

Media stars get down with the kids to ride digital wave

Tech Track 100 firms are at the front of changes in the way media are produced and consumed

SEAN DUFFY
BARCLAYS



The rise of smartphones, tablets and social media has transformed the media and entertainment industry beyond recognition.

Everything has changed, from the means of creating content and how people consume it – you could just as easily be reading this article on a tablet, smartphone or in a newspaper – to how success is tracked and measured.

A thriving UK media technology sector has grown up alongside these changes,

reinventing itself as traditional forms of media go into decline.

The UK remains a world leader in film, television, video games and digital media. This is partly thanks to a depth of talent, skills and creativity but, without question, the key change affecting the industry has been the emergence of new technologies that have revolutionised the way business is done.

That much is clear from this year's Tech Track 100. It features four video games developers, including Outplay Entertainment (No13), which specialises in free-to-play games for smartphones, tablets and social networks; an Oscar-winning visual effects business, Milk Visual Effects (No73); and digital ad firms such as LoopMe (No20), which uses artificial intelligence to find out what ads mobile users should see on websites and apps.

These businesses join the likes of Tech Track 100

alumnus Unruly, which helps to make video ads go viral. It featured twice in the league table before it was acquired by News Corp, the owner of The Sunday Times, in a £114m deal in 2015.

The 10 fastest-growing companies in this year's table include four that are having an impact on media consumption in UK and beyond, all through engaging younger audiences.

Among them is No1 ranked business, Wonderbly, which creates personalised children's books based on their name, birth date or location. It has applied its technology to breathe new life into one of the sectors most affected by digital media – print publishing.

Behind its colourful pages, so magical to children, lies sharp technological know-how and a slick, vertically integrated business model that have enabled the company to sell nearly 3m books in 200 countries.

At No6 is Festicket, which has created a one-stop online



Tomorrow's consumers: under-13s are now the fastest-growing online audience

shop for 2.5m festival-goers. As well as selling tickets and packages to more than 1,000 festivals worldwide, it also produces its own online magazine and festival reviews.

Another, LADBible Group

(No9) was started by chief executive Solly Solomou in 2012 while he was still a student at Leeds University. Since then, its videos and articles – which range from celebrity gossip to politics – have captured a mind-

bogglingly large audience. It claims that its flagship channels are followed by half of all 18-30 year olds in the UK.

Companies such as LADBible have embraced the fragmentation of media on to

multiple platforms, including mobile and social media, and the shift from the written word to video.

Also at the cutting edge of these changes is Dylan Collins, a serial media tech entrepreneur whose latest business, children's digital platform SuperAwesome, ranks at No8 in the list.

"The proliferation of smartphones and internet access everywhere is forcing everyone to reassess their business models, think about what the media industry looks like in 2017 and consider how it will look in 2025," Collins says.

"In particular, a shift away from television has had enormous disruptive effects on every player within the ecosystem, including content creators, advertisers and distributors," he adds.

Children and teenagers in particular are increasingly turning to digital channels for entertainment, and SuperAwesome's technology ensures that brands and content owners engage with

them in a completely safe and legal way.

Collins says, "Under-13s are now the fastest-growing online audience but the internet simply wasn't built for kids. They are rapidly reshaping the digital media sector, in terms of consumption and also data privacy laws."

SuperAwesome is a great example of a UK media tech business that has thrived on the changes taking place in this exciting sector.

Much of the technology we are seeing now would have been in the realms of science fiction when we set up Barclays' dedicated media industry team 30 years ago.

We are proud to support Tech Track 100. I am sure that a continued focus on creative excellence, flexibility and a willingness to embrace new markets will ensure that we will see many more media businesses in future league tables. Sean Duffy is head of technology, media and telecoms at Barclays