

Tech Track 100 press release

Wednesday 14 September



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

Published this weekend, the 11th annual **Sunday Times Microsoft Tech Track 100** league table ranks Britain's one hundred privately-owned technology, media and telecoms (TMT) companies with the fastest-growing sales over the last three years.

There are eight companies headquartered in the Northwest of England on the Tech Track 100 (compared to six last year). That makes the region the best-represented on the league table outside London and the Southeast. Together the eight companies employ **1,400 people** and have achieved combined sales of **£517m**.

Online music CD and games trader **musicMagpie.co.uk**, based in Macclesfield, is the region's highest ranked company and appears on the league table for the first time. Sales rocketed 205% a year to £30.8m in 2011, just three years after the company was founded by Steven Oliver and Walter Gleeson. This year musicMagpie raised £10m from private equity firm LDC, and former Asda boss Allan Leighton joined as chairman.

Three companies headquartered in Manchester feature on the league table, including **Party Delights**. Founded by Allison Graham, the online party goods retailer sells more than 13,000 products both for children's celebrations and grown-up gatherings. Party Delights also runs white-label versions of its websites for Tesco Direct and Toys R Us. Sales grew 38% a year, from £3.6m in 2008 to £9.5m in 2011.

Cheshire-based **The Hut Group** makes it onto the league table for the fifth consecutive year. Its financial backers include Sir Stuart Rose, former chairman of Marks & Spencer, and former Matalan chief executive Angus Monro, as well as the investment firms Balderton and Artemis. It has made four acquisitions in the past year, including Myprotein in June and Lookfantastic.com last November. Sales rocketed 142% a year from £6.1m in 2007 to £85.4m in 2010.

The companies in the region feature on the league table alongside emerging brands such as online money lender **Wonga**, price comparison website **Gocompare**, and music recognition services provider **Shazam**.

The Tech Track 100 is sponsored by **Microsoft**, **Barclays Corporate** and **BDO**. It is compiled by **Fast Track**, the Oxford-based networking events and research company.

Fastest-growing private technology 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
In top 3	musicMagpie.co.uk Online music CD and games trader	Macclesfield	205.21%	†30,774	350	May 11	Offers 16 new football kits in exchange for 400 old CDs or DVDs
8 [4]	The Hut Group Online retailer	Northwich Cheshire	141.62%	†85,351	264	Dec 10	Sells more than 1m different products across its websites
25	We Buy Any Car Online car trader	Rochdale	81.99%	315,128	246	Sep 10	Says it buys more than 100,000 cars a year

76 [49]	UKFast <i>Internet hosting provider</i>	Manchester	44.50%	12,172	100	Dec 10	Its Manchester data centre has its own electrical substation
81	ANS Group <i>IT and telecoms provider</i>	Manchester	41.95%	†29,423	120	Mar 11	Founded by former child actor Scott Fletcher
89	Parcel2go.com <i>Delivery services provider</i>	Bolton	39.54%	†16,937	46	Mar 11	Delivers packages bought by British eBay bidders from sellers in America
93	Party Delights <i>Online party goods retailer</i>	Manchester	38.14%	†9,495	76	Jun 11	Founder Allison Graham has supplied more than 1m parties
100 [74]	Elite Telecom <i>Telecoms services provider</i>	Chorley Lancashire	36.79%	17,398	169	Jul 10	Manages call-queuing for Premier League football clubs

† Draft, audit exempt or not filed at Companies House

Scott Dodds, general manager, business strategy and marketing at Microsoft, the title sponsor of the league table, commented:

“Privately-owned technology companies are making a great contribution to the economy despite difficult trading conditions. It is especially encouraging to see that cloud computing continues to provide such significant opportunities by helping technology firms to open up new markets and cut costs for their customers.”

The national picture

This year’s Tech Track 100 companies achieved, on average, sales growth of 74% a year over the last three years of accounts, from a combined total of £680m in 2007/08 to **£3.1bn** in 2010/11. They almost tripled their combined workforce to **13,500** over the three years, with more than **8,800** jobs being added over that period.

Demonstrating a renewed appetite to invest among venture capital and private equity firms, **22** companies on the Tech Track 100 raised funding from these sources in the year to August 2011. A total of 45 have venture capital / private equity backing. This compares to six from last year’s league table that secured funds in the 12 months to August 2010.

Companies offering **outsourced IT services**, such as cloud computing and managed hosting, made a strong showing on the league table, with 21 companies operating in this sector. Other prominent industries include telecommunications, represented by 17 companies, digital media and entertainment (15) and online consumer services (13).

The majority of companies on the league table are headquartered in London (55) and the Southeast (13). Of the remainder 12 are based in the North, 7 in the Midlands, 5 in the Southwest, 3 in the East, 3 in Scotland and 2 in Wales.

The full findings are published in a special eight-page supplement within the business section of **The Sunday Times** on 18 September and on www.fasttrack.co.uk, where you can access a searchable database of all 100 companies, as well as past league tables.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES MICROSOFT TECH TRACK 100**

For further information please contact:

Ying Chen, deputy head of research, Fast Track, 01865 297 022, ying.chen@fasttrack.co.uk

Notes for editors

Fast Track has published league tables of top-performing private companies with **The Sunday Times** for the past 14 years, and its invitation-only events provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs to network and 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 had to be unquoted, independent and registered in Britain. They 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.

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 the base year (2007 or 2008) and £5m in the latest year (2010 or 2011). Companies had to also show an increase in sales in their latest year, but not necessarily be in profit.

The research was carried out by Fast Track between May and August. The majority of companies were interviewed by telephone and more than almost nine-tenths (89) were also visited by the Fast Track research team.

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

About Barclays Corporate

The Barclays Corporate Technology, Media and Telecoms team have more than 40 sector-focused specialists located across the UK. This dedicated team works with most of the listed UK TMT companies and more than a quarter of all Tech Track 100 businesses operating in the sector.

www.barclayscorporate.com

About BDO

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