

A catch up with...

An expert view of the
Technology sector

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CFO
Quartix Holdings Ltd

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Founder & CEO
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Foreword

As technology businesses advance their products and services in order to remain at the forefront of their sector, they must also handle the challenges that all businesses face.

To better understand the sector, we spoke to three leaders from three different-facing technology businesses to bring you their perspectives and insight on the industry, taking an inside look at the market.

Global supply chain difficulties, Brexit and the drive towards a zero-carbon future could all be seen as potential road blocks for a company such as Quartix Holdings. CFO Emily Rees explains how these challenges are creating future opportunities.

Current economic woes such as rising inflation and recession are shining a light on the weaknesses of the traditional banking model and the risks to account holders. Cameron Parry, Founder and CEO of Tally Money explains the benefits of switching to a digital currency.

Achieving a successful flotation in 2022 was no mean feat. Raluca Saceanu, CEO of Smarttech247, explains how the company bucked the trend of plummeting tech stocks in 2022 to be one of only a handful of companies to pull-off a successful IPO last year.

Thank you to our contributors for sharing their individual experiences in this edition. We would welcome your suggestions for industries to profile in future issues.

A catch up with...

The aim of the series: "A catch up with..." is to promote a greater understanding of the current market through a series of interviews with respected industry leaders to find out more about them, their company, their views on the market and the challenges they might face in the next phase of their business journey. Each publication will examine a single industry from the viewpoints of different business directors and founders operating within the sector to provide a rare and insightful overview.



“The product is very commoditised and the innovation comes not from the technology but how you present information, the user experience, the interface, the accessibility and how you want to use the data. That’s how we differentiate ourselves.”

Emily Rees
CFO, Quartix Holdings Ltd



Driving towards a green future

A catch-up with... Emily Rees

2021 was a significant year for Quartix. Not only did it celebrate its 20th birthday as a company, but the co-founder, Managing Director and CEO, Andy Walters stepped-down to be replaced by new CEO, Richard Lilwall. Emily Rees joined as the new CFO six months before him, bringing two fresh heads to the leadership of the business. Together they are navigating the company around road blocks caused by global supply chain difficulties, Brexit and the drive towards a zero carbon future. Emily explains how these challenges are creating the next opportunities.

Quartix is a SaaS business (software-as-a-service) in the technology sector. Its main focus is telematics within fleet management – helping fleet managers to track and monitor their cars, vans, coaches, and lorries 24/7. “The technology has been around for a number of years,” explains Emily. “What we’re really addressing with our product is helping fleets improve productivity and reduce costs. As a fleet manager with say, twenty company vehicles, it’s very hard to have visibility on what they are doing, where they are going, and what jobs they’re on.

“There may be waste in terms of fuel efficiency,” she points out. “Are drivers following the work plan you’ve given them and completing jobs on time? A lot of smaller companies will have fleet vehicles that should only be used on company time,” Emily says. “How do you ensure that cars aren’t being used for non-business purposes – fraudulently - which can also create an insurance risk? Then there’s risk of false claims made against your company,” she adds. “A member of the public might claim their car was damaged by a fleet vehicle. Without tracking technology you wouldn’t have any proof with which to refute that claim, or any way of understanding what really happened in that situation,” Emily explains.

“We are proud to be part of the first wave of AIM companies that are driving growth in the green economy.”

Quartix is more than just a GPS location tracker. “We have a lot of software within the product that provides driver behaviour information,” says Emily. “It will flag to a fleet manager if a driver is accelerating, or breaking very quickly. It provides a rating on each driver so that fleet managers can minimise high risk behaviour, which will reduce the risk of accidents and consequently, insurance costs,” she adds.

According to Emily, it’s all about good vehicle utilisation: “It ensures fleet managers are maximising the productivity of their current fleets. No-one wants to buy more vehicles than they have to,” she explains. There’s an environmental impact, too. “There’s a lot of focus on ESG at the moment,” says Emily. “Driving a fleet in the most efficient manner possible ensures that you minimise carbon emissions. It enhances your green credentials, and we are proud to be part of the first wave of AIM companies that are driving growth in the green economy” she adds. Quartix received the LSE’s green economy mark at the beginning of 2022 because more than 50 percent of its revenues derives from green incentives.

While the business classes itself as a SaaS business, it does have hardware. “It’s almost ‘hardware as a service’!” says Emily. “We put a unit into a vehicle – it can either be professionally installed, or we now have versions which can be self-installed, and we provide customers with a cloud platform which essentially gives them 100 percent visibility on a vehicle and where it’s travelled, to improve efficiency,” she explains.

Customers that use the product will typically reduce their fuel usage by around a 25 percent, and improve the productivity of their workforce by approximately 15 percent. “Overall, our customers drive ten percent fewer miles and idle time – time spent just sitting around – is reduced by up to 25 percent, which also reduces overtime,” states Emily.

The company’s customer base has evolved over the last twenty years. “When we initially started, Quartix focused on smaller customers that had circa three-to-five light commercial vehicles. But over time, we’ve broadened the scope of the type of customers we work with. For example, we have a large amount of Councils which need to report on many of the metrics that we provide,” explains Emily.

In a commoditised market, service is key. “There are a lot of competitors in this market. We’ve always positioned the product, as an off-the-shelf, value product, what you see is what you get,” she says. “There are lots of changes that have been tried in the industry over the years, for example, people have tried using mobile phones, but they can be turned off. The product is very commoditised and the innovation comes not from the technology but how you present information, the user experience, the interface, the accessibility and how you want to use the data. That’s how we differentiate ourselves,” she explains. “We provide a great service which is well above the standard for our industry. Companies choose to stay with Quartix even if they have the choice to go elsewhere for a similar price and product functionality.

“There are other providers who do specialised bespoke software for very large fleets of 500 units plus, but what we have seen over the last couple of years, perhaps because of cost pressures, is some of these larger customers realising they were only utilising twenty percent of what that specialised product offers. They like that Quartix provides a reliable product, has good customer service, and they pay less,” Emily explains.



Last year, Quartix won the BT Openreach fleet. “That was a big win for us and it’s testimony to the fact that larger fleets have similar needs to smaller fleets,” says Emily. “We’re finding as our field sellers go to market that people want a product at the level that we’re offering, which is good, accurate software, and at a good price. Being in the market as it’s developed over the last 20 plus years, we know what the main drivers are for customers and we’re very focused on what is needed to manage a fleet most effectively and we deliver on that very well,” she adds.

Technology businesses have been particularly hard hit by a series of global macro-economic events in recent years, but according to Emily, Quartix has navigated the difficulties better than most.

“The talking point for the last 18 months has been component shortages,” explains Emily. “Like most businesses, we receive the majority of our components in China and we’ve certainly seen a lot of competitors struggling. The one benefit for Quartix is that we run a tight, lean ship in terms of how we operate, and that has helped us to navigate this current situation. We have a large network of contacts developed over 20 years in the industry, and so we’ve been agile enough to find components where we’ve needed and look at new suppliers,” she says. “We’ve also had to very quickly pivot to components which are available and use them within our product. That’s doesn’t always mean that it’s been at the cheapest price, but really we didn’t have any significant problems,” reassures Emily.

“We’ve also pivoted on how we operate,” Emily explains. “Our cost of sales includes the professional installation of units into vehicles, but we’ve seen a change with Covid.”

“Whether that’s because of social distancing or another reason, many customers are taking another version of our product which can be plugged-in or self-installed. So, while we’ve had a slight increase in the components’ costs, that’s been offset by more and more customers moving to a self-installed solution which has a benefit for us in terms of operational costs. That flexibility and having that option has helped a lot.”

Despite global supply issues resulting in car delivery shortages, Quartix hasn’t seen an impact on growth. “Our growth has only increased,” says Emily. “When you’re in a market like the one we’re in currently: where inflation is increasing, petrol prices are going through the roof, there is a cost of living crisis, and increasing payroll costs for drivers; fleet managers are looking anywhere for something that will drive down costs where they can. We do well in a difficult economic environment such as this because we’re a lower cost product and the return on investment case becomes stronger when costs go up,” explains Emily. “We can reduce a fleet’s fuel usage by 25 percent,” she adds.

Quartix classes itself as a tech company and in AIM, as in other financial markets, there is a downturn on tech stock. “The general decline in technology company share prices has also impacted Quartix,” says Emily. “That’s because we’re seeing more and more investors that just want to sit on their cash at the moment and ride this out. It’s general market sentiment and not necessarily about Quartix, but the impact on us has been less than on the overall market,” she claims. “We’re a highly regarded company on AIM. We’ve always had quite a high price to earnings ratio driven due to our strong annualised recurring revenue (“ARR”). This forward looking, strong KPI measure is very cash generative and has really buffered us from the worst of the decline that we’ve seen in the market overall,” Emily adds.

Before joining Quartix, Emily worked in FMCG, for multi-site retailers and hospitality companies. “Tech is a very different direction for me,” Emily says. “Going through Covid in the retail industry was very difficult,” she explains. “A lot people came out of Covid re-thinking what they’re doing with their lives and careers. I had been wanting to move into something different for a while. Fortunately, a lot of finance skills are transferable to any industry. What I bring to the table, which is a benefit from my background in multi-site retailing, is a big focus on operational efficiency which can sometimes get lost in a SaaS business,” Emily says. “We, like a lot of SaaS businesses, consider ourselves a growth business which means you are continuously re-investing into marketing, and sales people to continue to drive that top line, and sometimes within that journey, your central costs or your overheads, don’t get enough attention,” she explains. “Retail runs a lean ship and we are a value product and therefore it’s important to keep your eyes on those overheads, on where you’re spending your cash and ensure you’re always maintaining the best return on investment. That focus has been drilled into me in my previous working environments and I’m applying that to Quartix on its growth journey.”

Quartix has grown very fast over the last 20 years led by its founder, Andy Walters, who retired in late 2021. “Having new leadership look at the business and its processes and implement new ways of working which match a company of our size now versus where we were ten years ago, has been a big focus of mine,” says Emily.



Over 600,000 units installed since 2001



More than 20 years of telematics expertise



More than 400 new fleet customers each month

The new leadership isn't just bringing internal changes, it's brought a lot of innovation. "In the past, the success metric has always been the number of new customers or new telematic units sold. Now the company is also reviewing up-selling new products and services to its 23,000+ customers, while also focussing on digital transformation to ensure the business can scale as efficiently as possible" explains Emily.

"Towards the end of last year, we launched E-volve, which is for electric vehicle migration," she says. "If you have a large or mixed vehicle fleet, and you want to migrate some of the vehicles to EV, where do you start in terms of making that decision? The fortunate thing for our customers is that with Quartix, we have all the data that you'll need to make that decision. We know how far vehicles travel, where they stop overnight, the distance and time taken for a general trip. We're able to consolidate that data together in the platform to advise which vehicles should migrate to EV without hampering your current operations, the type of charger to choose and where to locate it," she says.

"Another service we finalised at the end of last year was Quartix Check," explains Emily. "It's a Health & Safety compliance product which asks drivers to go around the vehicle and check everything's operating correctly. Problems can then be escalated through the app to notify the fleet manager. So there's new products and new upsell opportunities which will drive the ARR without any increase in costs because we've already invested in the software to do these tasks," she adds.

"In the long term, when 100 percent of fleets are electric, our product will vastly change," predicts Emily. "We're already working on initial iterations of what that product will look like, for example instead of how much fuel people are using, it will measure the rate of charge."

According to Emily, beyond the macro-geopolitical risk inherent in supply chains involving China, and the global move to Net Zero carbon emissions, the biggest challenge to business is people. "Everyone wants the best in class in terms of their employees and there needs to be a lot of focus on investing in your staff, remuneration and the benefits that you're offering them in order to retain the staff," says Emily.

"The hidden costs of a lot of employee churn can be quite significant. That's a loss of productivity when you're a fast growing tech company. Losing two or three people that are absolutely necessary to your business could really hamper your growth," she explains. "In the tech sector, in particular, salaries are increasing significantly. Managing that in the best way with your employees is a challenge," she adds.

Hybrid working creates a problem or an opportunity depending on whether you're a pessimist or an optimist, according to Emily. "Our operational base is in Newtown in Mid-Wales. It's a very tight-knit community and where we usually hire our people," she explains. "But hybrid working means they might be able to travel further for a job which provides new opportunities and a higher salary, so that's a pressure for us. But Quartix has also moved away from requiring staff to be in the office to work full-time. We realised that with the right levers in place to help people feel part of a team, we too can go further afield for the people we need.

"For example, we operate in France, Spain, Italy and Germany and so we need language speakers," Emily explains. "Post-Brexit and with Covid, a lot of people decided to go home, which could have left us exposed. But remote workers, set-up in the right way, have helped us hugely. We quickly brought in heads from all over the UK, but we bring everyone together, through our ways of working and managing staff that helps to make them even more sticky!" she says.

Quartix is planning continued growth in Europe and the US. "Europe has a low penetration rate in terms of the number of commercial vehicles that have tracking technology," explains Emily. "There's a large opportunity there. We want to expand into new countries in the most efficient way possible. We try to centralise all the back office operations in Newtown, but we need sales people on the ground, and as part of that operational scalability, you want to be able to drag and drop the same operational model into every new country that you go into," she adds.

"That's easy to say but not always easy to implement. Across the EU there are set ways of working and individual country requirements that need to be kept track of in order to stay compliant."

There's a huge opportunity in the US, too, Emily explains: "Every company that I've worked for has tried to get a foothold in the US market, but it's a very difficult market to get into. We're working through the right way to expand into the US, whether that be by opening in key locations, going state by state, or some other way," she reveals.

Quartix sees itself as a growth business, which means that the growth rate needs to continue. "The main measure for us externally is ARR, but internally it's lifetime value over customer acquisition cost ("LTV/CAC"): essentially, how long a customer stays with us and the average value that customer brings over their lifetime with us and how much we're spending on the sales and marketing," Emily explains. "Like many other businesses, we've seen inflation affecting digital marketing costs which are going up across the board. We don't want growth for the sake of growth, to the detriment of the LTV/CAC and the return you're going to get from that customer. For us, it's about pushing more money into what's working, but also about finding new ways to generate business. Getting into that level of data and detail to be able to look at individual activities and measure their performance versus others helps to make the right call," she says.

"We have a great product," Emily says. "It works in all economic environments. It works when the market is fast growing and people are buying more vehicles, and it also works in a more inflationary and recessionary environment where people are cost-cutting. We want to be able to provide the data our customers' need in the most cost efficient way, while still delivering great service - that's our mantra," she says. "I'm sure lots of telematics providers are nervous about EV, but we really see it as a fantastic opportunity. Not just over the five to ten years it will take to migrate all fleet vehicles to EV, but beyond that to being able to offer an EV product. It's an exciting opportunity and we want to take advantage of that. It's all about finding those opportunities and going after them," she concludes.

“Through our technology platform, customers can use the value of the gold they own as money for everyday spending or saving.”

Cameron Parry
Founder & CEO, Tally Money



The democratisation of money

A catch-up with... Cameron Parry

Cameron Parry has built an independent monetary system to compete with the fractured reserve banking and fiat currency system because, he says, it is failing the public. He believes that the banking system is not a healthy environment for savers or depositors and did something about it. TallyMoney – a digital currency anchored to physical gold that works seamlessly with the existing banking and payments infrastructure – launched in the UK at the end of 2021. Current economic woes such as rising inflation and recession are shining a light on the weaknesses of the traditional banking model and the risks to account holders. These drivers combined with a planned IPO in 2023, could see TallyMoney really take-off this year.

Opinions contained are those of the interviewee. PKF Littlejohn are not making investment recommendations regarding Tally Money or its services.

The banking system is a lending system, according to Cameron: “If you want to borrow money, it’s very good as the national currency loses value by design so does your debt obligation in real terms, but conversely this is a big problem for savers as the value of fiat money diminishes the purchasing power of savings over time.” Fiat money is government-issued currency that is debt-based and not backed by a physical asset, whereas tally is backed by gold: one tally represents one milligram of gold that the customer owns.

“We protect the value of people’s money and their access to it,” explains Cameron. “Through our technology platform, customers can use the value of the gold they own as money for everyday spending or saving. We are the world’s first to issue individual accounts with an international bank account number (IBAN) that works just like a normal bank account with a debit card but the account balance is denominated in a currency that’s not issued by a Government,” he says. “TallyMoney is an asset-based form of money that is full-reserve, which means the underlying asset is never leveraged or lent out or invested. Ours is a custodial service - it’s the customer’s gold.” According to Cameron it gives customers the best of both worlds: “You get the trusted store value of gold, but you also get the real-time medium of exchange like a fiat currency,” he says.

At the moment, Tally only offers personal accounts for individuals in the UK, but the plan is to launch UK SME accounts in coming months as a web app.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in view of the global turmoil over recent times, Cameron says the last two years have been constructive for Tally Money. “We were focusing on building the system and recruiting the right people,” he explains. “When you’re trying to do something that hasn’t been done before, it takes time to get it right! Even when Covid was going on and accessing capital was more difficult (and as an early stage venture you’re not profitable initially, so you need to have access to capital), we were just able to get on with it.”

“In a way, the world slowed down and we just kept powering forward, doing what we needed to do: developing a scalable solution, making it available to the public, and then marketing it,” he says.

TallyMoney is seeing traction in the UK, the only jurisdiction where Tally is currently available. “We wanted to get our system nice and robust and scalable, and demonstrate that people actually wanted it in our own backyard, before taking this to other jurisdictions,” Cameron explains.

Rising inflation since early 2022 has helped to move the dial. “With all the money printing that’s been going on, inflation has been hiding in financial assets, but now consumers are feeling the effect of their pounds being devalued. If inflation is ten percent a year, and the bank interest rate that you’re getting on your savings is two percent for example, your money is devaluing at eight percent per year in real terms. You’re losing value even if the balance in your bank account doesn’t change because your purchasing power is being diminished. So, if you’re saving in a fiat currency in a bank savings account, you’re in a downward spiral,” Cameron claims. “It goes to the crux of why somebody would use TallyMoney and a Tally account rather than a regular bank account using pounds,” he says.

“We wanted to get our system nice and robust and scalable, and demonstrate that people actually wanted it in our own backyard, before taking this to other jurisdictions.”

According to Cameron, some people are worried that they may have the access to their money restricted if something catastrophic happens in the banking sector such as another financial crisis. “The last kick in the teeth to savers losing value in their bank account is expropriation risk,” he explains. “If your bank gets in financial trouble, it can actually seize some of your savings to prop themselves up under the Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive 2.” Its equivalent is legislated in most countries around the world post the global financial crisis.



“In the UK, interest-bearing savings accounts and current accounts are worth over £1.1 trillion. We could literally just stay in the UK forever and we’d have a very bright future.”

“The reason is that with all the debt that has been going into the system post the GFC, government revenues aren’t enough to bail out banks,” Cameron continues. “Bank’s will have to bail themselves out by using their depositors’ funds - which is not what a customer thinks they’re getting when they become a bank customer!” he exclaims.

Tally is a positive way to address these issues, according to Cameron. “Common sense tells us we need to have some savings, we can’t just live on credit. There are a lot of people who are a bit worried about the decisions made by central banks, or government fiscal policy. It doesn’t look like things are getting more certain out there, and anything people can do to make sure that they’re financially robust and in control of their own money, is a positive thing for them to do,” he says.

To make the most of TallyMoney, customers need to have the capacity for savings. “If you’re living hand to mouth, you don’t really need a good store of value, you just need a medium of exchange,” Cameron explains, “but anyone with savings should be using a Tally account,” he says. “We’ve done market research around where our audience segments are, and savers is the big one.”

Other customers tend to be people who travel a lot and who want to think in terms of just one currency. Cameron gives an example: “If I buy a cup of coffee in Italy and then I buy a cup of coffee in Japan, if you’re using TallyMoney you can see that it cost 50 tally in Rome, but 70 tally in Tokyo.”

“TallyMoney also provides an extremely cheap foreign exchange rate,” he adds. Tally claims to have the most inexpensive exchange rate for individuals because it is based on the global wholesale price of gold and has no added FX spread or transaction fees.

“Some customers are gold enthusiasts: people who want some easy exposure to gold at a low cost, but with the full flexibility to spend it whenever they feel like it,” explains Cameron. “Others are cryptocurrency enthusiasts, and while TallyMoney is not a crypto currency, they like the idea that there can be competing monetary systems that are independent,” he says. “Then we have independently minded people, who don’t think that the State is always going to necessarily act in their best interests, and so want to take control of their own money and finances. They are typically also people who make decisions directly about what they hold in their investment portfolio. And then lastly, because it’s fintech, we have customers that want to be first out of their peer group to try new things,” he concludes.

The FTX crypto exchange bankruptcy has damaged the perception of bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies as potential alternatives to the established monetary system. “I’m a big fan of bitcoin,” says Cameron. “I co-founded the world’s first blockchain industry company to successfully IPO on a recognised stock market in London on Christmas Eve, 2015. Even back then I was of the view that it would take a good five to ten years before bitcoin would achieve mass adoption, if ever.”

A lot of Cameron’s learnings about bitcoin have gone into the design of TallyMoney: “I’ve taken away some of the reasons that stop bitcoin from gaining mass adoption, in my view, but I did add some of the principles and virtues of that system,” he says. Another competitor would be gold trading apps, or foreign currency trading apps, “but their interest is in getting the trade and charging customers half-a-percent, or one percent of the value each time,” explains Cameron. “It’s not really useful as money. TallyMoney is really competing with everyday bank accounts and fixed-term savings accounts,” he adds.

TallyMoney needs to do what cryptocurrencies have not: achieve mainstream acceptance. To do that they will have to build awareness. “We’re in a position where we’ve built a stable and scalable monetary system. We’ve had our smartphone app proof of concept out for three years now, and last year we were proving up our business model. It takes time to build trust in an alternative money for the mainstream. You need to be out there for a while. You can’t go live and everybody goes ‘wow’ and takes it up overnight - it’s not like that,” says Cameron.

“We’re not a listed company at the moment. I’m looking to bring it onto the stock market in 2023 and that will increase brand and product awareness, and it’ll put us in another regulated environment, which will add further credibility,” Cameron explains.

“We’re looking at a standard list on the main market of the London Stock Exchange and the capital we raise will allow us to expand our market footprint,” he says.

A key challenge getting to this stage has been finding the right people to work with. “In an early stage business, you really need people who have a specialist skill in something that complements whatever your core area is, but who also have an overarching, generalist understanding of things - we all have to wear many hats here at Tally. Finding the right people is a massive challenge, particularly when you’re doing something that hasn’t been done before,” Cameron adds.



Tally is a digital currency anchored to physical gold



1 tally = 1 milligram of gold



The most important thing for TallyMoney was to get the foundations right first. “You don’t get a second chance with people’s money. This is not like a gimmicky product – it’s serious stuff,” says Cameron. “It’s all about giving people a safe and happy environment with their money, so we try to keep it nice and positive, to which end we use a bright sunshine yellow as a core brand colour.”

Cameron doesn’t believe the down-turn in technology stocks will greatly impact TallyMoney. “The business is built on economic fundamentals. It had revenues defined straight off the bat. If TallyMoney was free - making a loss but attracting hundreds of thousands of customers – and we still had to figure out how to generate revenues, that, to me, would be dangerous,” he explains. “I’d rather be clear to customers upfront about what they’re paying for what they’re getting, and make sure it’s good value.”

“Fintech has been in a difficult environment since early 2022 as far as investor sentiment goes,” explains Cameron. “It means that capital dries-up for everybody which makes it a bit more challenging, but that hasn’t really affected our company valuation which is fairly modest, realistic and credible, in my opinion,” he continues. “I’d really like to see a lot of the company value take hold when we’re on the stock market. TallyMoney is about the democratisation of money and if you believe in that, then you should let the public own in the growth and maturing phases, to the degree they want to, part of the central monetary authority – we are the issuer, regulator and operator of the Tally monetary system,” he says.

“As far as a hockey stick take-up of Tally is concerned, I expect that’ll happen at some point when we’re on the market,” predicts Cameron. “Prior to that, we’ll just keep building-up market traction to the extent that our resources allow, in the lead-up to a compelling IPO.”

Regarding competition, Cameron states: “When I started working on this concept in 2017 with a colleague, I thought that we’d be rushed to be the first mover in this space. But actually, the longer it has taken to find the right people and build the organisation, the more it seems that there’s nobody else coming. Not yet at least.”

“We may have copycat companies in future and that could be a threat, but nobody can take away the fact that TallyMoney was the first non-fiat non-crypto mainstream money for everyday savings and payments and the longer that goes on, the more established we’ll be in our own home market,” explains Cameron.

“The world’s a big place and there’s plenty of room for other participants” he says. “In the UK, interest-bearing savings accounts and current accounts are worth over £1.1 trillion. We could literally just stay in the UK forever and we’d have a very bright future,” Cameron claims. “But Tally is money designed by the people for the people, so we do want to get this out globally and into as many people’s hands as reasonably possible.”

“As far as a hockey stick take-up of Tally is concerned, I expect that’ll happen at some point when we’re on the market. Prior to that, we’ll just keep building-up market traction to the extent that our resources allow, in the lead-up to a compelling IPO.”

“Even if Tally doesn’t turn out to be a big success, and if what follows TallyMoney becomes the big thing and protects the broader public from the debt-based fiat currency system that’s designed ultimately to fail them, then we would have played our part. I’m sure that TallyMoney will have a large degree of success, and it might have a huge amount of success, but even if we are the ones that opened the door, that’s still a very positive thing to have contributed to society,” says Cameron.

According to Cameron, the existing banking system will eventually come to an end in some form. “Hopefully, it won’t be hugely catastrophic. But it will reset,” he insists. “At that moment, a lot of wealth will be stripped away from the population through their fiat currency savings and that’s going to devastate a lot of people. Our system’s designed to protect and benefit depositors and savers. It’s there for people to have sound money in their lives,” he says.

“I’m not a ‘gold bug’,” Cameron states. “I didn’t start off trying to turn gold into money, I started by trying to design sound money, and gold is the best underlying asset to delivering that.”

“All we’ve got to trade in our lives is time. When you agree to get something in return for your time, your effort, your labour, your mental energy, the stress, and the sacrifice away from your family, and somebody pays you for that, there’s something fundamentally not right about somebody else stripping the value of that currency away as you go forward trying to earn more.” he explains. “If I did some work last year and I didn’t spend the fiat currency I was paid until today, it can only buy 90 percent of the things I could have bought a year ago. That’s a bad system! We need an alternative. We need a monetary system that encourages you to save money and be productive,” Cameron says. “It’s pretty straight-forward. It isn’t straight-forward to deliver, it’s been a lot of hard work, but that is what TallyMoney achieves.”



“We help companies to not only proactively prevent and respond to attacks, but also to secure their digital transformation journey.”



Raluca Saceanu
CEO, Smarttech247

Cybersecurity – A growing, underestimated, business risk for all organisations

A catch-up with... Raluca Saceanu

Royal Mail, The Guardian, Arnold Clark, Reddit, Pepsi Bottling Ventures, healthcare giant CHS, Atlassian, PayPal and T-Mobile: these companies are just a few of the many to report cyber attacks, hacks and data breaches in the first two months of this year. It's no surprise then, that cybersecurity is a growing industry. Global cybersecurity organisation, Smarttech247, is rising on the swell of that wave. CEO, Raluca Saceanu explains how Smarttech247 bucked the trend of plummeting tech stocks in 2022 to be one of only a handful of companies to pull-off a successful IPO last year, and how she intends to establish the company as a global market leader.

Smarttech247 provides managed detection and response capabilities to some of the world's largest organisations: "We help companies to not only proactively prevent and respond to attacks, but also to secure their digital transformation journey," explains Raluca. The company has 130 employees based in offices located in Ireland, United Kingdom, Romania, Poland and the USA; multiple integration partners such as, IBM, Microsoft, Tanium, CrowdStrike, Trend Micro, and Proofpoint; and a large number of global customers from a range of industries.

"One of our biggest customers is a Fortune 100 organisation with over 200,000 employees," says Raluca. "We also have one of the biggest car retailers in the USA - a USD \$30bn company." But while large global organisations are the company's main target customers, it's not exclusive: "The mid-market is severely under-resourced and under-served, so we are actively targeting that market as well," she adds.

Over the last two years, the company has grown considerably. "We started the IPO process about 18 months ago, and we completed it in December of last year. Throughout the IPO journey, we managed to continue to grow and win more customers. For example, last year alone, we grew by 75 percent in terms of head-count, and we've had an average of 30 per cent year-on-year revenue growth and profitability growth, as well," explains Raluca.

At the beginning of February 2023, just two months after its successful AIM flotation, Smarttech247 reported a bumper quarter of contract wins, including multiple multi-year contracts with organisations in the US and Ireland. These include a three-year agreement with a large US tech company headquartered in Massachusetts and a two-year agreement with a prestigious university in Ireland, worth US \$400,000 and US \$450,000, respectively. As a result, Smarttech247's shares jumped five per cent.



Smarttech247 is a multi-award-winning MDR (Managed Detection & Response) company



The company's mission is to keep customers secure



Smarttech247 has industry recognitions in ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 2700:2013



"We've just released our first trading update where we announced a number of contract wins, and our share price has maintained really well," says Raluca. "The reason we decided to go for the IPO was to accelerate our growth journey, and this is going to be our focus for the next 12 months," she explains. "We have a large focus on investing in our innovation roadmap: we are hiring in our R&D department, and we're looking to develop more products. We're also investing heavily in sales and marketing as we're looking to grow our presence not only in the UK but also in North America and APAC."

"There were a very limited number of organisations in London who managed to float last year, so it gave us an advantage."

"We have exciting partnerships on the way," she reveals.

Achieving a successful flotation in 2022 was no mean feat. The IPO landscape was challenging, particularly for technology companies. The number of firms listing in London last year fell by 67 percent, according to research reported on CNBC, and the funds raised by companies listing in London plunged by more than 90 percent.

"We noticed that the markets were down and the macro-economic factors were grim. However, we saw it as an opportunity: there were a very limited number of organisations in London who managed to float last year, so it gave us an advantage," Raluca explains. "It was a good decision to make."

"The IPO process is not an easy one, it's a challenge, but the success that we obtained at the end of the IPO process made it all worth it," she says. Smarttech247 succeeded in achieving its target market capitalisation of £36.8 million on admission.

According to Raluca a number of factors enabled the company to buck the negative market trends.

"If you look at what's happening in the industry, the threat landscape is continually growing and the geo-political tensions are contributing to that growth, so it was always going to be the right time for us to list!" Raluca exclaims. At the time of writing, Munster Technological University (MTU) had just had data shared on the dark web in a ransomware attack, illustrating the point. "We are a profitable company," she continues, "and compared to other tech companies, there's much less uncertainty around the economic factors of this industry. Cybersecurity is an eight trillion dollar industry at the moment and it's expected to be ten trillion by the end of 2025," Raluca explains. "To put it into perspective, that's the global energy bill!"

In addition, over the last 24 months, the world has seen an accelerated digital transformation journey, mainly as a result of the pandemic, Raluca explains: "A lot more organisations now have a remote or hybrid workforce and have seen the benefits of adopting more cloud technology. That means organisations have physical premises, hybrid solutions, and cloud solutions, and when you move to the cloud it's a challenging journey because there are many security considerations that you have to be aware of," she says. "We help organisations ensure that their digital transformation journey employs a security by design approach." In other words, they get them to think about cybersecurity at the beginning of a project to reduce the likelihood of flaws that might compromise a company's information security.



"The second problem is that too much data is being generated so the risk surface is much bigger," Raluca explains. "There are more technologies, and there are too many complexities around the technologies that are being offered on the market. If you take a mid-sized organisation, it could have hundreds of security tools all doing different things, and overall, quite complex and disparate security operations, so many organisations are looking to simplify that - that's a key area for us as a cybersecurity organisation that aims at reducing security complexity for clients," she adds.

Raluca highlights that the most notable challenge for organisations is the fact that cybercriminals continue to innovate. "They have endless resources," she says. "Cybercrime is an industry. These are not teenage hackers sitting in their basements hacking organisations. They are businesses, like our business. They have marketing departments, sales departments, engineering departments, and customer service departments; and they have numerous resources both financial and operational to invest in the latest tools to create the latest malware that employs artificial intelligence, for example. It's simply very difficult to play catch-up," she explains. "It's really, really important that we understand the scale of the challenge and that we treat cybersecurity as a risk area rather than a technology area," she warns.

The war in Ukraine has triggered a lot of cybercrime, Raluca says: "It's a war behind a war: nation-states attacking other nation-states, and the ripple effect of that is that the tools they use end up in the wrong hands - the hands of criminals who use these tools to attack companies," she explains. "Geo-political tensions have a massive, massive impact on the cybersecurity industry because they accelerate the rate and sophistication of attacks."

In tandem with the increasing number of external threats driving the industry is the increasing amount and scope of data regulation. "Every single regulation that deals with privacy, data protection or cybersecurity is beneficial to us because it spurs organisations to really start taking their security measures more seriously," says Raluca. "For example, the EU Cybersecurity Act came into effect recently in Europe and we are already seeing an increase in public organisations publishing tenders for security. If I were to compare it to just four years ago, we're seeing an uplift of nearly 50 per cent in public and state organisations, and government agencies looking for managed security," she adds. "The latest Act, the Digital Operational Resilience Act ("DORA"), outlines the kind of cyber security measures that organisations need to employ in order to build resilience as a company. Every single regulation or law that comes into effect, helps not only us as cybersecurity organisations, but also the world to become a safer place," Raluca says.



Smarttech247 has three core products in its portfolio which aim to help companies meet that goal. “The first one ‘VisionX’, which is a managed detection and response platform,” Raluca explains. “It employs a concept called cybersecurity mesh architecture which helps organisations simplify their security operations by sitting on top of all the other technologies that an organisation may have and makes sense of those technologies. It allows people to understand the threat that they’re facing, anticipate it, and respond to it properly,” she adds.

“Secondly, we have a product called ‘Threathub’, which is a threat modelling platform. It employs a concept called dynamic risk governance and integrates very well with ‘VisionX’. It allows organisations to prioritise the vulnerabilities that are taking place in their environment and understand what to patch, when to patch, and how to respond,” she explains.

“The third one is a very simple, but powerful one called ‘NoPhish’, which helps organisations to detect phishing, report it and remove it from their organisations, in a matter of minutes. We’ve got lots of customers that are using this product, and they absolutely love it because it empowers the users to protect the organisation from phishing,” Raluca enthuses.

“We are continuing to apply the knowledge we have built over the past ten years into developing these products further,” she explains. “We’re investing in software engineers, developers, project managers, and multiple other resources, as well as potentially looking at M&A, should there be future synergies,” Raluca adds.

Smarttech247’s investment in people highlights the main obstacle for the industry. “There are a number of challenges facing the industry: number one is the huge skills shortage,” admits Raluca. “We need more people than the market has to offer. There’s something like three million open vacancies in cybersecurity at the moment.”

The large numbers of redundancies recently announced by big tech companies is yet to have an impact, according to Raluca. “At the moment, this is happening more in the US. I believe that in the next six months a lot of organisations in Europe are going to see more talent available on the market. We’re hiring, so we’re very open to discussing opportunities with people that have been laid-off, and we are getting more applications than before, but I don’t believe we have seen the full ripple effect of that yet,” she explains.

Smarttech247 has built strategic partnerships with some of the world’s best universities to find and attract talent. “We run numerous academies for undergraduates where we bring the best students in early on,” explains Raluca. “We teach them about cybersecurity, and what it means to be an analyst or an engineer, and then, when they finish their degree, we employ the best – this initiative has allowed us to find a lot of talent,” she says.

“We also have a women in cybersecurity academy which has been quite powerful for us. Diversity is a huge problem in this industry,” Raluca explains. “There’s not just a skills gap, there’s also a diversity gap. Women represent only 20 per cent of the cybersecurity work force globally.”

“The way I see it, that’s a missed opportunity for organisations because we’ve got this huge pool of talent which is un-tapped, so, we are taking that issue seriously by developing diversity initiatives,” she adds.

As a female CEO of a cybersecurity company, Raluca is leading by example. She joined Smarttech247 in Cork nine years ago when the company had only ten employees. A strategic management Masters post-graduate from the University of Innsbruck, she started out as the company’s marketing director and quickly progressed, taking over from the firm’s founder, Ronan Murphy, as CEO in early 2022.

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Developing talented people and enabling them to progress is key to retaining employees in a very competitive jobs market. “In our industry, maintaining your retention rate is really, really important. We invest a lot in our training and development, but we are an employer that focuses on both an employee’s well-being, as well as professional development, in an effort to retain people. We have a very good talent attraction strategy, but also retention strategy,” Raluca explains.

“Interestingly, although we only have about 130 employees, we compete with very large organisations like IBM, Accenture, HCL and Cognizant, and we tend to win!” Raluca exclaims.

“That’s because we really understand our clients’ risk posture. Rather than treat technology as something you just plug-in and off you go, we really take a holistic approach to customers’ cybersecurity. We won a five year tender for the Institute of Cancer Research primarily for this reason, competing against some large organisations. They felt that we understood their risk strategy and risk posture much better,” she claims.

More contract wins are on the horizon. “We are going to announce more in the next three months,” confides Raluca. “We have a lot of innovation news, and we’re also bringing a lot of new talent on board and it is something that we’re very, very excited about,” she says.

Smarttech247 is also establishing itself convincingly as a global cybersecurity thought leader. Its Zero Day Con took place in Dublin earlier this month, and brought together speakers such as Legal Attachés from the FBI; the Deputy Director of Operations, NCIS; the Assistant Commissioner of the Irish Data Protection Commission; politicians and industry leaders who discussed the rapid influx of ransomware attacks, constant emerging technologies, geopolitical tensions, regulations, and the cybersecurity landscape.

“I believe that, as an organisation, you have to continually innovate,” says Raluca. “Not innovating contributes to stagnation, and we can’t afford to stagnate as a cybersecurity organisation. We need to keep ahead of the threats and to do that, we need to keep innovating. I don’t see it as a threat, but as a major opportunity for our organisation to lead the way and become the leader in cybersecurity,” she adds.

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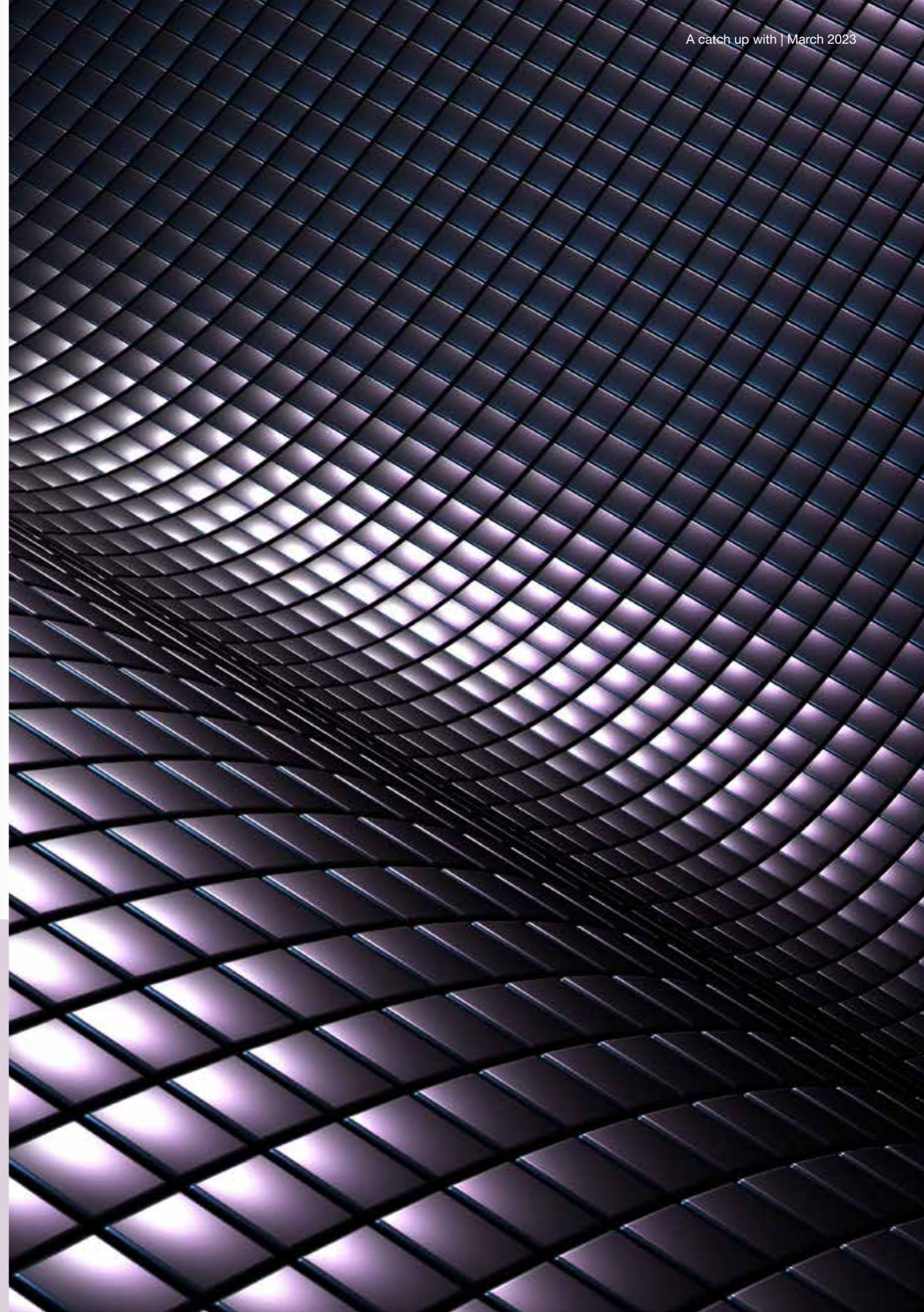
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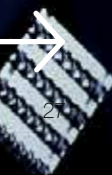
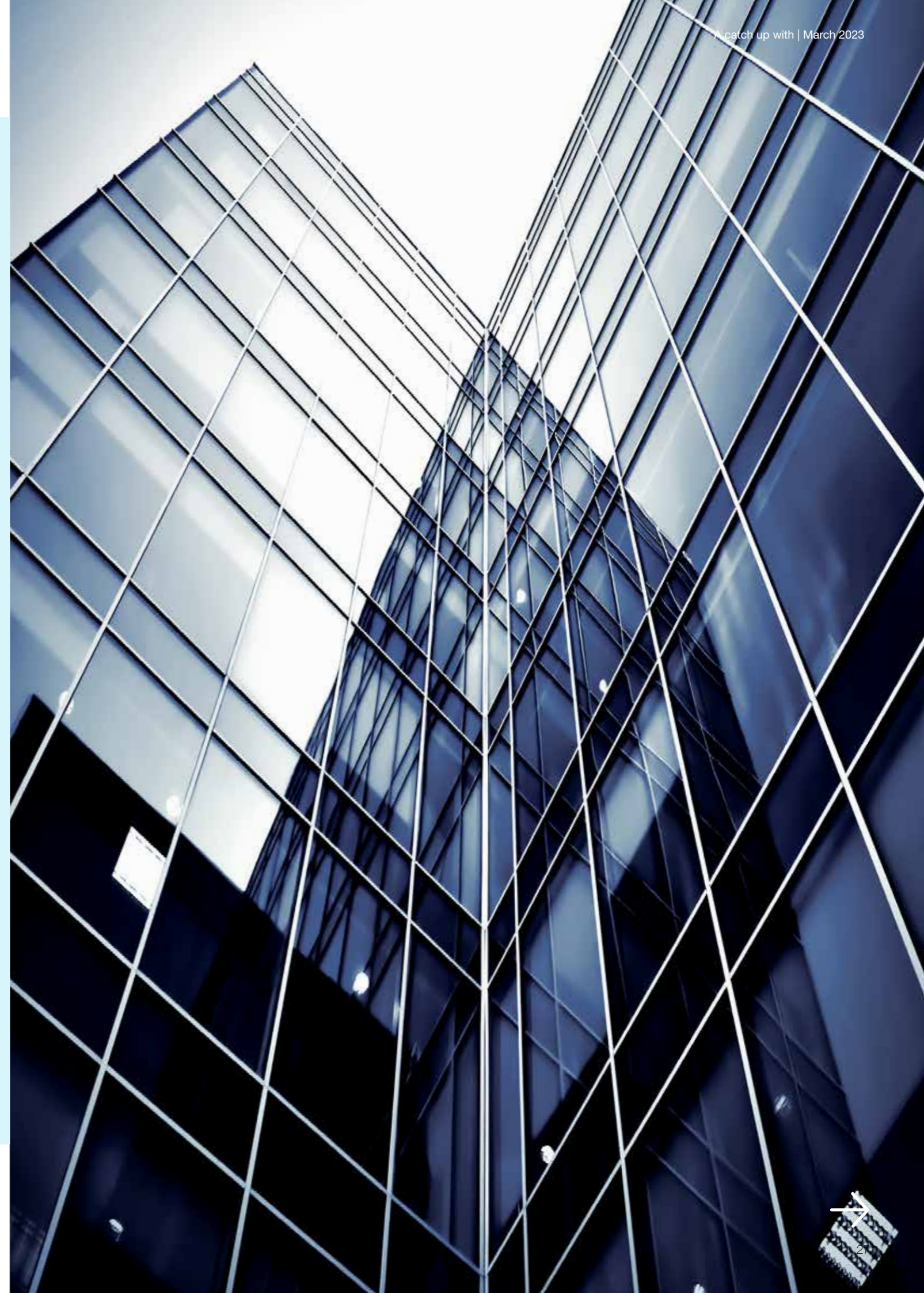
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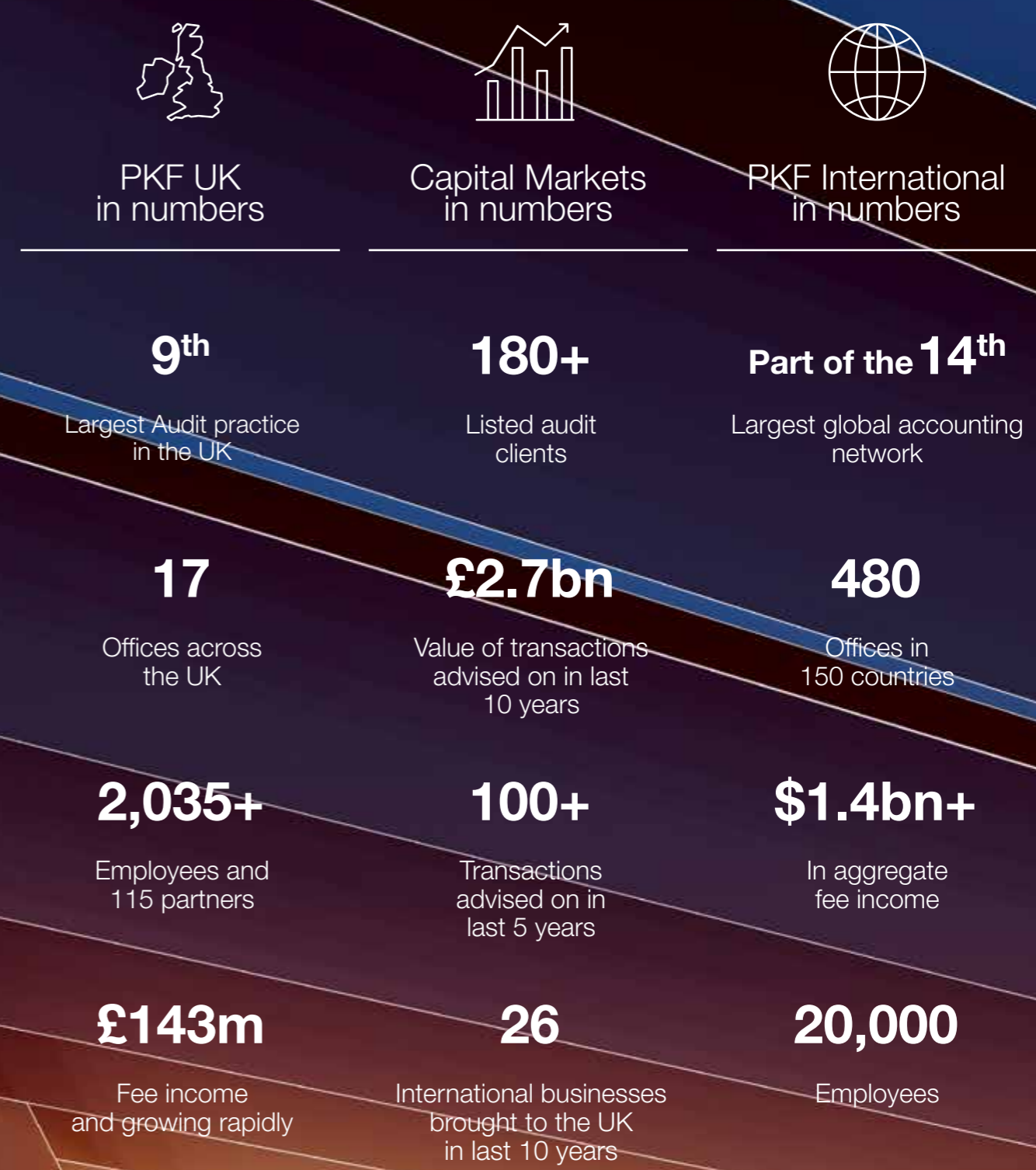
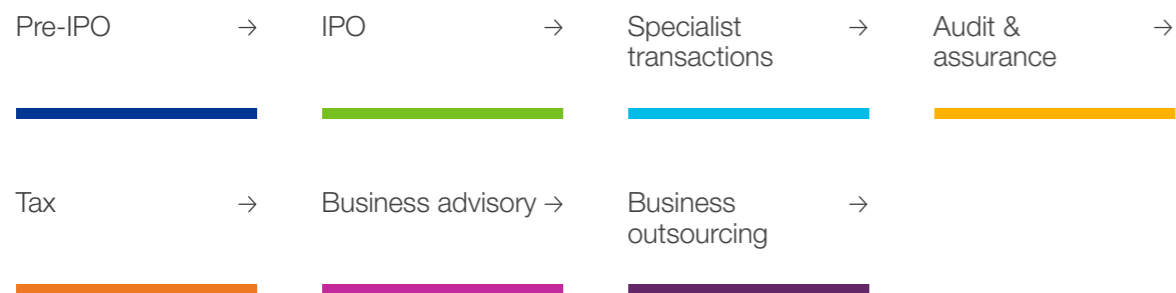


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