Top Tech: North West 2020
Celebrating and recognising innovation in the North West
Welcome to the inaugural Top Tech: North West. It has been an extraordinary year which has presented untold challenges in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the huge upheaval and economic turmoil, our region has demonstrated its fierce resilience and has not only risen to but has embraced these challenges. The North West has been a melting pot of entrepreneurship for centuries and many of our homegrown companies are global leaders.

Our rich heritage of innovation has propelled the region into a world-class centre for technology. Recent research revealed that Manchester has become the fastest growing technology city in Europe, leapfrogging research hub Cambridge for venture capital backing.

Almost £530m of venture capital funding was poured into technology firms in Manchester in 2019, second only to London in terms of investment.

Technology is a hugely important sector for Mills & Reeve. Our focus on the technology sector in the North West is reflected in our growing team which advises national and international clients, our upcoming move to Circle Square and strong links to the region's universities.

Therefore, it was a natural progression for our team to replicate the success of the Top Tech: Yorkshire, which is now in its third year, and launch Top Tech: North West to shine a light on the region's pioneering and transformational companies.
The calibre of entrants has been outstanding. Not only did we see cutting-edge technical innovation, but we were bowled over by the resilience and the willingness of companies to adapt, pull together and devise products and services to help others survive the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the entrants were MedTech companies which are partnering with the NHS and providing much needed services during the pandemic, while others are developing world-leading diagnostics and medical devices to help improve our lives, health and wellbeing.

Elsewhere, we had cutting edge FinTech companies and those at the forefront of robotics and artificial intelligence. Entrants also include those who are using technology to help revolutionalise the legal sector in terms of client satisfaction and document management.

What also stood out was the geographical spread of entrants from across the North West region and we are delighted to feature companies from Manchester, Liverpool, Lancashire and Cheshire in the report. It was a difficult task to decide on the final 20 companies and there was healthy debate among the seven judges, all of whom have unrivalled expertise and experience in the technology sector. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their time, effort and contribution.

Finally, a huge congratulations to all the companies which made it into Top Tech: North West. The breadth of talent, innovation and commitment was excellent, a big well done to you all!

"Almost £530m of venture capital funding was poured into technology firms in Manchester in 2019, second only to London in terms of investment."

Paul Knight, Partner
Mills & Reeve
The Judges

Paul Knight,
Partner, Mills & Reeve

Amul Batra,
Chief Partnership Officer,
Northcoders

James Gregson,
Senior Investment Director of the Impact Fund,
Palatine Private Equity

Dr Kath Mackay,
Managing Director, Bruntwood SciTech Alderley Park

Richard Faulkner,
Managing Director, Technology Banking at Silicon Valley Bank

Jess Jackson,
Investment Director, GC Angels

Simon Thorn,
Managing Director, Acceleris Capital
Methodology

In September this year, the Manchester office of Mills & Reeve partnered with TheBusinessDesk.com to search for the North West's most dynamic and industry leading technology companies.

Top Tech: North West was launched to celebrate pioneering companies that are putting the region on the map as a growing hub for technological development and innovation. The launch followed the success of Top Tech: Yorkshire which is now in its third year.

We were delighted with the number of entries from a diverse range of technology companies across the region, each demonstrating why their cutting edge and innovative technology deserved a place in Top Tech: North West.
Criteria

**Technological innovation**
Are you at the forefront of change?

**Leadership**
How have you adapted to the changing market?

**Financial performance**
Can you demonstrate long-term and strategic growth?

**Environment and community**
Do you make a difference to your community?

**Outstanding client service**
Tell us how you put your customers at the heart everything.

**Culture and workforce**
Are you committed to your staff and your culture?
3D LifePrints is a medical 3D printing and technology company that uses 3D technologies to provide innovative solutions to the medical sector.

The company began life as a social enterprise in Kenya in 2013 when the founders saw an opportunity to use emerging 3D printing technologies to create low cost patient matched prosthetics for developing world amputees.

Seven years later, 3D LifePrints designs and manufactures a wide variety of patient specific medical devices. Each device is designed from a patient’s CT or MRI scan, ensuring it exactly matches their anatomy.

Liverpool-based 3D LifePrints operates a unique business model where it provides services at the point-of-care, embedding bio-medical engineers and 3D technologies within hospitals. Its first ‘hub’ was opened in 2015 at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital.

Within a hub, 3D LifePrints provides a wrapped-up service of staffing, hardware and software. By collaborating closely with clinicians, the company designs and manufactures custom-made medical devices including implants, cutting guides and anatomical models.

The company now has additional hubs at Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre in Oxford and Wrightington Hospital in Greater Manchester. It is looking to open sites at Leeds General Infirmary and in London next year. In the longer term, 3D LifePrints plans to roll-out its embedded hub concept across the UK, Europe and the USA, aiming to have 50 sites by 2025.
Agile Automations

Agile Automations is a Manchester-headquartered robotics process consultancy which has been leading the way in AI, robotics and automations since 2015.

The company specialises in creating robotic process automations (RPA) for firms large and small, allowing them to identify and streamline manual business processes and, in doing so, giving them a competitive edge.

As an example, RPA is a way of speeding up repetitive and time-consuming tasks, to unlock the potential of a workforce, while also reducing human error and offering significant cost savings.

By automating data-led tasks such as payroll, invoice reconciliations, making payments or on-boarding new customers it frees up a team’s time allowing them to take on more tasks, with the potential to add value to the organisation’s strategy, improving overall productivity and return on investment.

Agile Automations offer clients an end-to-end service from scoping, design and testing to implementation, helping firms to understand where technology can have the greatest impact in their business.

The company believes its bespoke approach results in technology designed around its clients’ business needs rather than providing a ‘plug and play’ service.

Agile Automations works across financial services, property, and insurance sectors, counting multi-national banks in their client list as well as SMEs and non-profit entities.

It prides itself on its disruptive commercial model which is based on the ‘trust economy’ and the spirit of collaboration.

“This robotics consultancy has a record of successful collaboration with loyal, high-profile, clients. It has been growing its client portfolio this year, aided by an innovative model for commercialisation.”
AppLearn is a pioneering digital adoption company on a mission to bring certainty to enterprise software investments. The company created the Adopt digital adoption platform to achieve this and redefine what is possible in both providing in-application support and getting insights into users’ software interactions.

With Adopt, AppLearn makes step-by-step guidance and useful knowledge content available right where it is needed within any business software. By embedding this support and unrivalled software analytics across complex tasks and end-to-end processes, AppLearn not only ensures people stay productive, but enables businesses to quantify and optimise the outcomes of their software.

After years of experience working with global enterprises, AppLearn knows adoption excellence is about more than technology. To remove uncertainty from its customers’ projects, AppLearn also covers strategy, culture, behaviours, processes and skills. This model and expertise are just as crucial to its mission as the Adopt platform.

Founded in 2011, AppLearn created the world’s first digital adoption platform years before the category was first recognised by global research and advisory firm Gartner in 2019. With rapid growth, a scalable model and $25m in funding from California-based K1 Investment Management, the company is at the forefront of technological change.

“AppLearn has been able to grow its business to ensure year on year increases in users and revenue as well as win awards and create a really vibrant workplace culture.”
Clin-e-cal is a digital health start-up spun out from the University of Manchester.

The company uses its patented audio digital signal processing engine, Sound Response®, creating apps providing real-time feedback to people using inhaler medications.

The first application using this technology is a free app, Rafi-Tone, which makes using an inhaler with a spacer easier and more fun for children. Rafi-Tone helps to engage children while promoting effective inhaler technique through fun games. It recognises auditory signals from a spacer mask with an embedded whistle which makes a sound when used correctly. Positive inhaler technique means medication is likely to be far more effective. Rafi-Tone is a CE marked app and listed on the NHS Digital Apps library and is accredited by health app review organisation, ORCHA, with a score of 80%.

The company is working closely with manufacturer Clement Clarke International expanding its technology to help the millions of adults with asthma around the world. The Clip-Tone device is a low-cost attachment providing audible guidance on inhaler use. Clin-e-cal’s app will provide real-time inhaler technique feedback and provide the ability to track adherence helping better monitor disease and transforming ordinary inhalers into smart inhalers.

“The Rafi-Tone app has received impressive endorsements and approvals. It is great to see it making a positive difference to young children using inhalers.”
Connect Childcare

Connect Childcare is a nursery management software specialist which provides a fully integrated management observation and communication system.

The Nelson-based company has invested around £2.6m into product improvements which are tailored to address nursery and childminder ‘pain points’ and connect effectively with parents. Its software is used by 70% of the top UK nursery chains.

The software stack is split into three areas: Connect Childcare which is aimed at managers and administrators, iConnect for practitioners and ParentZone for parents and carers.

When lockdown hit earlier this year Connect Childcare launched its ParentHub app to help busy parents of 0-5 year-olds. ParentHub hosts content surrounding school transition, nutrition and at-home learning. Its collaboration with EYFSHome meant the app could deliver activities linked to the EYFS educational curriculum, bridging the gap between nurseries and parents during the pandemic and beyond.

Connect Childcare also launched StaffPlan to help nurseries prepare for reopening and the ‘new normal’. StaffPlan addresses the real-time need for nurseries to effectively manage, return and furlough staff. More than 50 sites are using the tool.

The company has ambitious plans. Next year it is launching a SaaS platform, Foundations, which is designed to free up time for childminders and smaller settings. Overall, Connect Childcare’s target is to secure 10,000 more settings globally and increase sales by £7 million.

“The company has made significant investment in product improvements, an engaged and growing workforce and a sound roadmap for global growth in the coming years.”
Culture Shift

Culture Shift is on a mission to empower leaders and senior executives to create a world of work and study that is safe, happy and supportive for everyone.

Culture Shift is a SaaS start-up that has created a real-time platform for people to report harassment and bullying in organisations confidentially and safely.

Its Report + Support online reporting system enables victims to report problems either anonymously or seek support from an adviser. It also provides the licensing organisation with vital information to fix problems that might be hidden, and ultimately to achieve a shift in culture.

Culture Shift is currently working with 52 higher education institutions across the UK and Ireland including UCL, University of Warwick, University of Liverpool, University College Dublin and University of Edinburgh.

In March this year, Culture Shift secured £1.35m of seed investment to further develop its platform, recruit a head of sales and two further members to the sales team and significantly enhance its marketing, SEO and communications activities. The move is designed to help it expand into the corporate world and Culture Shift is in talks with companies in the insurance, sport and banking sectors.

The Culture Shift platform is currently providing support to more than 835,000 people and the team has doubled to 16 members since the start of the pandemic.

“Dealing with massively sensitive topics, Culture Shift offers anonymous reporting, but has never lost sight of the need for human centric design. The CEO has been a highly vocal and collaborative business leader in this area.”
Doc Abode

Doc Abode, created by clinical entrepreneur Dr Taz Aldawoud, is a SaaS platform that supports healthcare providers to deliver more responsive, cost-effective care by safely connecting and matching a multi-disciplinary workforce to NHS patient needs, in real-time, based on clinician availability, proximity and expertise.

Doc Abode manages all the logistics in deploying and sharing a workforce across organisational boundaries by providing HCPs with a secure app installed on their smartphone. When needed, the healthcare provider can escalate requests for direct advice, guidance or assessment through secure tel/video triage or in person visits. Doc Abode facilitates attracting a 'new' workforce from clinicians disengaged with traditional ways of working.

The company covers a population of around 5 million in the North of England through contracts with NHS Urgent and Primary Care providers, as well as working with the wider NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups and Integrated Care Systems.

Chosen as a 'Digital North Accelerator' by NHS England’s Academic Health Science Networks in March 2020, Doc Abode has also recently been awarded the Momentum Fund to support scaling across Greater Manchester’s 2.8m population.

Over the next five years, Doc Abode intends to build a national profile as a leading provider of integrated digital solutions for the NHS, act as a disruptor to the traditional locum approach and support lifestyle choices of NHS professionals through new patterns of work.

“We can see the important role the Doc Abode software platform plays in matching workforce to patient needs. It is great Doc Abode is now scaling across Greater Manchester.”
Established in Liverpool in 2012, E-Sign is a leading global provider of electronic signature solutions. Its software makes users’ lives easier through the digitisation of document send processes, also helping to reduce the use of paper and benefiting the environment.

E-Sign allows electronic signatures to be added to documents and returned to the sender almost instantly. Combining e-signatures, payment capture, ID checker and much more into one platform, E-Sign can help businesses across various sectors, (e.g. legal, recruitment, property sales and lettings, financial services, media production, software and utilities), achieve true digitalisation and simplified document management. Customers include Virgin, UK Fuels, Aunt Bessie’s, Nando’s, Oxford University and the NHS.

The E-Sign team has worked with various government departments and the European Commission to provide access to digital services for citizens throughout the world. This has resulted in the rapid increase of users accessing E-Sign’s digital infrastructure, both via the web-based application and as a third-party integration with other software services.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March this year the company has seen revenue increase on average 22 per cent month on month, new customers increase 73 per cent and revenue growth per customer increase by 39 per cent.

“The market has moved in favour of Liverpool start-up, E-Sign, and we look forward to hearing of its continued success.”
Gendius

Gendius is a digital health start-up based in Macclesfield. Its risk management platform for diabetes, Intellin®, features a user mobile app, and a healthcare provider dashboard. Through the user app, Intellin® allows people with diabetes to plan ahead by forecasting their risk factors for developing complications such as chronic kidney disease or diabetic foot ulcers. The web-based dashboard interfaces with the user app and enables healthcare providers to remotely monitor their patients’ disease management.

To date, the Intellin® app has been downloaded 440,000 times (growing by around 40,000 downloads each month), and it has more than 74,000 monthly active users (increasing by almost 3,000 people per month).

Gendius has entered into a Master Services Agreement (MSA) globally with AstraZeneca, initially focussed on the Middle East, to grant access to the Intellin® dashboard to HCPs across the region. Gendius is also in discussions with insurers to help them stratify people with diabetes more accurately, so that the people at lower risk could obtain insurance.

“Gendius has cleverly utilised AI to provide access to more tailored information applicable to each particular user. The app is therefore positioned to be more pro-active rather than reactive as some other technologies are in this space.”
Gnatta began in 2012 when founder Jack Barmby was studying at university. While supporting a business dealing with their social media customer queries, he was unable to find a suitable tool for one to many communication – so he built his own. This has evolved since then into the Gnatta product suite, handling all communication channels for businesses of all sizes.

Alongside Gnatta, Jack founded customer service outsourcer FM Outsource which then enabled Gnatta to provide both the software and the outsourced contact centre delivery.

Gnatta’s proprietary technology has helped its clients disrupt the way in which they handle their multichannel communications like Twitter, SMS, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and email. The software combines customer enquiries from multiple channels into a single conversation query within seconds without the need to be logged into disparate systems. The efficiencies this generates has saved clients up to £3.5m a year.

COVID-19 has accelerated the shift from ‘bricks & mortar’ retail to e-commerce, with many online retailers growing exponentially. This has allowed Gnatta to grow its existing blue-chip client base, including the likes of ASOS, FedEx, and AO.com, by bringing on new businesses affected by the pandemic including Hotel Chocolat and Pret a Manger.

“Whilst e-commerce soars in the wake of the COVID-19, the unique technology that this Bury based business has developed will prove pivotal in managing those individual customer relations going forward.”
Kinomica is a proteomic-data science and diagnostics company specialising in cell signalling. Based at Alderley Park, its KScan™ technology is a powerful suite of advanced proprietary bioinformatics and phosphoro-proteomics analytical methods that can provide improved monitoring of drug molecular efficacy and response, and also discovery of predictive biomarkers for patient selection and stratification in clinical trials.

Kinomica has preclinical proof-of-concept data to demonstrate that its game-changing biomarkers predict drug response more accurately than current state-of-the-art gene sequencing.

Unlike existing state-of-the-art technologies and diagnostic tests, KScan™ uses proprietary computational algorithms to interrogate the phosphoro-proteome and identify clinically precise biomarkers for more accurate drug monitoring and efficacy predictions.

Kinomica’s KScan™ technology is at the forefront of new technologies to support pharmaceutical companies to develop improved personalised medicines, healthcare providers to save money by focusing their resources on treatments that are efficacious, and patients to be treated with improved personalised medicines.

Since spinning-out of Barts Cancer Institute in July 2019, the company has secured 11 contracts with blue-chip pharma. Despite COVID-19 setbacks, Kinomica has secured further revenues, successfully winning substantial contracts since June.

The company is on course to secure more than £3.5m in Series A funding to further commercialise and scale-up over the next three years.

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Lavatech's technology platform inCase supports businesses in the legal sector to improve client communication, service levels and satisfaction.

inCase works by integrating into a business' existing IT systems to help deliver any communication to their customers. That could be a simple message, a questionnaire to complete, a document read or a form to sign. The end user downloads a mobile app which has been tailored and fully branded to the business to receive notifications. In the app, the end user can read those messages, complete questionnaires, read documents and sign forms digitally.

inCase now offers an identity checking feature using the latest technology available. Within the app, customers can scan their identity document, complete a ‘real-life’ person test and verify that they are the person in the document. This feature is fully GDPR compliant and helps businesses meet requirements under the 5th Directive to Anti-Money Laundering Regulations.

In the height of COVID-19 lockdown, the company completed a £1.5m investment deal with Inflexion Private Equity for a minority stake. With the investment completing in May 2020, Lavatech’s June 2020 year end saw a growth by 21 per cent on the previous year. Q1 2020 results report a 65 per cent growth in turnover.

“Technology is a key enabler to improving efficiencies and customer service and Lavatech has captured and proven its niche here.”
Lokulus develops technologies enabling organisations of every size to empower their customer service teams to create the best customer experiences. Its software allows companies to personalise their customer interactions to ensure their customers feel remembered, heard and understood.

Macclesfield-based Lokulus offers a range of products and solutions that supercharge customer interactions through AI and machine learning powered bots.

Lokulus strikes a balance by understanding and integrating its AI agents in and around human-managed tasks, allowing customer service agents to focus on the more important customer interactions, whilst the AI automates many of the repetitive or basic decision-making tasks.

The company focuses on partnering with clients, so they have the best digital tools in place to improve their customers’ experiences, increase productivity, drive retention and ultimately secure higher profits. Its customers include Capita, Matalan and Volkswagen.

The last 18 months have been transformative. Previously known as numero, Lokulus was bought by ex-senior leaders of numero from the TransUnion Group. The new owners have embarked on a robust growth strategy, employing new talent, re-engaging and winning back previous clients and developing and launching a new range of products under the Lokulus brand.

“Lokulus develops fantastic technologies and now, armed with a portfolio of blue-chip clients, new brand and dynamic management team, is poised for rapid expansion.”
Matillion develops cloud data integration and transformation software to help companies make their data useful, enabling IT teams and business users to make data-driven business decisions. Manchester-based Matillion has a portfolio of more than 800 global customers. These include Amazon, GE, Merck, Siemens, Sony and Splunk.

Matillion, which saw 88 per cent revenue growth in 2019, delivers fast time to insights with pay-as-you-go economics. Matillion empowers businesses to extract data from various sources and load it into their chosen cloud data warehouse - including Amazon Redshift, Snowflake, Microsoft Azure Synapse, and Google BigQuery. Businesses can then transform that data from its siloed source state - ready for advanced analytics, machine learning, and artificial intelligence.

Matillion stands out in the crowded data technology field by fulfilling enterprises’ diverse data needs and meeting them wherever they are on their data journey. Companies can start out with Matillion Data Loader, a free data ingestion SaaS tool and transition to Matillion ETL to perform complex data transformation.

Matillion's cloud-native products can provide analytics-ready datasets to help analyze the impact of COVID-19. A major US city uses Matillion ETL to track personal protective equipment (PPE) for its frontline workers, while Bio-Rad, a manufacturer of products for the life science research and clinical diagnostics markets, used Matillion ETL to analyze and track antibody test shipments.

"Matillion is one of the most exciting tech companies in the UK and it's great it is based in the North West of England. The company's journey of rapid growth should provide inspiration to every Northern tech start-up."
The Organisation for the Review of Care and Health Apps (ORCHA) is a leading independent digital health evaluation and distribution organisation.

The company was founded in 2012 when Liz Ashall-Payne had an idea that would transform healthcare using the power of digital technology. Since then, ORCHA has been on a journey involving thousands of app developers, tens of thousands of healthcare professionals and millions of individuals across 11 countries.

ORCHA is based at Sci-Tech Daresbury and helps governments and health and social care organisations to deliver the right digital health apps, to the right people, at the right time.

Its unique insight, assessment, and implementation services are improving the health of the population, the health of our health systems and the health of the health app ecosystem.

ORCHA conducts reviews for government organisations in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Israel, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, UAE, United Kingdom.

In the UK, ORCHA is the approved assessor for NHS Digital and works locally with 50 per cent of the NHS providers and commissioners. NHS England is accelerating adoption across the NHS, placing ORCHA in its National Innovation Accelerator Programme.

With recent backing from the Local Growth Hub, ORCHA has grown from seven to more than 50 employees and opened offices in London and Utrecht, Holland.

“ORCHA is fast building a reputation as a trusted source in digital health, at a time of mass expansion of the sector. The company boasts an impressive management team leading the growth and scale of the organisation.”
Push Doctor

Push Doctor is an online GP provider and remote consultation enabler, connecting thousands of patients with NHS clinicians each week.

Push Doctor provides the UK’s first platform for video consultations with patients online and via smartphone – offering convenient and secure access to NHS-trained, GMC-registered doctors.

The Manchester-based company works with NHS GP practices and hospitals across the UK connecting thousands of patients each week with a range of clinicians.

Through its partnerships with the NHS, patient reach has more than doubled since pre-COVID-19, rising to 5.4 million.

Video technology was key to delivering care at the height of the first wave – and its use soared as it allowed GPs to adapt and ensure patient care was not disrupted significantly.

Push Doctor recently secured £13.7m through a Series C funding round. The money raised will go towards scaling its digital services to support the NHS and patients at a point where demand has never been higher.

Bookings increased by 129 per cent in the first 8 months of this year compared with the last eight months of 2019.

“The company is making exciting progress with product adoption and is making a practical contribution to the administrative burden in the health and care system.”
RealRates

RealRates is a fintech lending platform and marketplace connecting consumers, aggregators and lenders to originate consumer credit products.

The Tattenhall-based company has a panel of 20 UK lenders offering loans and alternative lending solutions. It was the first lending marketplace to offer a rate guarantee where the interest offered to the customer is guaranteed not to increase after they apply.

Founded in 2018 by ex-Moneysupermarket financial technology experts, the business has acquired 60,000 customers and originated £50 million in new loans.

In response to changing market conditions, RealRates enhanced its platform to include Open Banking data to help customers understand how much money they can afford to borrow. The company is now extending its Open Banking credit eligibility checking service to aggregators and lenders.

RealRates is developing the UK's first Open Banking credit passport called RealCheck which will enable customers to create an online account to securely store their credit, personal and Open Banking data which can be used to check their eligibility for credit on any price comparison site and personal finance app.

RealRates intends to make the RealCheck passport available to lenders in the mortgage, car finance, POS finance, tenant vetting and personal debt management markets. It estimates that consumers are making 150 million credit, income and affordability checks per year in these markets and that RealCheck could dramatically simplify and improve the customer experience.

“A really interesting, disruptive piece of technology that will seemingly create a much smoother journey in the increasingly-challenged consumer credit marketplace.”
Summize

Summize is a lightweight platform that uses artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to help legal teams and SMEs understand, manage and review contracts instantly.

Founded in 2018 by technology lawyer Tom Dunlop, Summize has grown rapidly. Against the headwinds of COVID-19, it brought its product to market earlier this year and has since achieved a 250 per cent increase in revenue and 10 significant contract wins.

In October, the website hit more than 10,000 visitors for the month. Summize has also generated more than £1.8 million in funding and counts several prominent North West business professionals among its board members. Summize's SaaS platform eliminates the need for legal teams and businesses to manually wade through their contracts. By creating instant summaries of any uploaded contract and storing them in one platform with an easy-to-read display, Summize accelerates the contract review process by up to 85 per cent.

The platform analyses contracts intelligently, identifying and managing the key terms and offers users the ability to create bespoke clauses and playbooks, and add comments and red flags. Summize also helps teams create customisable exports of contract summaries and tables and share read-only links to even non-Summize users for feedback and knowledge-share.

Summize can be used in Microsoft Word, allowing users to edit and create contracts as well as review them. The Manchester-based company's portfolio of clients includes Brabners, Thinkmoney Group, Elior and Zuto, while on the global stage it has companies in the US and Australia.

“Analysing and managing legal contracts just got exciting with this AI powered, rapid solution.”
Voly provides a specialised SaaS accounting system for asset management, primarily into the super-yacht market. The business was established by ex-professional tennis player Ian Flanagan after he identified a lack of any industry specific integrated solutions. Voly commenced trading in 2017 and has grown rapidly over the last three years, recently moving to larger offices in Cheadle with its headcount having grown quickly during the last twelve months.

Voly’s real-time system is multi-currency and provides FX trading functionality alongside an integrated pre-paid Mastercard facility. High value assets such as super-yachts and private jets are complex to manage and expensive to run and Voly is the only recognised industry standard system. The software effectively provides a ‘one-stop shop’ capability for all the systems that super-yachts require with the exception of navigation/safety.

The financial performance of the business has been strong with sales doubling each year from 2018 onwards with growth continuing in the current financial year. The number of yachts currently subscribed to the system is more than 350, with half of these having signed a three-year contract or longer. The business is currently raising investment funding to further support its future growth and development. Management strategy revolves around moving from a market leading niche accounting system to a larger and broader ‘yacht management’ product offering including HR, payments, payroll and safety management.

“An exciting platform with a clear market opportunity and first mover advantage in the super-yacht niche. A product with great functionality, including around the challenges of FX.”
VREvo is a University of Manchester spin-out company and winner of the university's Intellectual Property Next Big Thing Competition 2019.

VREvo develops virtual reality (VR) content for higher education teaching primarily in medical and biomedical sciences, although developments are being explored cross-faculty and with the NHS and industry.

In 2019, the company set up a VR laboratory in the medical school and evaluated the tech with more than 300 staff and students. The response was overwhelmingly positive, but the team was unable to identify off-the-shelf software to use in its undergraduate/postgraduate courses that met its training standards.

The company decided to utilise the skills available in the North West to create VREvo and start producing VR teaching content.

Its first developments are a physiology/disease of the human eye learning simulation and a cross-faculty humanitarian project developing AR/VR for landmine detection in Africa and Cambodia.

VREvo’s target markets include the large medical/biomedical disciplines with hundreds of thousands of students and staff globally. These include medical, nursing, midwifery, optometry and dentistry. The simulations are also being developed at different competency levels to be used at under/post-graduate and for CPD level.

VREvo is in talks with investors to secure funding and has corporate partnerships in the pipeline.

“A highly innovative utilisation of virtual reality within medical and biomedical sciences.”
Highly commended

Cantarus
Cantarus is one of the North West's fastest-growing full-service digital agencies with a focus on rigorous engineering and user-centric design.

Since 2003, it has partnered with organisations worldwide to deliver solutions across the entire digital ecosystem – from websites to apps, strategy to brand.

Its innovative MemConnect app platform specialises in improving member engagement and enables membership organisations to deliver excellent mobile experiences.

Cantarus' client portfolio of more than one hundred organisations includes commercial, Not for Profit (NFP) and membership organisations in the UK, Europe, North America, Middle East and Africa - including WHSmith, Sports Direct, Worldpay, Serco, Action for Children and Royal College of General Practitioners.

The judges said: "We've been really impressed to see the beneficial projects Cantarus have completed in 2020. For example, its build of an app enabling British Armed Forces personnel to read bedtime stories and leave messages for their family at home is particularly touching."

Tectores (PelliTec)
Tectores has developed gel technology that prevents blisters on the feet of runners, walkers and podiatry patients. The innovative part is the technology is contained in a circular pad which reduces friction and sticks to the inside of footwear not the skin. Independent studies show the pads benefit people with diabetes by making shoes more comfortable and reducing the potential for foot ulcers.

The technology was invented by two of the directors who had blisters whilst training. 'Stick on skin' treatments did not provide a healing environment so the idea of a gel containing pad which stuck to the inside of footwear was born.

Since 2016 the team has evolved, developed a strategy and vision, attracted funding, patented the technology and protected designs. The CE marked PelliTec blister prevention pad launched in the UK and USA in 2019.

The judges said: "Tectores has engaged with experts in material science and podiatry to create an innovative technology in foot health. After demonstrative effectiveness of the product, the team is making good progress in commercialisation."
Contact us

Paul Knight, Partner

📞 +44 (0)161 234 8702
📞 +44 (0)7552 165880
✉️ paul.knight@mills-reeve.com
LinkedIn