to do.

One of these people was Rebecca Rae, the Head of Strategy and Insight at Reason Digital; a digital agency that works with UK charities and social enterprises to create tech for good. On our visit to their office in Lever Street, we learned about some of reason's products, including an app to help sex workers stay safe. Rebecca told us how much she loved her job; by the time we left their offices, we loved what Reason Digital did, too.

On another day, we went to Sheffield to visit The Floop, a telematics data company working with motor insurance and auto organisations to help save lives. The idea for The Floop came from Aldo Monteforte, an Italian entrepreneur and investor who saw a gap in the telematics market and co-founded the company with Dr. Sam Chapman, a researcher at The University of Sheffield. We learned about a company that uses complex data to save lives, and how it all began.

vTime, the world's first social network in VR, is being built within brick-lined walls of offices above the Baltic Social in Liverpool. We went there to speak to their Managing Director, Clemens Wangerin, who moved to Liverpool from Belgium in the mid-nineties to work for games company Pysgnosis.

"vTime grounds you in a virtual world, and gives you a sense of presence," says Clemens, when we asked him about vTime. "You believe you're somewhere else, and you believe you're there together."

It's difficult to envision Sumo Digital being anything other than it is today, which is a company regularly visited by representatives from Sony and Microsoft, who fly in from Seattle; a company responsible for AAA games like LittleBigPlanet 2 & 3, Forza Horizon 2 and Dead Island 2. But back in 2003, when Infogrames shut down its Sheffield studio, Sumo was just four guys with a lot of experience and some redundancy cheques. We were interested to know how four guys became a company with offices in Sheffield, Nottingham and Pune, India, so we met with Darren Mills, one of Sumo's cofounders.

One sunny day in Newcastle, we visited Gilbert Corrales, his wife Helga and two other members of the Leaf.FM team in an attic above a theatre on the Quayside. In 2014 Gilbert and his team moved from Costa Rica to Newcastle on UKTI's Sirius programme to develop their app, a music discovery and promotions platform, that's been used by over 25 million people, and have stayed in Newcastle ever since.

"We're passionate about music," says Gilbert. "We're passionate about making a dent in the universe."

Talking to Gilbert about Leaf.FM and his journey across the world made for a good afternoon; it was a new kind of story from a new kind of northern tech company, a story we were glad to hear.

We spoke to so many more individuals, like Hugh Campbell from GP Bullhound, Rachael Turner from MadLab, Victoria Betton from mHabitat, Lyndsey Britton from Campus North, Doug Ward from SpacePortX and Natasha Sayce-Zelem from Sky. After months of interviews, we have compiled the stories into a film, called Tech in The North.

Tech in the North will premiere in April. The film is sponsored by Tech North, Leeds LEP, First Direct, Creative England and Sky. It will be available to watch online at The City Talking's website.

[thecitytalking.com](http://thecitytalking.com)

## INTERVIEW

# PINK BOUTIQUE

**Pink Boutique is growing fast by focusing on a niche but passionate audience.**

MARTIN BRYANT

In a world of huge investment rounds it's reassuring to learn that you can still build a business the old fashioned way. In 2012, teaching assistant Alice Hall bought a pack of dresses for £90 and sold them at a markup on eBay. Reinvesting her profits, she sold two packs, then four, then eight.

After six months, Pink Boutique moved from eBay to a dedicated website. Five years later and entirely bootstrapped, Pink Boutique employs 70 people and ships thousands of garments each day.

Pink Boutique is the only business in the Northern Tech 100 entirely owned by women. Hall's mother stumped up the initial £90 investment to start the business and remains the company's only other shareholder.

In a competitive fashion ecommerce market, Pink Boutique has carved out a niche for itself. It supplies a glamorous look to women that has proven popular in party towns like Glasgow and Liverpool. If you've got your tan and your heels on point, a Pink Boutique outfit is the perfect centrepiece for your look.

Hailing from the North's ultimate party town, Newcastle, Hall spotted that demand for this look wasn't well served by the big players in the market. "We were in the right place at the right time. We were first to market with the glamorous look."

Hall's success has earned her a place on Forbes' 30 Under 30 Europe list, and as a finalist at the North East Business Executive of the Year Awards 2016 for Tyneside and Northumberland. Meanwhile, Pink Boutique recently came in at number 12 in the Sunday Times Virgin Fast Track 100 league table, which ranks private companies with the fastest-growing sales in the UK.

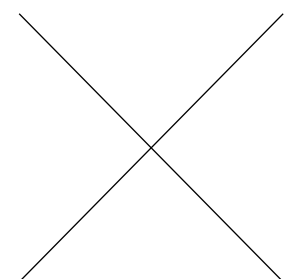
Despite her success, Hall is far from finished. Staying true to her niche, Pink Boutique is exploring the possibility of serving its target market with an expanded range of products. And while the firm has attracted an international customer base in the US, Australia and Eastern Europe without really trying, Hall sees growth potential outside the UK once she starts marketing internationally.



Beyond Pink Boutique, Hall recently co-founded a separate business with her husband. Glam Home Store serves the

furniture needs of the glamorous crowd, working with small suppliers to deliver items like sofas and beds faster than most major retailers.

Alice Hall is the perfect example of an entrepreneur who knows, lives and breathes her audience, serving them with conviction, passion, and disregard for the conventions of the mainstream market.



**86. RESPONSETAP**

ResponseTap was co-founded by Richard Hamnett and Ross Fobian while in university. Established in 2008, the Manchester-based company is now Europe's leading call intelligence software specialist. With £1.5m invested into product development annually, the company now supports more than 2,000 clients worldwide, including British Gas, Aviva, Mercedes Benz and Virgin.

Their 85-member team recently relocated to 8,000 sq ft grade-A office space with capacity for 140 staff. The team also gives back via the 111 initiative – an annual six-figure charitable giving programme, that began in December 2016.

**87. UKFAST**

UKFast is one of the largest independently owned hosting providers in the UK, nearing a £40m turnover in 2016. The firm, set up by Lawrence and Gail Jones in 1999, now has offices in Manchester, London and Glasgow.

UKFast looks after the web presence of some of the world's biggest brands by providing dedicated servers, cloud hosting, colocation and security services to government, public sector and commercial organisations. The firm has four fully owned, custom-built data centres, and its cybersecurity arm Secarma specialises in ethical hacking and penetration testing.

**88. PARCEL2GO.COM**

Fil Adams-Mercer founded Bolton-based company Parcel2go.com in 2004. With two arms to its business – a parcel delivery comparison site, and an outsourced white-label software – Parcel2go.com has experienced phenomenal growth since its launch.

The company runs websites and customer services for couriers such as TNT, Hermes, DPD and UPS throughout Europe. They have been featured by the BBC, Channel 4, The Sunday Times, The Telegraph and The Financial Times.

**89. UNIFORM**

Uniform, a design and innovation company, was established in 1998 by three product design students at Liverpool John Moores University; Nick Howe, Pete Thomas and Nick Bentley. Uniform now employs 54 people, mostly in Liverpool but with a small outpost in London.

Their roster of clients includes Amtico, Pets Choice, Linn, Mitre, The Royal Mint, Canary Wharf and Knight Dragon. Uniform's research and development work in AI, IoT and VR has been covered by the BBC, CNN, WSJ, FastCo, and PSFK among others.

**90. WAX DIGITAL**

Since 2001, Wax Digital has been providing cloud eProcurement to help savings-focused organisations worldwide reduce costs, improve compliance, increase visibility and reduce risk. Their web3 software is deployed via the cloud to 260,000 users in over 100 countries, carrying tens of millions of transactions efficiently and securely every year.

Wax Digital was founded by Daniel Ball and Paul Ellis in Manchester; their customers include the NHS, Nissan, Xerox, Durham University and ITV.

**91. NITESITE LTD**

York-based Nitesite designs and manufactures patented night vision products for hunting, personal security and zero-light observation. Invented by Phil and Dave Craven, NiteSite's products deliver crisp, ultra-clear night vision, regardless of ambient light conditions. The company also sells a full range of accessories and an infrared handheld spotting device, SpotterXtreme, used within the hunting and security markets.

The company currently exports to 31 countries and has a presence on every continent. In 2016, Nitesite won the Queen's Award for International Trade.

**92. SIMPLE USABILITY**

In 2001, Guy Redwood founded SimpleUsability; a behavioural research and user experience consultancy based in Leeds. SimpleUsability's passion for observing truly natural behaviour helps their clients to become more customer-centric and develop significantly better products and services.

The company works across sectors including retail, finance and travel; their clients include EE, Playtech, Asda, Jet2.com, the NHS, McDonald's and Hermes.

**93. SONOCENT**

Leeds-based Sonocent was founded by Roger Tucker in 2007. The company develops software that visualises speech from audio recordings, making audio as easy to access and manipulate as text. Their software can be used to help learners take notes in the classroom, practise oral language skills or aid struggling writers.

The company currently works with Vision West Nottinghamshire College, The University of Bath, University College Cork and the University of the District of Columbia.

**94. BLUE LOGIC**

Formed in January 2007, Blue Logic is an IT support company in Leeds run by directors Mark Ambler and Dave Helm. The company has worked with industry leading vendors like Microsoft, Sonicwall, Sage, Netapp and Veeam. They also host regular workshops, seminars and webinars on a range of topics to inform and educate businesses.

The company employs over 90 staff and continues to grow. In 2017, they were shortlisted for Service Provider of the Year in the Networking Computing Awards.

**95. DELETE AGENCY**

Co-founded in 2000 by Andy Hutchinson and Mark Walton, Delete Agency operates out of London, Leeds and Munich. They specialise in digital product creation, UX design and digital transformation.

Their recent work includes the creation of a highly-acclaimed new digital presence for Southampton FC, a digital showcase for lighting manufacturer iGuzzini, redefining the digital offer and complete platform overhaul for self-storage provider Safestore, and delivering a brand new web presence for Leeds Beckett University.

**96. AXON**

Based in Macclesfield, Axon is a cloud managed service provider and Microsoft Gold Partner co-owned by Mike Agutter, Graham Fern and Tim Mears. Founded in 2001, Axon began as a single-source IT company and in 2011 shifted its focus to cloud computing. These days they provide everything from IT support, virtualisation, telecoms and IT security to data backup, consultancy and training.

Their clients include Tarmac Building Solutions, Natural Retreats, City Press and Irish in Britain.

**97. CONTEXT PUBLIC RELATIONS**

In 1992 Frank Smith and Craig Coward founded Context, a specialist public relations and marketing consultancy focusing on the technology sector. Based in Macclesfield, their services include media relations, content marketing and social media management to clients in a number of technology sectors, including information security, healthcare tech, retail and fintech and telecommunications.

Their clients include global leaders in information security like Check Point Software Technology and North West technology firms like omnichannel ecommerce software company Maginus.

**98. 4040 MEDIA**

Based in Southport, 4040 Media are a marketing services agency. Founded by CEO Matt Byron in 2009, 4040 Media were the early pioneers in animated explainer videos. They have created over 1,750 videos for over 1,000 clients around the world as part of their Wyzowl brand, including Seagate, Oracle and Deloitte.

In November 2016, 4040 Media raised £500,000 in equity and debt funding, to be used towards their growth as well as the development of new products and services, like their new platform publi.sh, a new content marketing brand.

**99. YOOME**

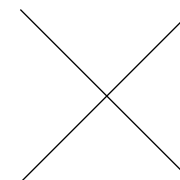
Yoomee is an Agile/Lean digital agency. Run by husband and wife team Nicola and Andy Mayer, Yoomee designs and develops new digital services for social good, working to support vulnerable communities.

The Sheffield-based company uses human-centred design methodologies to connect people together around a common cause, inspire and motivate. They are a values-led organisation that works exclusively with non-profit organisations and public sector clients.

**100. INVOSYS LIMITED**

Invosys is a new generation carrier out to challenge the traditional telecoms establishment. Recognised as a key player in the UK wholesale and reseller channel, the Worsley-based company has expanded globally with the launch of its market-leading platform, Number Manager, in Australia and New Zealand. Invosys manage more than one million calls per day for customers, ranging from sole traders to large multinationals, public sector organisations and some of the UK's most recognised brands and retailers.

In 2015 co-founder Peter Crooks was shortlisted in the Entrepreneur of the Year category of the 2015 Comms Business Awards.





## INTERVIEW

## UNIFORM

**Uniform is a uniquely playful and creative agency that keeps reinventing itself.**

MARTIN BRYANT

Of all the companies in the Northern Tech 100, Uniform has perhaps the most varied history. In its 19 years, the Liverpool agency has been involved with everything from interior and product design to virtual reality and artificial intelligence.

Founded in 1998 by three product design students at Liverpool John Moores University, the company scored an early success with the award-winning design of Garlands Nightclub. And when entrepreneur Simon Woodroffe got in touch, they found themselves designing a groundbreaking warm saké dispenser for the second ever Yo! Sushi restaurant.

As revenue and headcount grew, Uniform moved into creating computer-generated visualisations for top architects and property developers around the world. For example, in 2008 they made the launch film and imagery for landmark London building The Shard.

Never a company to stand still, Uniform developed a broader set of services for clients and found itself doing place branding for museums and galleries.

It was in 2012 that things got really interesting, though. "We decided to have fewer clients but do more for them," says cofounder Nick Howe. "We were interested in getting much closer to our clients, positioning ourselves as consultants and partners rather than suppliers."

As a part of this shift, Uniform invested heavily in R&D. "Innovation and pushing boundaries has been part of our DNA since day one. But it's much more structured now – a deliberate function of the business," says Howe.

A dedicated team within Uniform creates playful concept products to explore what the company can do for its clients. Early examples of this approach included a Postcard Player that brought music recommendations back away from digital algorithms and into fans' hands via machine-readable cards. Listening Post, meanwhile, was an interactive gig poster that could be touched to play audio clips of bands.

Visit Uniform's HQ and it can feel a bit like Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, with another weird and wonderful toy around every corner. There's a jukebox on one wall that reads your facial expression to



**"PUSHING BOUNDARIES HAS BEEN PART OF OUR DNA SINCE DAY ONE"**

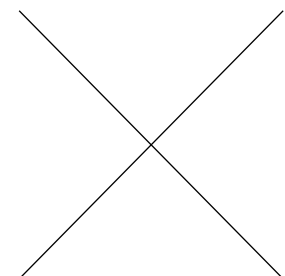
play a song appropriate to your mood, for example.

Uniform now employs 54 people, mostly in Liverpool but with a small outpost in London. They're working with clients including football firm Mitre, and drinks brand Gatorade, with whom they're working on a brand activation for Arsenal FC.

Howe praises Liverpool's "diverse, dynamic and outward looking" qualities, and says Uniform will remain firmly rooted in the city.

That said, he expects the London office to grow this year to better serve clients in the capital.

Given Uniform's many shifts in focus over the past two decades, we can expect more in the future. Howe says that artificial intelligence is a current hot topic at the company. He's recently returned from Austin, Texas, where Uniform gave two talks on the topic at SXSW. We'll watch with interest to see how this playful, creative company reinvents itself next.



# ONES TO WATCH

**The Northern Tech 100 League Table might focus on the fastest growing tech businesses in the North. But there are some new kids on the block you need to know.**

## NADINA OSMANI

In July 2016 Tech North launched its new hunt for the North's most exciting early-stage tech startups – Northern Stars round 2. A series of pitch competitions took place across the region and in November the 10 winners triumphed at the grand final in Manchester. They're bright bunch of entrepreneurs spanning the spectrum of tech sub-sectors from ad-tech and AR through to video analytics and broadcasting software. Here they are.



## AIRTIME REWARDS

Free stuff is the best stuff, we all agree. If you could buy your morning coffee and get money off your phone bill, that coffee would taste even better. That's what happens when you use Airtime Rewards. Airtime Rewards is a retail rewards app, or, in much juicier terms, if you spend money with your favourite brands you get money off your phone bill. Spend enough, and your phone bill could cost you nothing.

There are currently 13 brands signed up to use the Airtime Rewards app, including Caffè Nero, Habitat, Debenhams and Waitrose. For consumers this means that just doing your weekly shop, the same way you always do, could reduce your monthly phone bill by £10-£20. Airtime Rewards works on any network, prepaid or pay monthly phones. Using the existing payment infrastructure from Mastercard and Visa, Airtime Rewards can instantly reward customers who use their debit or credit cards in store or online.

Co-founders Adam Ward and Josh Graham have been working in the mobile technology sector for over 10 years, developing loyalty and payment solutions for network operators and retailers in the UK – including Orange Wednesdays. The co-founders were aware that the average monthly cost of having a mobile phone

is rising for consumers and thought of a unique way to help them out while building brand loyalty with participating retailers. As of February the company also joined the Wayra O2 Telefonica accelerator programme.

[airtimerewards.com](http://airtimerewards.com)



## DREAM AGILITY

Dream Agility was born from what CEO Elizabeth Clark describes as the "\$70 billion nightmare" of Google Shopping. In 2013, Clark was working with a jewellery brand carrying over 10,000 products who wanted to list on Google Shopping. She approached the three biggest ad-tech companies in the world to ask how they could help tackle Google Shopping; their response? They couldn't do it, they were invested in incremental gains on social. So she did it herself.

When making online shopping adverts, companies will often have beautiful and inventive names for their products, but these names aren't necessarily the words that their customers are using when searching online. Dream Agility works with the search terms that customers actually use and changes the ad listings of relevant products to match those terms on Google Shopping ads – giving customers exactly what they're looking for. According to Clark, the result of using Dream Agility is an uplift in traffic of between 20% to 500% for retailers, doubled conversions and profitable ads within weeks of using the platform. The company offers the first purpose-built, integrated feed, ad-tech solution, with UK, EU and US patents pending for their technology. This means that they're optimising online shopping ad results all the way from stock levels to search terms.

They are now a Google Premier Partner, and manage more Google Merchant API calls for their clients than any other company in the UK. Since winning Northern Stars, Dream Agility have gone on to win several more competitions, including a place on the global Lafayette Plug and Play Accelerator. They're also opening their first office in Paris, and hiring in Australia as part of their plans to expand worldwide. Clark is also thrilled to report that some of their clients are still hitting record sales every month on the platform, even after more than two years of use.

[dreamagility.com](http://dreamagility.com)



## LIVINGLENS

Research by Cisco tells us that by the end of 2017 over 69% of online content will be video. However, video content remains impenetrable as a source of data – we can tell how long people watched it, and how many people came from a video to make a purchase, but we can't really say much more than that. Liverpool-based LivingLens have built a product that captures and analyses the speech, actions and sentiments contained in video content and turns it into searchable data that can be translated to any language, from any language. LivingLens CEO Carl Wong describes the platform as being able to treat video as a source of unstructured data to "find meaningful moments" for the consumer insights industry. To provide a practical example, their software could capture thousands of product reviews on YouTube and allow companies to discern the overall sentiment and gain useful insights about their consumers' true feelings.

LivingLens have just announced a further £1.3 million in funding, from the Angel CoFund and other angel investors. Wong said of the funding: "We are delighted to announce this funding round, which will enable us to more deeply support our customers, accelerate the development of new capabilities that will add more value for clients, and, ultimately, scale the business. We are now working with some of the world's largest brands and agencies to help them to get closer to their consumers and drive more value out of consumer video as a valuable source of insight, and expect 2017 to be a really strong year for our business."

[livinglens.tv](http://livinglens.tv)



## RADIO.CO

Radio.Co is a live-streaming platform that allows anyone to create an online radio station, running entirely from the cloud.

You no longer need a huge studio, giant analogue equipment and endless hours to create your own branded station – Radio.Co can connect from anywhere in the world and switches easily between live and automated broadcasting.

James Mulvany, CEO of Radio.Co, set up his first online business in 2003 when he was only 16 years old. Since then, he's noticed increasing demand for cloud-based radio platforms. According to research from Radio Joint Audience Research, nine out of ten Brits still listen to the radio at least once a week, and the average person listens for about 21.3 hours per week – so the appetite is obviously still there. There are now more than 2,500 stations broadcasting using Radio.Co and the company says it's signing up around 150 new stations to the platform every month. One of its most popular stations is Cult Radio, which showcases artists signed to the Cult Record label founded by Strokes frontman Julian Casablancas.

Radio.Co are about to release a major update that will allow customers to record shows and syndicate their content to various podcasting platforms. This feature doesn't just make it easy for customers to manage both their live and on-demand audio, listeners can download their favourite shows as a podcast to enjoy again and again. Another exciting development is the launch of MCR.Live, a radio station and podcast network for the Manchester region, where the company is based. The station is already available online and on DAB, and aims to make local radio relevant again. To do this, they've signed up some great content partners, such as Skiddle to ensure interesting and valuable content for their listeners.

[radio.co](http://radio.co)



## SWAPBOTS

Imagine if technology could bring your childhood dream of living, breathing toys into reality. Well, it can and it's called SwapBots. SwapBots are a collectable, customisable toy and video game hybrid brought to life by a smartphone or tablet using augmented reality. The swappable toy currently has over 700 different combinations of characters, from space griffins to cyber dragons, and many more to come.

Sick of being subjected to in-app purchases and a barrage of ads while playing games,



the SwapBots team moved the purchasing feature into the toy itself, meaning no in-app purchases, no ads, no 'you must wait 5 minutes to click on this again' nonsense. All the fun of mobile gaming without the annoying parts. The toy was designed by parents, to give kids from different backgrounds access to augmented reality technology at pocket-money prices.

SwapBots is also inspiring people from the toy and tech industry to see the potential of augmented reality. The likes of game development engine Unity, AR platform Vuforia and toy manufacturer Crea are all championing SwapBots. Crea, known for producing the Skylanders toy, also manufacture the product.

Expect to see them everywhere by Christmas this year, as they've launched a £25,000 Kickstarter campaign that's well on its way to being fully funded. They've also had a feature on the front page of TechCrunch, exhibited at toy shows in three cities across the US and were named one of the CE50 winners by Creative England.

[swapbots.co](http://swapbots.co)



### PERSONALYZE

Personalize's (formerly TopicDNA) mission is to understand people better than anyone else, and make advertising more interesting and relevant. Their product is a social profiling and ad targeting technology that, according to co-founder Jason Binks, profiles four times deeper than any other available social analytics tool. For customers, this means ads that are actually relevant to their interests, and for advertisers, it brings a 65% increase in cost efficiencies for their social ad targeting, claims Binks. Co-founder Andrew Ko began creating Personalize as his PHD project at Manchester University. The project began as a study at Manchester Business School, exploring how people connect socially through music. Ko began using music as a starting point to understanding people's personalities, and the project eventually became much broader, and sought to use social media as a better way of understanding people.

As well as being a Northern Stars Winner, they also came second in Twitter's Global Innovation Competition. The company has just been announced as a top 10 I-COM Data Startup Challenge finalist, making them one of the top 10 data startups in the world. They are API approved for Twitter and Instagram, as well as counting other large social networks among their biggest fans. They are also currently leading a strategic partnership with a large innovation group, where they provide social analytics data and insights.

[personalize.co](http://personalize.co)



### VALUE CHAIN

The idea for Value Chain began around 13 years ago as a niche aerospace manufacturing company, after CEO Tom Dawes studied a PHD in aerospace supply chain. During his studies he identified two potential opportunities, one in manufacturing and one in supply chain collaboration software. Initially, he began the manufacturing company but after the 2008 financial crash he realised that you need business intelligence and supply chain intelligence in order to have a robust manufacturing company. Learning from his mistakes in manufacturing, he then began Value Chain. The company provides software to manufacturing companies to help them streamline their operations and manage risks.

The thing that is special about Value Chain is that they want to work with businesses of all sizes, from SMEs to OEMs, to understand their needs and use big data analytics to ensure a steady stream all the way through the manufacturing process.

Dawes parallels the growth of the company with how Facebook initially grew virally, through connecting people and their networks, but instead they are connecting businesses with their supply chain partners. They are currently working with three university partners, on projects for huge clients such as Bentley, BAE Systems and the Ministry of Defence. Since winning Northern Stars they have also begun working with Rolls Royce. The company is six months into its commercialisation phase and has generated revenues over £1million and forecasts revenues over £50million in the next five years.

[valuechain.com](http://valuechain.com)



### ASH.TV

Ash.TV CEO Ash Lewis describes their unique patent-pending technology as "the world's first automatically playing video advert on mobile devices." They have also created another product, which works in harmony with their video adverts, called True Target, which allows clients using their video adverts to target their customers based on age, gender, location, interests and occupation. Traditionally, Ash notes, companies struggle to make money through mobile advertising due

to differences in display that mean ads designed for screen don't work well on mobile devices and often get excluded. However, with nearly 50% of web users browsing on mobile, he saw a definite gap in the market for an advertising solution.

Based in Hull and Amsterdam, Ash.TV allows companies to upload a video and set up a targeted campaign within about 15 minutes. After launching, companies can then track their reach and success. They describe their smart bar advert as "90 pixels tall, 2.7% click-through rate and tonnes of fun" and their testing against YouTube over a month delivered eight times the return on investment for their client. Since winning Northern Stars they have also won one of the largest food and beverage companies in the world as a client.

[ash.tv](http://ash.tv)



### DUECOURSE

"80 - 90% of small businesses fail because of bad cash flow and not because of an underlying business problem" began Michael Hall, one of the directors of Manchester-based DueCourse, at his winning Northern Stars pitch.

DueCourse is a cloud-based service which provides cash advances on invoices for SMEs. Founder and CEO Paul Haydock started the company as he realised that "traditional methods of finance are completely out of sync with what today's SMEs need" and states that they wanted "to disrupt the market and help SMEs get access to the cash they need to fuel their business, in real time." The service is obviously very popular with SMEs as eight out of ten small businesses who sign up go on to become regular users.

DueCourse uses its own proprietary risk engine to assess which invoices can be released and provides the money within hours. The solution means that companies can save hours of work spent chasing invoices and instead focus on their immediate needs such as hiring new people or purchasing equipment. DueCourse works with a variety of different accounting packages such as Sage, Xero and Quickbooks.

This year they became one of the largest fintech investments outside of London, raising £6.25million, £1.25million of which was equity funding and £5million of debt for lending to UK SMEs. Their new backers include the founders and investors of Lovefilm, Zoopla, Transferwise and LinkedIn. The business is currently only available to UK SMEs, but DueCourse are also planning a further round of funding over the next 10 months to expand their services worldwide.

[duecourse.com](http://duecourse.com)



### PROXISMART

Using their smart beacon solution, Proxismart's ParkingPerx platform allows users to park for a reduced cost, or possibly even for free in their nearest town centre. Primarily targeted at high streets that have recently seen a downturn in trade, ParkingPerx aims to get people back into the city centre and increase loyalty, footfall and local spending. The data collected by the beacons can also be used by local BID companies to map consumers' use of parking and plan future policy and city planning.

Managing director Chris Reed claims "car parking has a direct relationship with town centre prosperity." ParkingPerx was inspired by a particular complaint Chris heard while working in a small market town. A customer went to their local high street and spent £14, but was two minutes late to return to his car and had been issued a parking fine of £60. Stories like this, Reed maintains, reflect the barriers that dissuade people from shopping on the high street rather than online.

Having been named one of Creative England's CE 50 companies, Reed will be taking his experience to Parkex Conference and IPI World conference in New Orleans. They secured Innovate UK funding to run a pilot of the product in Sunderland early last year.

[proxismart.co.uk](http://proxismart.co.uk)

Find out more about Tech North's Northern Stars programme at

[technorthhq.com/northern-stars](http://technorthhq.com/northern-stars)



# Digital Jobs Action Summit

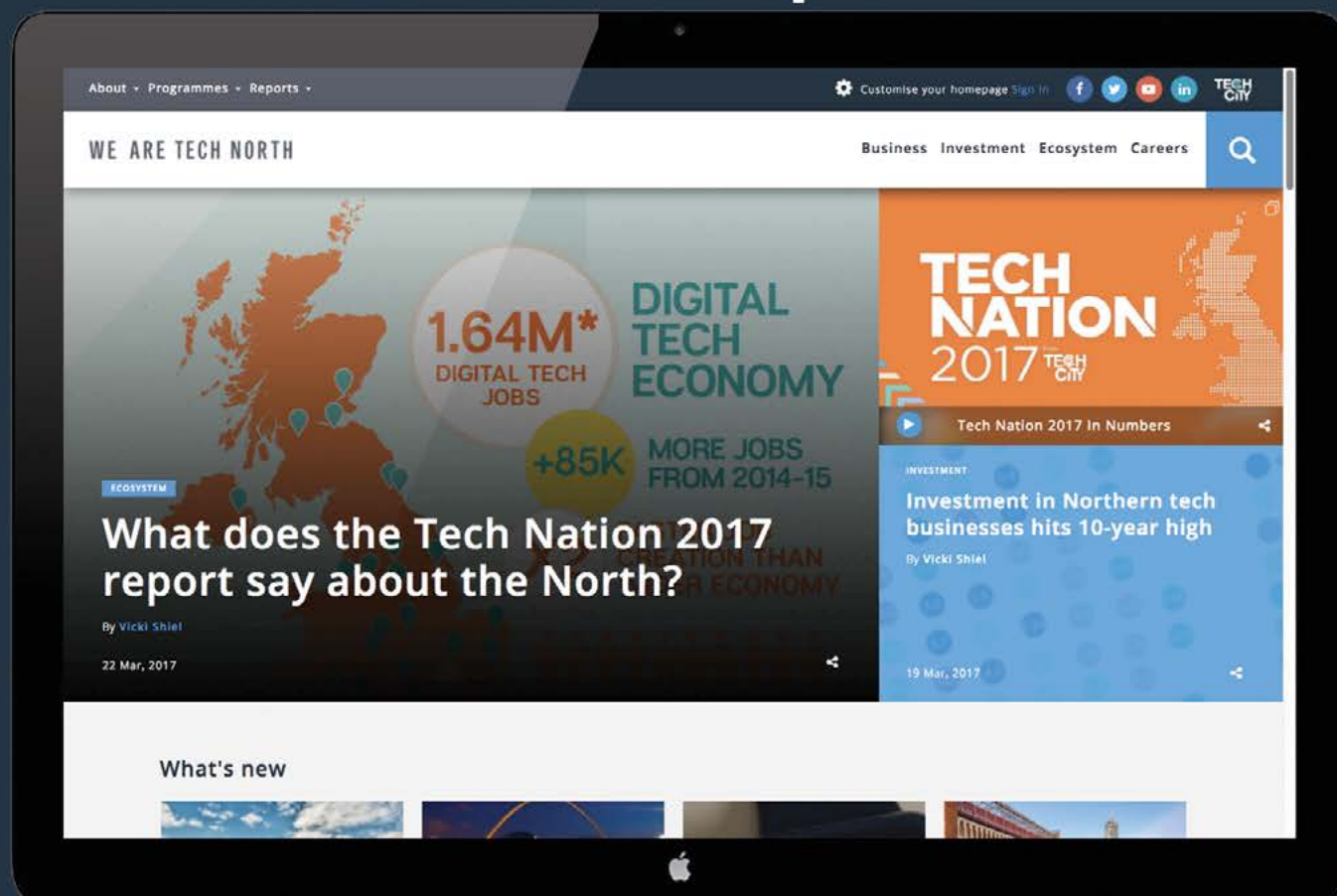


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