

Meet UFODRIVE, an all-electric, all-digital, 24/7 rental service

As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Aidan McClean, CEO of UFODRIVE

Temps de lecture : minute

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The 100-year-old legacy car rental is a broken experience. Even slow-moving complex industries like airlines have moved on from herding everyone to a desk, creating long queues and getting physical signatures on paper contracts. Add to that the 101 opaque charges, fees and extras, and it's no surprise that customers hate it.

My cofounder and I had to do a lot of travel for business. As the rest of the world evolved, we found ourselves getting stuck week after week in the rental queues. It was like groundhog day - each time we'd go through the same script, often with the same rental agent.

No to this, yes to that; yes, we are aware of the risk; no, we don't need a GPS (yes, they're still selling GPS as an add-on in the smartphone age). We don't need an upgrade, and yes, we can fill it up rather than pay your 5x price for fuel, etc.

What pushed us over the edge was an infamous holiday rental. After being herded into the rental car centre at a major European airport, I was standing in the queue, and as we got to the desk, the door to the back office swung open. There was a whiteboard on the wall with the ranking for which agent would get the free steak dinner this week for upselling the most unnecessary extras. I looked at the 100 people in line behind me, the three agents pushing useless products to tired travellers and

decided then and there this model had to end.

Our backgrounds are in optimising and automating the back-end systems for banks and financial institutions to deliver faster and better customer experiences. With the same laser focus on customer experience, we rewrote the rental experience in 2 hours. Rental centres, queues, desks, agents, signatures, paper, keys, and upselling, were all removed. We replaced it with a completely digitised experience in a single app. Book, register and drive in less than 5 minutes.

I've been an early adopter and evangelist of electric vehicles since long before UFODRIVE. We have a compelling climate problem on the horizon, and EVs are critical to addressing that. I told my cofounder Renaud and our seed investors that we should go all-electric. The initial response was a big no - that would be insane.

Minimal EV market penetration, slow growth prospects and poor charging infrastructure, amongst other concerns.

Investors didn't realise that EVs are software platforms and ICE (Internal Combustion Engine) cars are lumps of metal. Like an old phone with buttons vs a smartphone. With our goal to automate and optimise the customer experience, we knew we could do so much more with an EV.

That's held true. We've got a 5-year headstart on our competitors, and we've created the highest-rated rental experience in the world. All the fears about charging, EV growth and the long-term viability of EVs are long forgotten.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how

you reach customers and so on?

We're an all-electric, all-digital, 24/7 rental service available in most major cities and some airports in Europe, the UK and the United States. Our fleet is entirely made up of the latest EVs, and we offer the best customer experience in the world.

Our aim is to fundamentally change the car rental industry for the benefit of customers and accelerate the transition from ICE to electric vehicles.

We deploy intelligent digital campaigns and extensive local branding to raise awareness. Once people have tried the service, we have exceptional loyalty and word of mouth does the rest. We also reward customers generously for helping us grow.

Remarkably, when we launched in the United States, many of our first customers were existing customers from Europe and people referred by them. It's humbling but also reinforces why we have to put all our efforts into ensuring the experience is the best in the business.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

In the last two years, we have also started to use our platform to help other businesses move their fleets from ICE to EV. Nobody else has built a native platform for managing EVs and tested it for over 20 million miles. We're working with Hertz, Uber and some of the biggest brands in the world for drivers, deliveries, trucks, etc. This new area of business for us is growing, and it's growing fast.

Tell us about the working culture at UFODRIVE

We move fast, with zero bureaucracy and zero appetite for politics. It's all-in, all of the time. It's a great team committed to excellence, and the speed of action is number one.

What has been your biggest challenge, and how have you overcome this?

Surviving the pandemic as a business. Luckily, our direct-to-car business model required no-human interaction, and that was a major factor in surviving during the pandemic.

How does UFODRIVE answer an unmet need?

UFODRIVE's all-digital experience means you can rent a car in minutes without queuing, signing paperwork, and all the other hassles that come with traditional car rental services. UFODRIVE's fleet is also available to hire 24/7, 365 days a year.

UFODRIVE's proprietary fleet management and eMobility software, UFOFLEET, ensures our customers receive superior charging scheduling, long-term battery health, advanced routing, and real-time data about which chargers are active and available. Our mobility platform has also been developed to manage rental, shared, commercial, and private fleets - and is available as a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) product.

What's in store for the future?

UFODRIVE has aggressive growth plans driven by a vision for the future with electric vehicles.

The company benefited from sustained growth throughout the pandemic, growing the team and expanding its offering. We have successfully opened new locations alongside adding home delivery and subscription options to our existing rental operations.

Our plans for future growth are now in motion, and integral to this is the expansion of our global operations and the creation of a Tech Hub.

In addition to the rental operation, we have been expanding, developing, and refining our UFOFLEET SaaS platform, to create the most dynamic eMobility tool on the market.

UFODRIVE is expanding into the US and across Europe, with plans about to be finalised for several new US and European-based locations.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Time is the most precious asset you have. Don't waste it, and don't let others waste it. Every day you must achieve something and progress towards your goal. Be clear on your goal. If anyone comes along that hampers or slows progress, remove them from your business or life. Time vampires will kill any startup. Speed of execution is everything.

Aidan McClean is CEO of [UFODRIVE](#).

Article by Aidan McClean, CEO of UFODRIVE