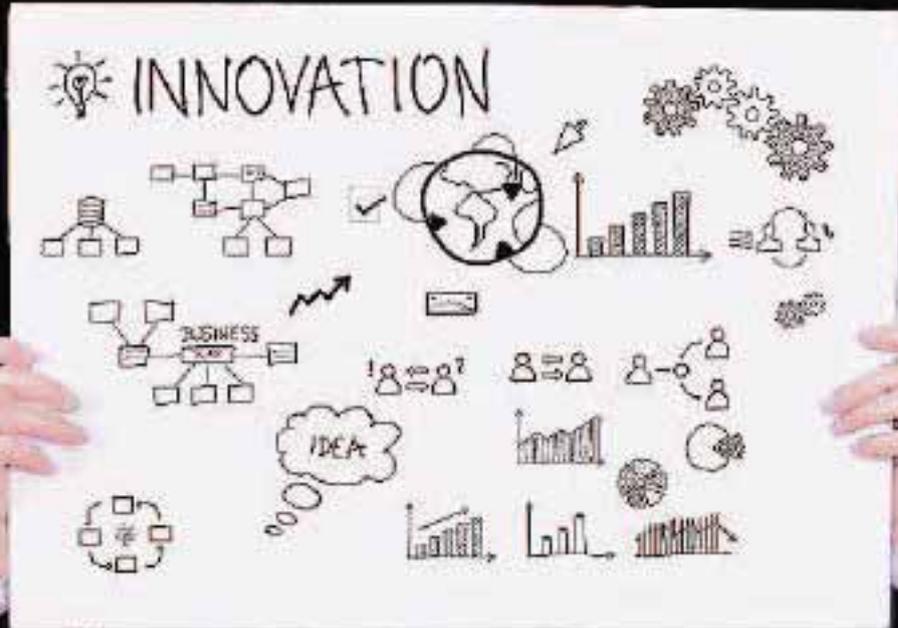


# How our leading firms are grasping change to succeed



**In the second of our women in tech series – in partnership with Manchester-based executive search firm Laudale – Fiona Vlemmiks highlights how digitalisation has set local businesses on a journey of reinvention**

**D**igitalisation has transformed our society. The ubiquitous use of mobile devices, the internet and social media has forever changed the way we live, shop and work.

In business, this has led tech start-ups to disrupt industry after industry, offering smarter and more agile alternatives to traditional models of working.

As many companies have been forced into digital transformation in order to compete, uncertainty and change has been inevitable – but the new digital landscape has also opened up masses of opportunity.

In the retail industry, for example, mobile technologies have made the shopping experience almost unrecognisable from five to 10 years ago.

Yet online sales grew 8% in 2017 and are forecast to grow a further 35% by 2022, comfortably outpacing offline demand growth despite challenging overall retail climates.

N Brown Group – which has a

159-year heritage in Manchester – is an example of a highly successful transition from a mail order catalogue to digital-first retailer.

In 2014, work commenced to move the company's systems to new platforms, enabling N Brown to offer relevant updates and a greater variety of customer experiences.

“The foundational platform work is complete and running well and we are now focused on driving very frequent incremental change into our technology stack and rolling out the technology across our brand portfolio,” explains Jennifer Mossop Scott, IT change director at N Brown Group.

“We've also hired new skills into the business and developed our people to embrace new ways of working and thinking.”

In Q3, the group reported that 74% of transactions were made digitally (77% of those on mobile devices), with total online sales up 9% year on year.

“During the last quarter, 77% of N Brown's traffic was from mobile devices, including tablets.”

“About 57% of all traffic is from smartphone and phone conversion rates are increasing.

“Businesses like ours are constantly striving to serve and delight customers. So, of course, when customer needs and behaviours change, we need to change with them – or even ahead of them.

“The vast majority of UK and international customers are comfortable with online shopping, including, increasingly, our older customers. Customers love to see new

products weekly, rather than seasonally and they respond to communication very differently than they used to.

“Equally, they talk about our brands and products differently on social media and other digital channels.”

Meanwhile, in the automotive industry, Auto Trader's game-changing move from a print magazine to a web-only business model is legendary.

Founded in 1977, the trade magazine enjoyed rapid success. Always in the driving seat, the company launched its website in 1996, followed by its first App in 2010. Aware of changing consumer behaviour, Auto Trader made the courageous move to concentrate solely on digital, printing the final issue in 2013.

Alison Ross, customer experience and operations director at Autotrader, says: “What we did, which other niche organisations didn't do, was disrupt ourselves. We didn't manage the decline of print, we actively encouraged it within our own organisation. It was quite a bold way to approach it.”

And it worked. Today, Auto Trader is the number one online marketplace for

Laudale

**FEATURE**

**FROM PAGE 15**

car buyers in the UK, with 55 million cross platform visits from engaged users who conduct more than 50 searches per second.

In fact, consumers conduct four times more automotive searches on Auto Trader than on Google and three quarters of all time spent on automotive classified sites is spent on Auto Trader, according to Ross.

Auto Trader also has extensive relationships with car manufacturers and dealerships nationwide. 80% of retailers advertise on Auto Trader, listing over 450,000 vehicles every day.

With eyes firmly focused on the future, Ross says Auto Trader is now considering the opportunity of another market shift - as the car purchasing journey inches closer to being a process that is made entirely online.

Elsewhere in Manchester, tech is shaking up the traditional recruitment sector with firms like Hiring Hub, which launched in 2010.

The online marketplace connects employers and recruitment agencies, allowing them to manage their recruitment activity all in one place,

accelerating and streamlining the process.

The average time-to-fill-a-job on Hiring Hub last year was 20 days, versus an industry average of 68 days - more than three times faster - according to a survey by Gartner.

"We can help companies broaden their candidate search in minutes, by pushing their vacancy to our nationwide community of independent recruitment agencies," says Anna Dick, chief technology officer at Hiring Hub.

"With hundreds of recruitment agencies in our network, we have greater reach than even the biggest recruitment brands.

"Online marketplaces by their nature tend to offer consumers greater choice and convenience by consolidating suppliers into one place. That's essentially all we're doing with Hiring

Hub. The result is that companies can post a job today at, say, 10am, and by 11am have four specialist recruitment agencies working on it, and by 5pm perhaps have the first candidates over for review.

"Offline, that process - finding agencies, negotiating fees and terms, and then starting the search - can take weeks, whereas on Hiring Hub's marketplace it sometimes takes minutes." Employers manage the recruitment process using Hiring Hub's free software and are provided with a dedicated account manager for a single point of contact.

As Hiring Hub expands, Dick says the focus is currently on stability, scalability and security.

"We are currently working on maturing our technical platform to

ensure we can continue to move fast as we grow. We are starting to get real feedback from our users and we can use this to better inform how we prioritise what we do next."

Dick reveals that Hiring Hub also plans to utilise artificial intelligence (AI) to further revolutionise the sector. "We are bringing AI into the Hiring Hub marketplace in a way that we believe will completely transform the industry," she says.

"Potentially, it could bring time-to-hire down to less than a week, even for highly technical roles, but I can't and don't want to say how we plan to do that because, well, for obvious reasons.

"AI is really exciting within recruitment but I will say that, fundamentally, recruitment is a people business and AI won't ever replace that.

"Hence, we're looking at ways we can use technology to facilitate better relationships, streamline process and share up-to-the-minute market intelligence with users, but we won't be looking at ways to circumnavigate recruitment agencies because, at our very core, we believe in their value."

**“**

**We're looking at ways we can use technology to facilitate better relationships**

*Anna Dick*

**”**



**Naomi Daley**

Naomi Daley is head of IT asset management at Talk Talk. Her role involves helping the business manage all their IT assets, both hardware and software, reducing cost and risk from audit exposure. Not from a traditional technology background, Daley has been with TalkTalk for six years starting as part of the team that launched the TV service.

The success of the project led to roles in technology introduction and colleague systems where Daley became the lead for TalkTalk's northern office.

She is passionate about getting involved and getting others involved in projects to encourage diversity in business.

**Beckie Taylor**

Beckie Taylor is a people professional with extensive experience of working with tech businesses to scale up through the importance of people.

An ambassador for tech and the co-founder of Women in Technology North, in 2017, Taylor launched Tech Returners a programme designed to break down the barriers for people returning to, or starting out in tech after a career break.

During 2018, Tech Returners will also be launching further courses focusing on continual development and an app themed around discovering and developing skills.



**Alison Ross**

Alison Ross is a member of the senior leadership team at Auto Trader Group plc,

With 20 years' experience in technology, Ross now shares responsibility for a cross functional team bringing together technology, operations, service and sales expertise.

She leads a progressive culture and environment at Auto Trader, ensuring the attraction, development and retention of a talented, engaged and diverse workforce.

Ross also serves as the chair of Manchester Digital, the independent trade association for digital business in the north west.



## Lucie McLean

Lucie McLean joined the BBC on a three-month contract in 1996 and never left.

After nine years in TV and online journalism she became a product manager, working on the BBC's fledgling mobile website.

In the 12 years since then, she's led teams to launch some of the BBC's most successful apps and websites, including the London 2012 Olympics mobile website and app and the BBC Sport app – both of which were built in Salford. She has been head of product for Children's for three years and over that time has doubled the size of the team.

This year, her team will be launching several new apps and games for children of all ages.

## Helen Ramkaran

Helen Ramkaran has been an influential leader in the tech industry for more than two decades, having held roles at Play, Morrisons, Shutl, Stagecoach and Missguided.

She has played a key part in the digital revolution and passionately believes that despite all the advances in technology, people are still at the heart of this success.

At Missguided, Ramkaran has created an in-house agile team who work hand-in-hand with the business to deliver fast-paced change enabling Missguided to meet consumer needs in the challenging fashion industry.

Most recently, her team have launched a new menswear website - and there is more to come.



## Sadiya Ahmed

A former secondary school teacher, Sadiya Ahmed embarked upon a free fall into the world of coding.

With a first class mathematics degree and a pair of compasses to hand, she stumbled upon a role at MoneySavingExpert where she currently works as a Java Developer. Before joining MSE, Ahmed trained as a software engineer at the National Security Academy with BAE Systems where she developed a renewed passion for programming.

Throughout her time at MSE, she has undertaken exciting projects and has recently been involved in the 'Digital Festival 2018' in Manchester, helping to increase awareness of women in technology-related roles.



## Elizabeth Vega

Elizabeth Vega founded Informed Solutions in 1992, building it into an award-winning company in digital transformation and big data solutions with offices across the UK and Australia.

A highly experienced board director, she campaigns for the need to close tech's gender and skills gap and strongly champions SMEs and the Northern Powerhouse.

Vega is a trusted advisor to UK and Australian government, serving on Cabinet Office's SME Panel since 2012.



**FEATURE**

# Digital is king but human skills are not going away

The majority of organisations we work with now view themselves as heavily digitally enabled.

As 'digital' is such a broadly encompassing term, this enablement means different things to different businesses - improved customer channels, increased efficiencies through cloud infrastructure, a mobile-enabled workforce, etc.

Whatever the strategic objective, we frequently hear clients across all industries say something along the lines of "we aim to be a tech company first" or "we now resemble a platform business".

This 'new' reality impacts skills from entry to exec level. Whilst the technology leader's skill-set has always adapted with key trends, the sheer pace of modern business means there's been a more stark shift in the demands of the

role in recent times. Traditional IT operating models are transforming tech start-ups and corporates are creating innovative partnerships, 'other' functional leaders are more tech savvy than ever, and in many cases 'digital' is now revenue generating.

Furthermore, data and security are firmly on the board's agenda.

This means that relationship building, collaboration, influence, commercial skills, negotiation, and vendor management skills (for

example), are now core for the CIO, CDO and CTO.

Whilst these ingredients are hardly new, many have shifted from nice-to-have 'soft' skills to fundamental tools for the modern technology executive.

We greet this with optimism - against a backdrop of rising artificial intelligence and automation, the demand for 'human' skills is not going away.

**Alec Laurie, managing director, Laudale**



Alec Laurie



## Anna Dick

With a passion for technical innovation and software delivery, Anna Dick's career began within the frenetic world of digital agencies before she went "corporate" in 2006, joining Moneysupermarket.

The pursuit of technical progress within a fast-growth environment suited Dick, who found similar homes at On The Beach and Hotels4u, where she did what she enjoys most: building tech teams.

In recent years, Dick has worked on large scale transformation projects for the BBC and Co-op, before being headhunted by Hiring Hub, thanks to her technical prowess and leadership skills.



## Jen Mossop Scott

Despite an academic background in neuroscience, Jen Mossop Scott's career for the past 15 years has focused on changing retail businesses through technology.

After several years in software and change consultancy at Accenture, Mossop Scott moved into in-house roles in applications development and technology change delivery at WM Morrisons and now the N Brown Group.

In her current role she is focused on driving technology delivery to transform the business from its catalogue-based heritage into a digital and international leader in plus-size fashion.



## Phillipa Winter

Phillipa Winter is chief informatics officer for Bolton NHS Foundation Trust. She qualified in 1994 as an occupational therapist, having many roles in a variety of settings in the NHS culminating clinically to therapy manager in 2012. In 2013, she became a CIO and in 2015 made the transition to CIO.

Winter is passionate about driving professionalism in informatics, multi-agency partnerships, sharing best practice and innovation.

By empowering clinical-led engagement and delivery in IT programmes, she aims to secure adoption and engagement of stakeholders, ultimately enhancing better patient care and user experience.