

Fast Track 100 press release

Thursday 1 December



TEN COMPANIES IN THE NORTHWEST WIN PLACES IN LEAGUE TABLE OF BRITAIN'S FASTEST-GROWING PRIVATE FIRMS

Published this Sunday, the 15th annual **Sunday Times Virgin Fast Track 100** league table ranks Britain's one hundred privately-owned companies with the fastest-growing sales over the last three years.

There are ten companies headquartered in the northwest on the league table (compared to 11 last year). They have made a strong contribution to the local economy over the last three years, despite the tough economic conditions. They have combined sales of **£230m** and employ **2,600 people**, having added 2,000 jobs in the last three years.

The region's highest-ranked company is Warrington-based **Secured Mail**, which features on the league table for the first time and is ranked in the top three nationally. This company collects a total of 400 million letters and small packets each year from business clients and transports them nationwide to depots of Royal Mail, which does the final mile. Sales grew 233% a year from £884,000 in 2007 to £32.6m in 2010, though margins were slim.

Also new to the table this year and based in Warrington, childcare voucher administrator **Fideliti** was started with an investment of £50,000 from Betfred co-founder Fred Done. Sales have grown 87% a year from an annualised £6.3m in 2008 to £41.3m in 2011.

Making its second consecutive appearance is natural pet food producer **MPM Products**. This Cheshire-based manufacturer's products can be found on the shelves of both independent and chain pet stores, with premium flavours including tuna with ostrich. Sales grew 78% a year from £1.5m in 2007 to £8.7m in 2010.

The companies in the northwest feature on the league table alongside household names such as **Cath Kidston, Ella's Kitchen, Jack Wills, Joules** and **Patisserie Valerie**.

The Fast Track 100 is sponsored by **Virgin, Barclays, BDO** and **Microsoft**. It is compiled by **Fast Track**, the Oxford-based networking events and research company that champions the UK's top-performing private companies.

Fastest-growing private companies in the northwest

National rank [2010 rank]	Company Activity	Location of HQ	Annual sales growth over 3 yrs	Latest sales (£000)	Staff	Latest financial year end [†]	Comment
Top 3	Secured Mail <i>Bulk mail service provider</i>	Warrington	232.76%	32,556	61	Jul 10	Collects 400m letters nationwide each year
35	Fideliti <i>Childcare voucher administrator</i>	Warrington	86.76%	41,298	19	Mar 11	Customers for its vouchers include employees of Virgin Trains and Heinz
40 [32]	MPM Products <i>Natural pet food producer</i>	Macclesfield Cheshire	78.15%	8,702	20	Dec 10	Premium cat food varieties include tuna-and-ostrich
45	APS Salads <i>Tomato supplier</i>	Wilmslow Cheshire	72.19%	34,979	84	Dec 10	Sells 300m tomatoes each year to British supermarkets

46	Liquid Personnel <i>Recruitment consultancy</i>	Manchester	70.79%	12,442	24	Mar 11	Co-founder sold his car to raise the money to start the business
47 [63]	Amber Taverns <i>Pub operator</i>	Preston	70.49%	18,494	15	Jan 11	Often spends more on refurbishing a pub than on the purchase price
56 [12]	Badger Office Supplies <i>Office products supplier</i>	Buckshaw Village Lancashire	66.55%	9,683	51	May 11	Has recently invested £3m in a new 80,000 sq ft industrial unit
57	OneE Tax <i>Tax planning specialist</i>	Bolton	66.24%	*17,536	35	Dec 10	Its last tax solution cost £1m to create, most of which was spent on lawyers' fees
62	Cartridge Save <i>Computer consumables reseller</i>	Stockport	61.65%	†8,221	31	Dec 10	Uses techniques designed for testing fighter jets to sell printer cartridges online
71	Waterfall Services <i>Contract caterer</i>	Warrington	57.52%	43,261	2,231	Mar 11	Provides contract catering for the YMCA

† Draft, audit exempt or not filed at Companies House * Annualised figure

Sir Richard Branson of Virgin, which has been the title sponsor of the league table for all 15 years, commented:

"2011 has been another challenging year for the UK in political and economic terms. Against this economic background the strong performance of the Fast Track 100 companies is to be especially applauded."

The national picture

This year's Fast Track 100 companies achieved, on average, sales growth of **87%** a year over the last three years of available accounts, from combined total sales of £714m in 2007/08 to **£4bn** in 2010/11. They more than tripled their combined workforce to **18,200** over the three years, with more than **13,000** jobs being added over that period.

Despite the tough economic conditions, nearly half of the companies have improved operating profit margins over the last three years; and 44 made profits of more than £1m.

Notable industry groups include consumer goods, which represent almost a quarter (23) of the league table and include fashion stores like **Jack Wills** and online sports retailers such as **Wiggle**. This industry group has combined sales of £800m and employs 5,000 people. The second largest industry is food and drink, featuring 15 companies such as restaurant operator **Patisserie Valerie** and **Diet Chef**, which delivers calorie-controlled meals to customers' doors. This industry group has combined sales of £326m and employs 5,100 people. In addition, 18 companies are health-related, such as NHS products supplier **Medstrom** and recruiter **Mayday Healthcare**, which supplies nursing staff to hospitals.

The majority of companies on the league table are headquartered in London (36) and the southeast (24). Of the remainder 17 are based in the Midlands, ten in the northwest, five in the northeast, four in the southwest, two in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland, and one in the East.

The full league table will be published in a special ten-page supplement within the business section of **The Sunday Times** on 4 December and at www.fasttrack.co.uk, where you can access a searchable database of all 100 companies, as well as past league tables.

ENDS

WHEN USING THIS INFORMATION PLEASE CREDIT: THE SUNDAY TIMES VIRGIN FAST TRACK 100

For further information please contact:

Laura Vicary, senior research manager, Fast Track; 01865 297 029; laura.vicary@fasttrack.co.uk

Notes for editors

Fast Track has published league tables of top-performing private companies with **The Sunday Times** for the past 15 years, and its invitation-only dinners provide a valuable opportunity for entrepreneurs to network and also meet its sponsors. The company was founded and is run by Dr Hamish Stevenson, who holds an associate fellowship at Green Templeton College, Oxford University.

League table criteria

Companies were ranked by their compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in sales over their latest three financial years between 2007 and 2010, or 2008 and 2011. A minimum of 25 weeks' trading in their base and latest years was required. For financial years lasting less or more than 52 trading weeks, figures were annualised on a simple pro-rata basis.

Annualised sales had to exceed £250,000 in their base year (2007 or 2008) and £5m in their latest year (2010 or 2011). Companies also had to show year-on-year sales growth from their penultimate to their latest year (2009 to 2010 or 2010 to 2011), and a forecast of further sales growth.

Companies had to be registered in the UK, be unquoted and not subsidiaries. They had to demonstrate operating profits in their latest year (2010 or 2011) and employ ten or more employees in that year.

Excluded companies include technology firms (covered by our sister league table the Tech Track 100), LLPs, pure property and financial trading companies, and companies with turnover of £500m or greater.

About Virgin

Virgin was founded in 1970 by Sir Richard Branson. The group has founded more than 400 companies worldwide in sectors spanning airlines, trains, mobile phones, financial services, hotels and fitness clubs, as well as sustainable technologies.

Sir Richard Branson is founder of Virgin Group. He is currently focused on growing Virgin's international business and Virgin Unite, its not-for-profit foundation.

www.virgin.com

About Barclays

Barclays is dedicated to providing support, funding and specialist advice for businesses and entrepreneurs across the UK.

With a clear focus on quality relationships, Barclays Corporate provides integrated banking solutions to businesses with an annual turnover of more than £5 million in the UK and large local companies, financial institutions and multinationals in non-UK markets.

www.barclayscorporate.com

As a leading global wealth manager, and one of the UK's largest, Barclays Wealth provides private clients with banking, investment management and brokerage services.

www.barclayswealth.com

About BDO

BDO LLP, the UK member firm of BDO, a global accountancy network with more than 1,000 offices in over 100 countries.

www.bdo.co.uk

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.

www.microsoft.com