

Access your target proteins on demand with Nuclera

We spoke to Dr Michael Chen, Co-founder and CEO at Nuclera about being selected to join Tech Nation's Future Fifty programme, founder life and plans for the future.

Temps de lecture : minute

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You have recently been selected to the Tech Nation's Future Fifty programme. What are your expectations and how does it feel to be identified as a future unicorn?

I anticipate that being part of Tech Nation's Future Fifty will provide invaluable support for Nuclera. Having already engaged with No.10 and embarked on a Mission to Singapore, the Future Fifty programme is proving its effectiveness in facilitating, scaling, and fostering new market opportunities.

While we haven't yet reached unicorn status, being selected for Future Fifty serves as significant validation of our potential as one of the UK's most promising scaleups. The UK boasts remarkable life science companies like Abcam, Solexa/Illumina, and Oxford Nanopore, and our aspiration is to be counted among them.

What was the catalyst for launching Nuclera?

My co-founders (Gordon & Jiahao) and I graduated from Prof Sir Shankar

Balasubramanian's lab, where he co-invented Solexa/Illumina next-generation sequencing. His journey deeply inspired us, motivating us to emulate his path by tackling significant challenges through entrepreneurship.

The catalyst for launching Nuclera stemmed from our firsthand experiences during our PhDs. As a structural biologist in training, I personally spent over 3.5 years making the proteins necessary to start my research project. This inefficiency was eye-opening. We discovered that much of early drug discovery is hindered by the time-consuming process of creating custom protein reagents. Nuclera was founded with the mission to empower protein makers everywhere by providing them with the ability to rapidly produce proteins through our eProtein Discovery™ benchtop system.

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 are a life science tools company based in Cambridge, UK, with significant operations in Boston, Massachusetts. Our primary objective is to empower protein makers in various sectors of drug discovery, including pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, Contract Research Organizations (CROs), Contract Development and Manufacturing Organisations (CDMOs), and academia.

Our overarching goal is to position ourselves as the go-to platform for automated protein expression and purification amongst drug discovery researchers, thereby addressing the challenges associated with protein making. Our aim is to ensure that no project encounters obstacles due to a lack of access to essential protein reagents.

We have successfully deployed our systems to protein science groups within the top 10 pharmaceutical companies, leading biotech firms, and prominent CRO/CDMOs.

To reach our customers, we utilise various strategies, including tapping into our personal networks, benefiting from word-of-mouth referrals, participating in industry trade shows, and hosting informative webinars. Through these channels, we aim to effectively demonstrate the value of our solutions and engage with potential clients across diverse sectors.

Excitingly, we recently onboarded Joe Bertelsen as our new Chief Commercial Officer (CCO). Alongside our Vice President of Marketing and Product, Kristine Friscino, Joe, and I are dedicated to raising awareness of our eProtein Discovery platform among the extensive community of protein makers. We plan to achieve this by sharing success stories showcasing the high-quality proteins our system has generated for our early adopters.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

As a startup, we've had our fair share of pivots. In fact, we started Nuclera in 2013 during the first year of our PhDs as a DNA synthesis company! After listening to our customers, internally and externally, in 2020 we decided to pivot the company to addressing the unmet needs of the protein making community. Today, we're well on our way to being the go-to protein making platform having launched our eProtein Discovery system at the beginning of this year.

Tell us about the working culture at Nuclera

At Nuclera, our working culture revolves around customer-focused innovation. With over half of our team holding PhDs and extensive

experience in protein making, we possess a deep understanding of our customers' requirements. This understanding serves as the driving force behind our commitment to exceeding expectations and achieving ambitious targets.

As a life science tools company, much of our team's work takes place in our laboratories, cleanrooms, and offices. However, with operations spanning two continents (the US and UK), we've had to strike a balance between remote and onsite work. Collaboration is key to our success, requiring our teams to be highly cohesive and communicative across geographical boundaries.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

My favourite part of being a founder is watching the positive impact that Nuclera and its products have on the livelihoods of our employees, our shareholders, and our drug discovery customers.

What's in store for the future?

We're shipping to many more customers over the next 12-24 months! We're continuing to improve the quality and features of our eProtein Discovery - watch this space.

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

Identify the target customer as quickly as possible and build the product around the requirements of the target customers (not the requirements that you think customers want). Raise cash that is appropriately sized for your beachhead and expansion markets, not the cash needed to build the

product.

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

Prioritise family and do not let work (even in a startup) become the most important thing in your life.

Dr Michael Chen is the cofounder and CEO of *Nuclera*.

Tech Nation's Future Fifty Programme is designed to support late-stage companies with access and growth opportunities, the programme has supported some of the UK's most prominent unicorns, including Monzo, Darktrace, Revolut, Starling, Skyscanner and Deliveroo.

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