

Meet Solace, the digital agency driving the success of pioneering brands

As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Leo Rogers, CEO of Solace about going against the norms, working with startups and dealing with road bumps head on.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Solace was founded with a desire to strive for more and go against the norms of what society teaches. I dropped out of uni, left my safe job and put everything on the line to build an agency that delivers impact through digital technology. After discovering that software can impact 1,000,000s people and have a global impact, I sought to create a design and technology agency that helped founders go-to-market with innovative products.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Solace is a design and technology company that works with innovative startups to bring disruptive ideas to market in emerging industries. We have brought large agency talent into the startup ecosystem, enabling us to design user experiences that solve complex global problems in climate, finance and commerce. We work with passionate founders, who are trying to make a substantial impact. Often these are Y-Combinator, Antler or EF-backed, sometimes even Dragons Den with funding in place. They need

an acceleration of quality talent and expertise to drive them toward product-market fit. We aim to be a flexible, extension of the team for high-growth startups with our pioneering design-subscription service. Our mission is to deliver impact to the global economy, change lives in the process and support developing new organisations that solve the problems of tomorrow. Solace works with emerging startups, soon to be in the spotlight, including Tapline (£30M funding, Antler-backed), Yhangry (£1.2M funding, YC, Dragons-Den), ProGrad (£2.5M funding, TechStarstars, Deloitte) GreenNation (NeoBank), Farm21 (£1.2M funding).

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

Solace launched at the inception of COVID. I left Bath Spa University halls at 18, returning to my bedroom at my father's house and leaving everything behind. I decided to drop out to pursue my passion of building a design business. In year 1, I spent countless hours self-educating on how to operate the challenging agency model, through taking courses, reading and speaking to mentors who had already been on the journey. In the early days, I did all the design work, managed the projects, did B2B sales to prospective clients and coordinated the finances. Equipped with Zoom, persistence and hustle, I onboarded early clients who saw the vision, enabling me to build credibility in space. Road bumps included losing over 100 sales deals, having equity-based employees leave the company and nearly going bankrupt twice. In the first 18 months, Solace grew from 1 - 10 people then to 25 in 2023. As of today, Solace has developed apps that have reached 25m people +, hired the top 1% of talent in strategy, design and development and delivered over 50 applications. Startups have gone on to raise £30M+ from our design work and scale their venture to the next level.

How are you funded?

Solace secured a £200K pre-seed round in August 2022 from an Ex-Accentre and Deloitte Angel investor and a debt financing facility. The capital was deployed and growth and expansion in sales and marketing. Building a sustainable and profitable business model is a priority and Solace actively reinvests profits into growth and expansion.

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

Being a solo founder oftentimes there's no one to call who can understand the magnitude of the problem you are trying to solve. Ideas rattle in your head day to night and you have to trust your gut instinct for the decision-making you're doing. Being a talent business with high overheads, managing cash flow has been the biggest challenge. I can remember one time when we had enough cash left for 3 weeks. Payroll was approaching at the end of the month and I didn't think we'd be able to stump enough cash to pay the staff. At this time, I wasn't sleeping and was in a state of battle mode fighting for the survival of the company. The only way to get the cash was to close £30K worth of sales in two weeks and get the customers to pay their deposits before the month's end. I went all out on trying to drum up new business at this time completing over 200 cold calls a day, sending 1000s emails and trying to desperately get a slice of interest. After tens of NOs, many lost proposals and objections 2 new customers said YES and paid the cash the day before payroll. With only one route to survival, I learned that extreme action and persistence are the way to deal with unfavourable circumstances and still push through to a positive outcome.

What's in store for the future?

Solace is developing a DesignOps platform to revolutionise the way clients and designers interact, bringing scalable design resources to some of the largest enterprise organisations. Global expansion is on the horizon with plans to open an office in New York and tap into the market potential of the United States.

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

Start today and never stop. Massive action is the driving force for learning, growth and development. Get out there and push yourself outside your comfort zone. The right people will fall in place and revenue will grow with time. Be consistent, do the activities every day and show up without question.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

My routines tend to fluctuate in cycles of being healthy, and then somewhat unhealthy, depending on how much discipline I muster up to jump out of bed in the morning. As of now, I wake up around 7am, shower, get ready and head out the door straight away. Breakfast is typically consumed en route on my morning walk to our office on the south bank in London. The morning consists of focused work, trying to minimise distractions and focus on pressing tasks that need attention. At 10am, the first of usually around 9 meetings start, where I'm either selling our services to new customers, speaking with the project management team or coordinating operational efforts. The day typically consists of

management-related conversations to keep everything on track. Currently, I'm putting in the extra hours and usually end up eating Deliveroo at the office around 8pm then continuing work until 10pm, when it's time to walk back to my flat and get some rest.

Leo Rogers is CEO of *Solace*.

Article by Leo Rogers