

Meet Boardwave, the social enterprise connecting European software leaders

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Phill Robinson, Founder and CEO of Boardwave, about sharing knowledge, social purpose and the rocky road to success.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching Boardwave?

Having previously worked for and led global software companies both in Silicon Valley and Europe, I'd often shared conversations with other CEOs and leaders in my network on the topic of why Europe still struggles to create the type of globally-dominating technology companies that we've seen emerge over the last 20 years from the US. Post-2008 financial crisis, the US's recovery and growth, fueled by its leading tech firms, has significantly outpaced the UK and Europe's. In 2020, only seven of Europe's top 100 companies by value were software-based, compared to 39 in the US and 25 in Asia. Today in the UK, there is only one software company in the top 100 publicly listed firms. And it's not getting any better.

With this single challenge in mind, I founded Boardwave in 2022 with a strong belief that all the talent, knowledge and experience to build the next world-beating software businesses, that compete on a global scale, exist in Europe. But that knowledge is often isolated and fragmented by

geography, culture, language, proximity, growth stage, sub sector focus and investor portfolio. In just under two years, our community has gone from zero to 1500 UK & European software leaders. From early stage start-ups, to Europe's most impressive software leaders and investors, collaborating, sharing and mentoring, to build the next generation of global software businesses.

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

Boardwave was created to connect the leading software CEOs, chairs, non-execs, founders and investors in Europe, to enable them to share knowledge and best-practice, network and to mentor one another. So, for example, you could be the founder of a two-year old software start-up and seek advice and mentoring for free from some of the most experienced executives in the world - for free.

So we are providing access. Access to all the experience and knowledge in the community and using our platform the ability to pinpoint the most relevant leaders to help you. Access to capital - we have over 150 angel investors (who are also Founders & CEOs), and 35 of Europe's leading VC and Private Equity investors. As well as access to partners offering support services in strategy, product, technology, legal, corporate banking, advisory, go to market and marketing.

Boardwave is a social enterprise, focused on the development of its community, not profit. Membership is free for software CEOs and founders, on approval of their membership application. The community is funded by a partner consortium of 80+ blue chip organisations who have agreed to share the cost of this initiative between them, and are aligned with our vision.

Can you tell us more about the impact on AI, and making sure software companies know what to do with this technology?

Artificial Intelligence will revolutionise every aspect of business, and society and it's happening rapidly. In fact, it's estimated that AI will deliver €600 billion in gross value added (GVA) revenue to the European economy by 2030. However, there is a skills and knowledge gap within senior leadership, in European software, that has the potential to severely limit the practical application and potential of AI.

We are still in the very early stages of AI, and it's changing and developing quickly. For Europe to remain competitive, it is imperative that together our society rapidly improves its understanding of the practical uses for AI in their lives and their work.

Today all businesses rely on software and the companies that provide it, to improve productivity and drive growth. In turn those that provide that software must embrace AI as a new technology to improve their efficiency and also embed the technology in the products that they build, so that their products offer those advantages to their customers. It's imperative we avoid the European community becoming laggards rather than leaders in this next technology revolution - to create some real momentum for UK and European software against its global competitors.

Boardwave offers events, masterclasses and meet-ups for its members on "Practical AI". We work in partnership with the *Mindstone* meetup community, Europe's most popular AI meetup group with 7,000 participants, to offer monthly meet ups across Europe, for all Boardwave members and their employees. An easy and accessible way to get engaged with AI. <https://www.boardwave.org/practical-ai>

Tell us about Boardwave's social purpose?

We believe that business does not exist in isolation of society, and that “doing good, is good business”. Businesses are built with a vision or mission, often associated with making profit. At the same time, our view is that any company should also consider its social purpose. Today's workforce not only looks for interesting work, salary and career progression, they also significantly prefer to work in companies that give meaning and purpose, aligned with their personal values. So there is an intrinsic link between hiring and retaining your people, and your chosen purpose.

Boardwave supports urgent innovative medical research into curative treatments for Parkinson's. We pledged any capital, each year, that is surplus to our cash flow requirements to build the community to Cure Parkinson's - one of the world's leading charities dedicated to identifying promising new research and helping to ensure it gets funded.

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

Our fast-growth has almost certainly been our biggest challenge to date. The interest and excitement from the software industry has been unrivaled and has shown even more proof that there is this strong and urgent need to move away from the fragmented Europe we have today - which is 1,000 miles wide while Silicon Valley is 40 miles long - and instead build a united community that removes boundaries and connects our leaders in a way we've never seen previously.

What's in store for the future?

This really is just the beginning for Boardwave and *we've recently*

launched a whitepaper that looks 10 years to the future and poses questions around how Europe can become a global software superpower in the next decade.

The unique convergence of technological advancements, including Cloud, AI, Quantum Computing, Blockchain, Low-code/No-code tools, and the metaverse, present an unprecedented opportunity for the UK and Europe to forge ahead. Their combined impact on society will be more profound than the Industrial Revolution, redrawing the boundaries and disrupting industries where we have traditionally been strong. And it will all happen at warp speed.

If the right decisions get made now, in the next 10 years the UK and European software sector can have far greater success and spearhead a new technology revolution. And, despite already being behind the US in adopting these innovations, if the government, tech leaders and investors collaborate and act now, we can build world-beating companies with global impact, just like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Meta, Apple et al. have since 2010.

But this will require a concerted, collaborative effort across sectors including government, education, industry, and regulatory bodies. I've used the whitepaper as a strategy document that highlights past shortcomings and presents key strategies, tactics, and policy recommendations for catching up and leading the global software market.

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

Don't imagine it's a straight line to success. The journey of a Founder is a long and winding road. There will be dips along the way. To stay the course you need unwavering vision, focus and the right team alongside

you. I believe the world is full of opportunities and those that succeed are the ones that not only spot them, but grab them when they come along - even if you don't know where that might take you.

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

I live with Parkinsons' so each day can present unique challenges depending on my symptoms that day. But it's a gift. It's taught me to never put off until tomorrow, what you can do today. To cherish the good days and always stay positive - you don't know what's around the corner.

Phill Robinson is the CEO and Founder of [Boardwave](#).

Article by Phill Robinson