

Daniel Sawko, the founder of Welsh tech company shipshape.vc, helping founders globally find relevant investors for free

Frustrated at the inaccessibility of funding for startups outside of London, Daniel Sawko founded shipshape.vc, a VC search engine for founders.

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London has long represented the centre of UK startup activity—in 2022, the capital accounted for two-thirds of the total VC invested across the UK.

That's not to say that innovation doesn't thrive outside of London. Across the UK, startup hubs in Cardiff, Edinburgh, Manchester, and Belfast (to name a few) have popped up, seeing fountains of fintech, deep tech, biotech, AI, and other disruptive industries emerge across the country.

The key challenge these startups face, Daniel Sawko thinks, is the uneven distribution of capital. Hailing from rural Wales, Daniel saw the disparities between startups founded in London and those from outside.

Daniel's efforts to solve this problem has resulted in shipshape.vc, a search engine for startup funding. The aim is to remove the barriers, both formal and informal, that make fundraising much harder for those outside of key startup hubs, allowing startups to raise regardless of geography.

“So much R&D development happens outside of London. Our fundamental hypothesis of shipshape.vc is that investors want to help companies in a specific area, such as curing cancer or Alzheimer’s, and are much more likely to back businesses aligned with a specific problem rather than a startup’s location,” Daniel says.

‘Information asymmetry’ and other barriers to innovation

An economist by background, it was his understanding of ‘information asymmetry’—how the imbalance of knowledge and information can benefit one party over another—that led Daniel to the thesis that would eventually form shipshape.

“Those who hold the information tend to gate-keep and skim the cream off for themselves, an approach that does not lead to good outcomes for society at large,” Sawko says.

He saw this most evidently in the world of venture, which was unfairly biasing founders with connections and expert knowledge on how to navigate the world of investment. “The information on who to approach for funding—or who to invest in—is limited. This is holding society back from the progress we could be achieving should more information be available.”

So what did startups need? They needed an informative and impartial directory of investors that could help them find the right information and connections in order to access the funding they needed. And thus, shipshape.vc was born.

How does shipshape.vc work?

shipshape.vc is a free-to-use search engine that aggregates data from thousands of data sources to provide insights into funding stages, business locations, names, and amounts.

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This is combined with detailed information on the investors themselves, understanding their existing portfolio, social media presence, and any published writing. This gives founders a full picture of exactly the type of businesses that certain investors may be looking for.

Listing on shipshape.vc is completely free, all information is backed by external data sources, and the data is refreshed weekly, ensuring founders and investors have the most current information at their fingertips without the risk of spam or outdated contacts.

“We have made this mountain of data free and intuitive for founders to search, streamline research, and make sure that they get their one shot right when reaching out to the right investment firm,” adds Sawko.

The platform doesn't stop at investors. shipshape.vc wants to provide a holistic platform for startup support, including information on law firms, local governments, city councils, and funding readiness programmes.

Since its launch, shipshape has seen remarkable growth, with over 3000 startup users from 183 countries, and over 26,000 unique searches in just over a year. This organic growth, driven purely by word-of-mouth and referrals, is testament to the need for a platform like shipshape.

Flying the flag for Wales

On top of his role leading shipshape.vc, Daniel spends much of his time flying the flag for Welsh tech. At the upcoming Vivatech in Paris, he'll be appearing at the UK Pavilion on a panel about Wales' startup landscape, and the opportunities it holds for companies in a range of industries from semiconductors to insurtech and cybersecurity.

As a proud Welshman, Daniel has made it his mission to elevate the status of regional founders to the same level as those from London. After all, he firmly remains in this category—with the majority of the shipshape team based in South Wales.

Geography still plays a huge role in the fortunes of founders. Despite cities like Cardiff sitting just a few hours outside of London, startups that emerged from these ecosystems faced radically different experiences.

“Our data shows that a tech business of roughly the same size and revenue in London and the South East as one in the North of England would value their business very differently,” says Sawko. shipshape.vc is looking to level this, so that a founder in rural Wales has just the same opportunities as one based in London or the Golden Triangle.

There's reasons to be cheerful. In spite of this funding gap, countries like Wales and Cardiff continue to hold great potential for investment and startup activity. In 2023, over 20,000 new businesses launched in Wales, attracting £157M in VC investment.

This makes Daniel hopeful, not just about Welsh tech but the prospect of UK tech overall: “One of the things that makes me optimistic is that there are more people solving more problems than any one of us could possibly comprehend,” he says.

With the right information at their fingertips, many more of these founders could find the funding and traction to make a meaningful impact on the world stage.

Coming to Vivatech this year in Paris? You can hear Daniel speak as part of a panel on 'The Welsh Dragon: A tech ecosystem that's roaring' at the UK Pavilion on Friday 24th May 2024 at 14:00. More information [here](#).

The Commercial Department of the British Embassy in Paris provides support to French companies wishing to set up in the UK. Click [here](#) to find out more.

Article écrit par Maddyness, with the British Embassy in Paris