



THE FORBES REINVENTION AND RESILIENCE

Top 50

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Welcome

to the first Forbes Reinvention and Resilience Top 50 Report

What makes a good leader?

From politicians to renowned business people – everyone has their own idea of what a great leader looks like.

Apple co-founder, Steve Jobs, once said that ‘innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower’, while author, John Maxwell, believes ‘the pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails.’

Right now, both of these descriptions resonate and are relevant for leaders of today. It’s the subject of innovation that led to our inaugural Reinvention and Resilience Top 50, and it’s the ability of business leaders in the North West to tackle whatever is thrown at them – and have the flexibility and mindset to change course for the benefit of their business – that makes this list so impressive.

One thing is clear: a successful leader is one who has the ability to step outside their comfort zone and adopt new ways of working that meet the needs of the business there and then. That’s exactly what the leaders of these 50 companies have done. The region has responded with the passion, personality and determination that sets us apart from others.

Each company, and every leader, has shown innovation in one way or another; each has adjusted the business’ sails to navigate one of the toughest trading periods we’ve ever seen. We hope this list serves as a blueprint for future leaders and an example of the reinvention and resilience that exists across the North West.

Oliver Burton



THE REGIONAL *Landscape*

This year has put an extraordinary strain on the population and tested the resolve of even the greatest of businesses. Those that were regarded as recession-proof have suffered at the hands of COVID-19; those that were in a strong cashflow position before the pandemic have been dented; and those that were already in a vulnerable state have suffered irreparable damage. The casualty list is extensive.

Following lockdown, there was a 'strong rise' in business activity in the North West throughout August, according to NatWest's Regional PMI report, which tracks changes in the goods and services sectors. It said the area's economy continued to recover during the month following the record downturn caused by COVID-19. However, despite the North West economy remaining on the path to recovery, the rate of growth failed to kick up another gear, as areas of the region continued to suffer at the hands of the global pandemic.

Yet, with every headline of mass job losses, of companies filing for administration, and of negative financial predictions, comes a story of reinvention and resilience. In fact, many entrepreneurs have used the global pandemic as an opportunity. Research by O2 Business suggests that almost 200,000 companies were incorporated with Companies House since the country went into lockdown back in March to the end of June, with 4,014 new companies being registered in Manchester alone – the UK's highest figure per population. That means one per 143 people.

The spirit of innovation, entrepreneurship, and resilience in the region is undeniable. The Forbes Reinvention and Resilience Top 50 report aims to shine a light on those small-to-medium-sized businesses across all sectors that have demonstrated new ways of generating revenue and protecting jobs by re-inventing their business, service, product or sector in the wake of COVID-19.

The Reinvention and Resilience report identifies key trends that have seen companies 'pivot' to improve resilience and what this means for businesses looking to thrive in an economy affected by coronavirus.

Key trends highlighted in the report

- Reutilisation; companies finding new ways to use existing equipment or materials to create new products.
- Growth against the odds; whether it's through M&As or opening new sites.
- Companies embracing more democratic work cultures to accommodate resource shortages, investing in their team and digital ways of working.
- Businesses investing in digital transformation and mobile, and new shift patterns to keep themselves always open for business.
- Businesses diversifying and expanding their product and service offering.
- Quick response to a surge in demand and capitalising on an overnight opportunity.
- Community; highlighting the charitable and public sector efforts.

The Top 50 list is brimming with examples of companies that have shown these qualities in abundance – but it's clear this is just the tip of the iceberg. It should serve as an indicator of the many more positive stories that exist across the region and as a reason to be confident that the region will come back stronger and better than before.

*“ 4,014 new
companies in
Manchester ”*

THE Top 50

Thermmark, manufacturer of pre-cut thermoplastic markings, Congleton

Like many businesses, Thermmark saw a downturn in business because of the pandemic. The company decided to put something back into the community by providing a range of free indoor and outdoor floor signage, including NHS road markings, to local councils, hospitals, and care homes. As a result, Thermmark identified new commercial opportunities from the CSR venture and has now seen business return to usual levels of operation.

Morson Engine Room and Maker Space, an engineering and digital fabrication site, The University of Salford

The specialist manufacturing facility, funded by Morson Group, used its 3D printing capabilities to produce medical visors for NHS staff fighting COVID-19. Teams developed a prototype product and, following initial testing, were tasked with producing 75 visors a day and donating the products to Salford Royal Foundation Trust. The design was sent to commercial fabricators and other university technical departments in the North West to scale production and meet the numbers needed.

Velocity Composites, aerospace products manufacturer, Burnley

Velocity Composites joined the battle against the spread of COVID-19 by producing PPE for NHS workers in the North West. In the first couple of months of lockdown, the business delivered 8,000 face shields and 2,500 fluid protection gowns to the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust. It had capacity to produce up to 1,000 protective gowns and 5,000 face shields per day, using its high-speed material cutting machines normally reserved for creating composite kits used to manufacture parts for commercial aircraft. Its equipment and clean room manufacturing facilities were perfect for producing medical use PPE and it pledged to continue to produce face shields and aprons for as long as they were needed.

The Vita Group, manufacturer of flexible polyurethane, Rochdale

The Vita Group responded to calls for equipment and PPE in the fight against COVID-19, helping to supply 25,000 mattresses needed for the NHS Nightingale hospitals.

It was tasked with producing the polyurethane foam that has been used in the majority of mattresses, as well as manufacturing face and visor mask protection, softseal lining for incontinence wear/pads and filters used in ventilators.

What More UK, housewares manufacturer, Altham

What More UK experienced 'astonishing growth' in demand for its home bakeware products, as a result of an increased interest in home cooking and especially baking during lockdown. The manufacturer responded by running night shifts to keep up with the demand.

Silicone Engineering, manufacturer of silicone rubber sheets, rolls and tubing, Blackburn

Silicon Engineering became a COVID-19 component producer, supporting the NHS with the production of solid silicone sheeting used for specialist life-saving medical applications. As a result, the company implemented new processes and systems, to ensure they reached the healthcare frontline as soon as possible. All COVID-19 component enquiries and orders were given special priority and fast-track delivery.

Preston Board and Packaging, manufacturer of laminated cartonboard, solid board and display board products,

Preston Board and Packaging has been rather busy during lockdown. It completely rebuilt the company website, providing clearer information to designers, converters and brand holders as to products and services it offers. In addition, the company expanded its network of agents to cover Benelux, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and Austria, with the aim of further expanding its presence across Europe and further afield.

Panaz, textiles manufacturer, Burnley

Panaz teamed up with 360 Protex to combine its Shieldplus technology with colourful face mask design. The global supplier of anti-microbial fabrics for the healthcare market has been supplying the NHS for decades, but it extended its capabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic to also manufacture antibacterial hand gel.

Star Tissue, manufacturer of hygiene paper products, Blackburn

Star Tissue took a bullish approach during COVID-19 by announcing that it was not going to divert from its growth plans developed 18 months ago, instead choosing to invest in the expansion of the business. By finishing off construction on its second warehouse in the midst of the disruption, Star Tissue has been able to develop new production facilities that will allow the company to make products better and faster than many of its competitors in the UK.



The Nowt Poncy Food Company, cooking sauces producer, Rossendale

Up until March 2020, The Nowt Poncy Food Company was selling products to farm shops, delis and butchers, with a listing in Booths supermarket. When lockdown hit, the company was forced to think about the best way in which to deal with COVID-19. This included a home delivery service; keeping up with demand on its online shop, which was selling up to 20-times what it normally would; and exciting diversification into product manufacturing and new product development, in partnership with other like-minded companies.

Pictured left are Jools Abel and Karen Walker.



WEC Group, fabrication, laser cutting and precision engineering company, Darwen

WEC Group repurposed some of its manufacturing facilities to build parts of ventilators for the NHS, as well as key medical equipment for the Nightingale Hospitals built across the country. The company engaged with the VentilatorChallengeUK consortium, which was tasked with producing 10,000 ventilators for the NHS on a tight timeframe. In addition, it also won a large laser cutting and stainless-steel fabrication contract to manufacture key medical equipment for the Nightingale Hospital in Birmingham.

Innovating

IN CHALLENGING TIMES

INNOVATION: NEWNESS, IMPROVEMENT AND SPREAD.

Three words commonly used to define the term. Lauded in the good times, innovation comes into its own in the most challenging of situations when great ideas truly come to the fore.

Step in COVID-19. The biggest challenge facing every business, yet potentially a first-class opportunity for innovation. Hamstrung by the pandemic, we need to find new ways of doing things, we need to improve how we operate, and we need to ensure as many people benefit from it as possible. Newness, improvement and spread. Innovation.

Our Reinvention and Resilience Top 50 demonstrates innovation in action – companies that had a lightbulb moment amidst the fog. Whether it's the UK's first socially-distant festival, using 3D printing to make medical visors, or launching 'lockdown kits' to bring a restaurant to customers' homes – innovation comes in all forms and in all shapes and sizes. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that when we surveyed the Top 50, half of respondents said they intended to launch new products or services in order to take their business through the next phase of growth.

For some, the lightbulb moment is the easy part – it's often the task of making that idea a reality and a commercial success that is the hardest job. So, how do you ensure that your innovation is protected and you're best positioned for growth?

Whether it's winning new clients, expanding into new markets, or establishing new corporate structures, you need to ensure you have your house in order with clear and effective commercial contract terms in place. This is particularly important when you're adapting and growing at pace.

The success of an idea also hinges on the ability to turn it into valuable intellectual property (IP). That depends on three conditions: having a good idea, having full ownership of the idea and having an idea that is legally protectable. We support businesses to manage this as intellectual property law is a complex area. Depending on the products and services that your business provides, there are a series of intellectual property rights that you may either automatically hold on creation or you need to obtain intellectual property protection. In the UK, the most common forms of intellectual property rights are:

- Trademarks – these can be protected on a registered or an unregistered basis
- Copyright
- Designs
- Patents
- Confidential Information and trade secrets.

Whether you're a new business that has recently started trading, or you've been established in your industry for several years, it's always worth considering how you can protect – and later exploit – the intellectual property rights that your business owns. It's estimated that up to 80% of the value in a business can be found in its intellectual property and having appropriate registrations and licensing arrangements prevents the likelihood of third parties copying your products and services. With the opportunity for third-party investments in your business, or franchising opportunities in the future, the time is now to innovate and expand.

John Pickervance, Partner and Head of Commercial



THE Top 50

Gisburne Park Estate

Gisburne Park Estate hit the headlines during national lockdown for all the right reasons. Overnight, it became a classic example of a business that 'pivoted' its operations during a global pandemic, by creating the UK's first socially distanced outdoor festival.

At a time when events were being cancelled up and down the country, Gisburne struck the perfect chord with the media, and people alike, who were yearning for a sense of normality and somewhere to have fun in a summer of otherwise cancelled plans. The concept was simple, yet effective, meeting the needs of a population while complying with Government guidance on social distancing.

Creating 100 temporary jobs in the region's hospitality and events industries, The Gisburne Park Pop-Up festival took place between July 11th and September 27th on the estate's wedding grounds. It welcomed 30,000 socially conscious guests from across the UK for a 12-week programme of immersive movie nights, live entertainment and big-name DJs that included Jonas Blue, Shapeshifters and Sam Divine.

The festival operated 'first-of-its kind' practices to ensure social distancing was maintained throughout the expansive grounds. This included hexagon pitches each large enough for a social bubble of six and spaced 2.6m apart, one-way systems and bar-to-pitch service eliminating the need for queues.

Gisburne Park Estate owner, Guy Hindley, developed the concept for the festival with his wife, Amber Mead, and director of weddings at Gisburne Park Estates, Robyn Isherwood - the 'driving force' behind the innovative concept. After the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown led to the cancellation of weddings in keeping with Government guidelines, together the trio developed a unique programme of music, entertainment, food, drink and boutique glamping.

"It would've been easy to do nothing," explained Guy. "But an opportunity arose to employ a lot of people and make the best of a pretty desperate situation.."

..and make the most of it, they have. In a short space of time, they have done something extraordinary, putting on a 12-week festival during a global pandemic and one that has generated more than £1 million in turnover.

"We have put on a phenomenal number of events over the course of a 12-week period, with 30,000 people coming to Gisburne who, under normal circumstances, would not have come to the estate. It's opened up an entirely new market for us and one that we will definitely try to incorporate into our longer-term plans. Not only that, the festival has introduced us to new people and other ways of working.

"Everything that we're now looking at is based on a worse case scenario. Normal no longer exists, so we need to accept the situation and work together to find a long-term solution. Everyone will need to innovate."

With exciting developments in the pipeline, including a members' club, pods and glamping, the business is certainly seizing on the opportunity presented - and earned - through the pop-up festival venture, which has put Lancashire on the map in a 'UK first'.

As Guy puts it himself, staycations are about to enter a 'golden era'. "Our business has bounced back more than we could ever have imagined, because of the popularity of the staycation," he said. With log cabins, pods and glamping offering a natural solution to social distancing, Gisburne Park Estate is perfectly positioned with its Ribblesdale Holiday Park to meet changing consumer needs, in a constantly changing world for the hospitality and leisure industry.

The Cartford Inn, pub, restaurant and boutique hotel, Little Ecclestone

The drastic drop in turnover, as well as ensuring staff safety and mental wellbeing, saw The Cartford Inn take the difficult decision to cease operations before it had to. However, the team responded by carrying out scheduled interior and exterior maintenance of the pub. Planning for the future; creating an online portal for TOTI (Taste of the Inn) an on-site deli; bringing customers a **'TASTE OF THE INN at HOME'**; before developing re-opening plans, investing in four green houses for outside dining which received regional/national press coverage.

Ellis's Restaurant, Burnley

Ellis's Restaurant innovated, not only by adapting its service to collection + delivery but launching what it labelled 'Lockdown Kits'. These were ingredients to the restaurant's most popular burgers, delivered fresh to the customer's door, along with detailed instructions/recipes to allow people to have Ellis's at home. The profit made on these allowed the business to come through a very difficult time bigger and better, while also preventing any potential borrowing/additional debt. This has enabled the team to plan for the future and open another site, as opposed to scaling down.

Cloudwater Brew Co, brewery, Manchester

In light of the pandemic, Cloudwater Brew Co accelerated long-held plans to improve its direct-to-customer service, by launching a beer delivery venture. Offering the service across the M postcode, as well as selected others, the company expanded its product range to include beer from guest breweries, including Manchester neighbours Runaway and Squawk. Neither were able to offer online sales when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, with Cloudwater stepping in to lend support.

Lawrence Hunt & Co, food and beverages company trading as SPAR, Wigan

As well as continuing to serve the community during the pandemic – everyone on the shop floor, the warehouses, the delivery drivers and those working behind the scenes – Lawrence Hunt & Co continued to expand with work starting on the old Brownedge Road site in Lostock Hall, which will become a new SPAR store opening in early 2021 and its first forecourt site. In addition, the company focused on CSR by donating stock to @AllHallowsCHS and Love Preston, contribution towards the much-needed food parcels prepared for local families, as well as distributing refreshments to Wroughtington & Preston hospitals and Chorley Ambulance Service.

Didsbury Gin, handcrafted gin producers, South Manchester

Didsbury Gin halted production so it could repurpose and instead produce hand sanitiser. By converting its alcohol supplies, the company made the equivalent of more than two million bottles in the early stages of lockdown. This was supplied to the police, NHS, fire and further health and social care services.

Missguided, multi-channel retailer, Stretford

Fashion chain Missguided rolled out self-service parcel lockers with InPostUK, in a bid to keep shoppers safe and save money on missed deliveries and returns. Offering shoppers a convenient contact-free delivery and returns option, as well as working out ways for shoppers to minimise human contact, the outdoor lockers are available 24/7. This helps Missguided to lower the strain on its customer service teams, as well as responding to changing consumer behaviour, not only towards online shopping, but also customers wanting more control over their deliveries.

The Hut Group, e-commerce company, Manchester

Having raised £1.88 billion in the largest ever technology IPO and the largest UK flotation since 2015, The Hut Group is enjoying incredible success. However, it's achieved equal plaudits for its CSR activity. During lockdown, the company launched a £10 million aid package to support vulnerable communities, key workers and emergency services across Manchester, the UK and its international markets. Elsewhere, THG has transitioned part of its manufacturing capability to produce hand sanitisers, to help meet the exceptional global demand, and gave £1 million worth of free product to those who otherwise could not access it. It also pledged all 70 rooms in both of its Manchester city centre hotels – Great John Street Hotel and King Street Townhouse – to support both NHS staff and Greater Manchester Police who were working away from their families during the pandemic.

The Wellbeing Farm, weddings and events venue, Edgworth

While a lot of hospitality and events businesses shut their doors and furloughed staff during lockdown, The Wellbeing Farm adapted working practices to stay well and truly open and fully focused on looking after couples. The team organised Zoom meetings, offered free of charge back-up dates and kept them up to date through its private social media channels, including Wine 'n Wed and live question and answer sessions. It also adapted open days, held virtual wedding open days in conjunction with suppliers, while also pivoting to launch the North West Centre for Business & Team Wellbeing in collaboration with #WellbeingLancashire.

— FOCUS ON —

Redefining Lancashire



Lancashire has a story to tell. A story of natural beauty, of hard-working people, of legacy and of the future. Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, Lancashire is a place that makes things. Innovation is in our DNA.

With a population of 1.5 million people, over 60% of whom are working age, Lancashire has a significant talent pool. And, with a student population of over 55,000 across four universities, we are adding to that talent every year. This workforce serves 52,000 businesses, generating £32 billion per year. Or at least it did, pre-COVID.

Now, one of our greatest strengths is at significant risk. Lancashire has been no.1 in the UK for aerospace for many years, with 500 supply chain companies making us the fourth largest aerospace cluster in the world. With that sector now under major threat, it is critical that we work to re-purpose the supply chain and maximise our other sector strengths.

The Northern Powerhouse is recognised for four prime capabilities: advanced manufacturing, energy, health innovation and digital. Lancashire has significant strengths in every one of these sectors. We employ over 85,000 people in the engineering sector, and over 41,000 in the energy and environment sector, where we are a global leader in the development of small modular nuclear reactors. We have no less than four Enterprise Zones focused on growing these sectors further still, and the Engineering Innovation Centre, recently opened as part of UCLan's Preston Campus, will significantly add to that asset base, as will the AMRC's new home at Samlesbury.

In Health Innovation, Lancaster University has broken ground on the development of a new Health Innovation Campus, and the university also has significant strengths in cyber security, a priority growth opportunity in the digital sector.

Lancashire offers an excellent quality of life for our businesses and residents. The county is 80% rural, with 137 miles of coastline and two areas of outstanding natural beauty. More than 60,000 people are employed in Lancashire's visitor economy, which is valued at £4.41 billion. We attract over 69 million visitors a year, enticed by the quirks of a country pub, the thrills of a seaside theme park, the nostalgia of a ballroom, the exceptional quality of a Michelin-starred meal or the joy of fish and chips on the beach. With game-changing attractions such as the Eden Project, new hotel developments coming forward in Blackpool, Burnley and Preston, and significant opportunities across the county, there should be great potential to further grow this sector. However, it remains in a precarious situation and we need to fight for its survival.

Lancashire is a brilliant collective of brands, brains, products, people, places, services, heritage, land and opportunity. Pre-COVID, we were already developing ambitious plans for growth, bringing the county together behind a new vision set to transform our economy and fully realise our potential for the benefit of all our residents. What we need is an increased sense of urgency and speed of decision making at the national level and a greater use of local knowledge and intelligence in national plans for restart and recovery.

We need strong place leadership to tackle the challenges and deliver against our objectives, utilising all the inherent qualities that make Lancashire the place it is. Our innovation, our industrial excellence, our connectivity, hard work and tenacity. We are ready to create, build and regenerate. We are ready to redefine Lancashire for a post-COVID world. And we want to engage with businesses and residents from across the entire county to celebrate every inch of our towns, cities, villages, coast and countryside.

Rachel McQueen,
Chief Executive of Marketing Lancashire



THE *Top 50*

Mindsight Ltd, employer and employee wellbeing social enterprise, Nelson

Mindsight was incorporated in February 2020, with a focus on face-to-face training and support within 'live' environments. COVID-19 hit at precisely the wrong time for the fledgling business. With a genuine desire to 'save the world', the company was in a difficult position in month one, with zero income, no name and no track record. However, its approach to supporting people was primarily its solution. So, the team set up 'Roast 'n Toast' - a Zoom chat over a coffee, to discuss a health topic in

a safe space. During lockdown, it had over 150 different attendees and, by listening to their needs, Roast 'n Toast helped the company develop and shape its corporate delivery. This included working with Lancaster University School of Computing and Communications to develop a digital product; developing a retail product; creating #52For52, an online initiative; and 6+, a cultural programme based on the Six Degrees of Separation.



Key Digital, managed print services, Burnley

Key Digital traditionally supplies and maintains photocopiers and print devices, from office equipment to production print level digital presses. However, due to the pandemic, and the increasing number of employees working from home, the company diversified its offering to help businesses with their digital transformation. This included helping customers and new clients to digitise their workplace and teach them how to safely and securely store their documents in the cloud so that they can be accessed remotely. Key Digital also focused on its range of software solutions that help to manage this “digital haystack” and automate processes to aid business continuity for customers, such as a postal scanning solution and an automated invoice processing facility.

Pictured left is Andrew Ratcliffe, managing director.

Carbonbit, energy sustainability consultancy, Lytham

Between March and July 2020, Carbonbit had a 70% reduction in business. As a result, the company decided to use the ‘space’ to innovate. Responding to client need, it developed an IT solution which manages compliance, creating a system which allowed the team to develop a long-term relationship with the client, while reducing its risk significantly. The company’s attitude is about ‘adding value through innovation’ – an approach that has helped to increase turnover in this area of the business by 65%.

Checkedsafe, online digital compliance company, Burnley

As an online digital compliance solution, Checkedsafe is ideally suited to react quickly to any issue. As a result, the company immediately introduced new COVID-19 sanitisation checks and Dynamic Risk Assessments to enable customers (new and existing) to cover off the risks they faced. In addition, Checkedsafe introduced a full messaging service to enable customers to communicate with all employees, including furloughed staff, about any issues, not just work-related matters. The team also implemented a documents-to-app feature to enable customers to send documents to employees via its app and track when such documents have or haven’t been accessed. This allows employers to send things like safety briefings, updates and risk assessments.

LPK Facilities Management, commercial cleaning specialists, Burnley

LPK normally takes care of building maintenance, from gutter cleaning to complete industrial shop floor renovations. However, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the team made it their priority to ensure local businesses were able to keep their doors open safely. They immediately purchased a cold fogging decontamination machine, which eliminates all bacterial and viral infection on all surfaces. They implemented physical distancing signage, wash stations and sanitisation units throughout the night in several organisations to ensure as little disruption as possible to the companies and their workforce. As a result, LPK has widened its customer base from industrial units to public houses, beauty salons and solicitors’ offices throughout the North West.



PM&M Accountants, Blackburn

Since the very beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, PM&M remained fully committed to supporting its clients, contacts, team and community to ensure as many local businesses and individuals as possible were able to benefit from its help, and navigate the unprecedented challenges brought on by the virus and the subsequent lockdown. Its main priorities were: to help clients and their businesses survive the pandemic, by launching a 'Coronavirus Support Hub', support clinics and webinars and blogs; to maintain the safety of its people and support their wellbeing through 'whole team events' and 'mental health champions'; and to provide complete continuity of its business and services through any challenge that was presented (e.g. loss of clients, office closures, employee sickness), resulting in a significant number of client wins and a continued recruitment drive.



Viva PR, PR agency, Rawtenstall

Viva PR lost 40% of business due to budget cuts during COVID-19. As such, the agency had to make the difficult decision to furlough three members of its small team and work harder than ever to win new contracts. Working with long-term partner, Professor Simon Bolton at Edge Hill University, the team devised a strategy that focused on both traditional retainer work and project work; diversifying into new sectors; and growing existing client accounts. As a result, Viva won six new accounts, increased turnover by 27%, increased profits by 23% and expanded the team to help service the growing business.



Businesswise Solutions, energy management company, Nelson

To continue to support businesses, Businesswise Solutions set about creating new products which would continue to add value to clients virtually. As such, it launched a Virtual Site Audit – this involved the team migrating the entire audit process online, where traditional site audits require an Energy Engineer to visit the site to conduct the audit. Another product launched during lockdown was the Energy Budget Impact Evaluation (EBIE) to help businesses identify the impacts any operational changes (such as shift patterns, social distancing etc.) would have on their energy cost and consumption. As a result of these actions, Businesswise Solutions achieved an ambitious goal of identifying £1 million energy savings through its EMaaS solution. In fact, during the height of the pandemic, the EMaaS solution saved one Burnley manufacturer £10,000 on waste energy by identifying machines on standby mode.

BCN Group, digital transformation company, Manchester

When lockdown was first announced, BCN Group quickly issued its 'Covid-19 Business Continuity Plan', creating a taskforce to monitor the ever-changing situation so that the team could react and respond to any changes immediately. Prior to the pandemic, the company had invested heavily in digital transformation and mobile. This meant that when lockdown was imposed, and staff were sent home to work, the company was ready. Under the digital transformation plan, the team has increased voice and data capabilities to ensure the smooth running of its infrastructure and telephony, reducing any impact on the quality of service, while extending this to clients. As a result, BCN signed 64 new clients during lockdown, with FY19/20 results showing a 110% increase in turnover to £23.8 million. It's on track to grow turnover further to £30 million for the current financial year.



Fagan & Whalley

It's fair to say that COVID-19 has brought out the best in people. Whether it's community spirit, camaraderie, or simply working together for the greater good, the power of people has certainly won out during the global pandemic.

It's precisely this attitude towards teamwork and togetherness that can be seen in abundance at Fagan & Whalley. "As soon as the crisis hit, people pulled together," explains commercial director, Stephen Fagan. "One of the lessons we have learned during the pandemic is definitely the power of working as a team. People were naturally drawn together, with a real desire to pull up their sleeves, adapt the way that they work to ensure customers are never disappointed, and take action."

And that's precisely what Fagan & Whalley has done – collectively, as a team. Following the national lockdown announcement in March, the company saw volumes almost halve within a 48-hour period, with many customers temporarily putting their businesses into hibernation as the message to stay at home spread across the UK.

"In April and May, the business was severely affected, and turnover fell by 45%, compared to the same period last year. This unfortunately led to a third of staff, 120 people, being furloughed," Stephen explains. "The furlough scheme was vital for us during the early stages of lockdown – without it we would have struggled in the final months of our financial year."

As a supplier to key industries, the company felt compelled to keep operations open to serve those customers that needed its services.

While the retail and hospitality industries are still feeling the impact of COVID-19, Fagan & Whalley has seen a large increase in home deliveries through the Palletforce Network, meaning the company has been able to adapt its working practices to ensure it continues to deliver in the safest way possible.

Throughout the pandemic, the company has allowed the data related to COVID-19 to inform the day-to-day running of its fleet, managing vehicles and staffing levels accordingly to ensure customers and services have not been affected, and to protect staff – both in terms of job security and safety.



"Our strength is in our team," says Stephen. "Everyone has played their part and worked closely together during an unprecedented trading period."

"As a business, we have grown year-on-year since it first started 93 years ago and, thankfully, we have already recovered from the early hit at the start of lockdown. The question is, what will happen next?"

Focus on

GREATER MANCHESTER

When Andy Burnham clinched 63% of the vote to land the role of Greater Manchester's Metro Mayor – a position created by Greater Manchester's devolution deal – he promised to 'give power and purpose to those people and places Westminster has left behind'.

"We will get the voice of the North heard more loudly than ever before," he said in his victory speech. Three years on and he's facing the biggest challenge of his tenure in the form of a global pandemic. But still, he beats the drum for Greater Manchester and for the 105,000 businesses that sit within it.

While the current focus is about ensuring that Greater Manchester remains open for business, urging companies to access the financial support that they're entitled to and fighting the corner of the 2.7 million people who live in the region, a lot of work has been done since the role of Metro Mayor was created in 2017 – and the focus should not be taken off the firmly held belief that 'Greater Manchester is going to take control'.

Voted number one in Management Today's ranking of the 21 best towns and cities for business outside of the nation's capital in 2019, Manchester has grand ambitions when it comes to claiming top spots. After all, it has a legitimate claim to being the world's first industrial city, as the birthplace of both the trade union and suffragette movements.

Burnham is fully supportive of the idea that Manchester will become the UK's leading digital city by 2030 and, on a platform of inclusive growth and digital innovation, a global top 20 city five years later. Grand ambitions, but 'realistic' according to the former Leigh MP.

The foundations have certainly been laid for growth, set out by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) – the conglomerate of local authorities overseen by Burnham, which emerged as a response to the 2008 financial crisis.

An attempt to pool resources, it came into being on 1 April 2011 with devolved powers comparable to those of the Greater London Authority – covering public transport, skills, housing, regeneration, waste management, carbon neutrality and planning permission – pending approval from the 10 councils. The GMCA is very clear on its agenda. And, as such, delivering a thriving and productive economy in all parts of Greater Manchester is one of the key priorities of the Greater Manchester Strategy – Our People, Our Place.

"World-class science, innovation and business takes place in Greater Manchester and we're investing in it," the GMCA explains.

"We're making it easier for start-ups and existing businesses to find investment to ensure they can grow. We know if we can improve productivity and pay, all our residents will be better off."

The Greater Manchester Strategy is not the only piece of significant work being carried out in the region to inspire growth. Greater Manchester and the UK Government agreed one of the country's first modern local industrial strategies in June 2019. The Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy outlines a set of long-term policy priorities to help guide industrial development and provides a joint plan for good jobs and growth in Greater Manchester.

If you add to that the Greater Manchester Independent Prosperity Review – established to undertake a detailed and rigorous assessment of the current state, and future potential, of Greater Manchester's economy – together with the Good Employment Charter and its strong links with The Growth Company (MCC) and the Business Growth Hub, it's clear that the direction of travel by the GMCA is only moving forward.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a great strain on businesses across the region, there is little doubt that the foundations have been set for a prosperous future. As former prime minister Benjamin Disraeli said: "What Manchester does today, the rest of the world does tomorrow."

Helen Marsh, Partner, Commercial Property

Evoked Creative, design-led manufacturer of interactive digital solutions, Bromborough

Evoked Creative developed a series of innovative new products which address the challenges faced by its blue-chip client base as they re-opened for customers and employees following lockdown. The company supplies interactive digital solutions, including self-service kiosks, video walls, digital signage and payment terminals to organisations such as JD Sports, McDonald's and Google. Evoked Creative invested in the design and development of a kiosk - EV LITE|Temperature Check - which screens customers and employees on arrival at premises and has a contactless temperature check function along with an automatic hand sanitiser. Amongst a range of new solutions, the business has also launched a contactless user experience which can be integrated into existing touchscreen applications. The Evoked CORE|Contactless Interface has far-reaching application, particularly in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.

Cammell Laird, shipbuilders, Birkenhead

In line with the Government's focus on employing young people, Cammell Laird is set for a record apprenticeship intake. During 2020, the company will take on 25 people at its shipyard. This represents an increase on the 20 from last year. More than 700 applications have been submitted for the 2020 programme, which will offer apprenticeships in welding, mechanics, pipefitting and plating. Those successful will be given the opportunity to work on a variety of ships and vessels. The company is determined to provide career opportunities to an increased number of people from the local area through a world-leading maritime programme, while demonstrating its commitment to helping plug the engineering skills gap in the North West and supporting the local economy through job creation.

HARV, domestic abuse service, Accrington

In February, HARV launched its 'Move On' project for women who have suffered domestic abuse. Through grant funding, HARV was able to employ a specific worker to lead the project and help people get resettled. The worker's role is largely around confidence building, but the project was significantly affected when lockdown was imposed, requiring a huge amount of re-imagining of how they could continue to provide support. The worker made sure that everyone was 'connected', to enable them to continue to communicate, whether it was internet access or providing phone access. She also set up links with another organisation to create a gardening project - delivering garden packs to users and setting up a WhatsApp group to create a regular communication channel for the mini project. The charity's 'Recovery and Freedom' group usually meets in a small, physical group, so they were adapted to ensure this vital communication continued via the telephone, WhatsApp and Zoom - the latter was carefully orchestrated given the sensitive nature of access and confidentiality. The charity also set up deliveries of food and supplies to those most vulnerable. During the early stages of lockdown, incoming enquiries fell, as people found it difficult to communicate with the charity while being 'locked down' with their abuser. Making contact with new people was also difficult. However, as a result of changing its communication methods - enabling people to speak confidentially on a one-to-one basis, as opposed to being in a group environment - has seen the intensity of information given by people increase. As such, the charity intends to continue offering alternative channels of communication going forward, to ensure people have the confidence to share their stories and for the charity to receive the information they need. HARV also used the time to explore more funding avenues during lockdown, to ensure that income streams continue - this will allow the charity to develop more local safe houses in the future. By diversifying its model, HARV has been able to show resilience to exactly those people it is trying to help be resilient themselves.

Bellyflop TV, video production company, Burnley

Being in the business of video production, the majority of Bellyflop TV's work is conducted on a face-to-face basis. Due to booking postponements and cancellations, the team started to create short-form video content from archive and library footage, in addition to self-shot, mobile phone footage, to help clients continue to share their message. Further to this, Bellyflop brought a platform to market which allows businesses to obtain branded video testimonials and case studies with no more technical

ability than it takes to send an email. The platform allows businesses to create up to 1,000 videos in a month for a low-fixed fee of £249. As lockdown restrictions eased, the team completed COVID-safe training and adopted new protocols and procedures to keep themselves and clients safe when filming, resulting in green shoots of recovery in the form of new enquiries.



Ball & Berry Ltd, chartered building control surveyors, Preston

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ball & Berry took the next step in its national expansion programme, by opening a new office in the south of England. This follows the opening of its Birmingham office in 2019. The move will lead to the creation of new jobs within the business, including that of a new Regional Director. Opening a fourth office continues Ball & Berry's strategy of driving collaboration and growth between its specialist Building Control Surveyors, support staff and clients, as it delivers an increasing volume of major projects.

Cirrus Connect, leadership, talent and engagement consultancy, (Wilmslow, London, Melbourne)

2020 has been a year of strong growth for Cirrus which has seen the business welcome 12 new colleagues across the UK and APAC regions to support its clients and develop increasingly innovative virtual training and development solutions. Recent hires will help to lead global learning programmes with blue-chip clients, develop increasingly innovative and interactive virtual learning experiences and to ensure consistently high-quality programme delivery. The company has also made hires in its creative, digital, business growth and marketing teams, including a developer for the Cirrus Strata app, which helps users to build positive learning habits. In its tenth year of trading, the company has grown and supported clients through innovation, forging strong client relationships, and building an even more engaged, motivated and collaborative team. The business has also recently been recognised by both the International Business Awards and the Business Culture Awards.

McGoff Group, construction and integrated support services business, Altrincham

The construction industry entered a state of flux during lockdown, as development programmes ground to a halt. McGoff Group's situation was different, as it is a group of diverse, yet closely related businesses specialising in the creation and operation of much-needed care facilities for the most vulnerable in society. The company strongly believes it can really make a positive difference in these extreme conditions, by supporting key workers in both hospitals and private care facilities. McGoff Construction's activities are now solely focused upon delivering such care facilities nationally, currently across 10 settings, for its related businesses and other valued care sector clients. The company admits that the challenge will be to increase the pace of the delivery of private hospitals to support the NHS in its time of need. Having invested heavily in offsite construction, the company is best placed to meet this challenge through rapid construction techniques being currently utilised via Panacea within the Group. And, it predicts that, in all likelihood, it will be accelerating productivity hand in glove with front line responders to fight the war waged by an invisible enemy.

Jay-care, stairlift and mobility company, Burnley

Jay-care has always worked with the NHS and, pre-lockdown, this work had begun to increase. The company decided to approach the NHS offering its usual services on a more flexible basis and changed working hours to seven days a week for 13 weeks, working entirely with and supporting the NHS discharge and home support teams across East Lancashire. The company maintained its private essential, call-out and breakdown services, while changing all sales, no matter how small, to free home delivery. As a result, Jay-care saw record sales figures of £100,000+ in June, only to smash it again with £121,000 in July, experiencing record profit. The company is now looking to expand into new larger premises.



Mint Bridging, short-term property finance specialists, Altrincham

Mint Bridging released two products for the building development market, in order to help businesses amid the COVID-19 crisis. The first was geared towards those looking to drive ahead with plans and have workers operating safely back on site. Dubbed the New Development Product, it is based on a maximum four-house scheme with a loan value of up to £750,000. The second is for those impacted by building delays or unable to offload their premises due to the ever-changing market. The Development Exit Loan is available to those seeking loans up to the value of £750,000 based on a maximum six-house scheme.

Private White V.C., luxury clothing manufacturer, Salford

Private White V.C. primarily retails online and through wholesalers. During lockdown, it applied for and won two Government contracts to produce PPE for frontline services. As a result, the company requested a loan of up to £1.4 million to support its working capital requirement and scale-up production. Private White chief executive, James Eden, said: "Our trade has been in luxury clothes manufacturing, but the coronavirus crisis has led us to change what we do to help the national health crisis efforts and produce PPE."

Lofthouse of Fleetwood (Fisherman's Friend), manufacturers

During lockdown, Lofthouse of Fleetwood Ltd – the makers of Fisherman's Friend – acquired a 19.5-acre plot of land next to its existing Fleetwood facility, signalling the company's ongoing investment in the town. The firm, which bought the site from Associated British Ports (ABP) for an undisclosed sum, has been operating on the current site for almost 50 years and is rapidly reaching full capacity. The acquisition of this plot of land signifies its desire to safeguard the future of Fisherman's Friend in Fleetwood and will allow for the phased transfer of operations as the new site is gradually developed over a number of years.



David Taylor, director global division, at RSK Group (pictured left), said: "While we've not necessarily reinvented our business during lockdown, what we have done is made sure we were flexible and could move with changes in demand, whether that was in the agricultural market, which has seen little effect, housing which has been impacted, but has equally recovered, to international oil markets, which are still feeling the pain of COVID-19. It's been quite different across the business and it's that diversification which has enabled us to continue strongly despite the pandemic."

Throughout the crisis, RSK has continued to receive support from Ares Management Corporation, which is a global alternative investment manager – a relationship which David says has only grown stronger during the pandemic. "By managing our costs and very carefully modelling our financial projections, we've been able to show Ares that we have retained complete control during the COVID-19 crisis and done whatever we could to conserve our cash," explains David. "In fact, Ares has actually increased our funding, which shows the team is happy with how we have responded and continues to have confidence in the business."

While RSK has a firm eye on its own strategy during the pandemic, the company believes a number of factors will help aid the North West's recovery over the coming months. This includes attracting talent, growing business confidence, further Government intervention and investment in infrastructure. In terms of its own focus, the plan is to continue on the acquisition drive, with other opportunities in the pipeline, in order to service clients, both in the UK and across the world. "Clearly, we will need some new funding; we intend to launch new products; and we will continue to expand overseas, while also hiring new talent," says David.

Coronavirus, or no coronavirus, the foot is certainly not coming off the gas at RSK. With an unerring culture – one that is focused on nurturing and supporting its people – the company has not been thwarted by the global pandemic and continues to remain faithful to the approach that has delivered significant success for many years.

RSK Group, environmental, engineering and technical services business, Chester

RSK Group has always been a company with an eye for acquisitions and the onset of a global pandemic has not deterred it from its wider aims. In fact, in 2020, RSK has continued to strengthen and diversify its services with nine strategic business acquisitions, including an Austrian environmental consultancy and a serious entry into the water sector with the acquisition of Irish water business Nicholas O'Dwyer and WRc, previously known as Water Research Centre, the UK's leading centre for water research.

It is overseas expansion that is one of a number of tactics the company has identified, as it looks to take the business through the next phase of growth – an approach that has seen RSK expand from 1 to nearly 4,000 people worldwide in the last 30 years. It's that focus on growth, and the need to protect the jobs of those 4,000 employees, which has been the biggest driver during the COVID-19 pandemic. While customer demand has fallen away in some domestic markets, the company has responded to the public health crisis by setting up a decontamination and cleaning service through RSK Response.

Carrington Textiles, workwear fabric manufacturer, Chorley

Carrington Textiles increased capacity at its main processing facility in the UK to supply the domestic and international healthcare sector with the fabrics urgently needed for PPE in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Working around the clock with some of the biggest garment providers to the NHS and the healthcare sector in France, Germany, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, Carrington Textiles supplied over 3.5 million metres of fabric in the early stages of lockdown, a demand two times greater than usual, with 2.5 million metres alone serving the NHS, care homes, pharmacies and other front line healthcare professionals in the UK. Another 300,000 metres of Carrington Textiles' healthcare specialised fabrics clothed frontline staff at Nightingale Hospitals around the country.

3DGBIRE, 3D printing specialists, Chorley

As the pandemic started to cause problems with existing supply chains for PPE and medical devices, it became apparent that additive manufacturing was an ideal solution. 3DGBIRE quickly turned its R&D centre into a small 3D printing production farm and started to produce PPE for the local healthcare networks. Sharing design and production information has allowed 3DGBIRE to scale production with a network of print farms supported entirely by its customer base. The support from manufacturers, customers and staff has helped the company and the wider industry to focus on where it can have an impact. 3DGBIRE continues to work with the Government, healthcare and industrial organisations in developing the production of medical devices.

Dugdale Nutrition Ltd, animal feed manufacturer, Clitheroe

During the COVID-19 crisis, Dugdale Nutrition has introduced thorough new operational measures, in line with AHDB, covering bag collection, contactless deliveries and raw material intake procedures, to ensure that it complies with Government guidance, but also maintains supply and demand. The company has also proudly supported one of its drivers, Craig Booth, who organised the Clitheroe Truck Run for the NHS, raising more than £4,000. The convoy travelled along the A59, into Whalley, through Barrow and into Clitheroe, before driving through the centre of the town to Clitheroe Community Hospital. They were then joined at the hospital by Ribble FM and the emergency services for a 'clap for the NHS.'

William Turner, school wear accessories manufacturer, Nelson

William Turner successfully trialled making protective snood masks for the NHS, producing 30,000 a week. Adapting its manufacturing space, and operating in a socially distant way, the team turned their skills to helping the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Isomi, commercial furniture specialist, Runcorn

During lockdown, Isomi launched a range of products designed to help offices comply with social distancing restrictions. The Wellness Screen collection, which includes freestanding screens, desk dividers and desktop screens, was designed for a range of sectors, including corporate and healthcare, enabling them to plan and execute how their staff can return to the office in the future. As well as UK customers, Isomi has designed and developed products for those in the US, including a New York hospital.

Perspex International, plastics fabrication manufacturer, Darwen

In response to unprecedented demand due to COVID-19, Perspex International reacted immediately and increased the production of PERSPEX® clear acrylic to fulfil requirements for protective PERSPEX® acrylic screens across the UK and Europe. The installation of hygienic protection screens, as seen in supermarkets and pharmacies, reduces the risk of further infections of COVID-19 and protects those working in public areas. Operations Director of Perspex International Ltd., Bryan Welch, said: "As a UK manufacturer, we believe we have an obligation to meet this demand where possible and therefore we acted immediately to increase production to meet the urgent requirements. Achieving the production volumes required in such a short time period has required the business to quickly implement new manufacturing methods and practical working changes." As such, production schedules were changed to prioritise the production of clear PERSPEX® acrylic sheets; production lines used for bathroom products and coloured products were repurposed to enable production of clear PERSPEX® acrylic; and shift patterns were changed to allow for greater production capability. As a result of the immediate factory changes, production increased by 300% compared to pre-lockdown levels.

Medusa19, COVID-19 saliva test manufacturers, Manchester

A pair of Boohoo founder shareholders set up Medusa19 to deliver a saliva-based rapid test for the COVID-19 antigen and struck an exclusive distribution agreement for direct-to-consumer sales. The development is considered to be a "major step forward" in the fight against the disease. Medusa19, established by prominent dealmaker Richard Hughes and Boohoo executive chairman Mahmud Kamani, has an initial focus on home testing. It has worked alongside biotechnology business Avacta Group, which has struck a partnership with Cytiva – formerly GE Healthcare Life Sciences – to develop a product designed to give a result within minutes for use by both healthcare professionals and consumers. The test will be distributed by Medusa19, which is currently investing in global e-commerce, logistics and customer support infrastructure in preparation for Avacta's test launch.



Nutrition Group, food supplement and health product manufacturer, Blackpool

Supply and demand is a delicate balancing act – even at the best of times. But, when a global pandemic strikes, and you find your products in high demand overnight, the way in which you respond is critical.

Contract supplement manufacturer, Nutrition Group plc, faced that exact challenge in February and March when purchase orders increased by 100%, compared to the same period as last year. Unsurprisingly, it saw a 'huge spike' in products related to the immune system, such as Vitamin C and D, as some of the UK's biggest brands reacted to consumer demand.

"That trend has continued at a higher level in the last few months, as overall sales of these type of products have increased," explains Richard Greathead, CEO at Nutrition Group.

Not to be outpaced by demand, the company quickly adopted a number of tactics, including investing in new tablet presses, which enabled it to increase capacity through faster machinery, doubling the hourly output of

Vitamin D. Having already created 20 new jobs to service its protein bar line, prior to the pandemic, Nutrition Group complemented its investment in machinery by extending working patterns, both day and night, to ensure the tablet presses keep running.

The demand has been worldwide, with Nutrition Group distributing products across Europe and the Middle East.

"We're very positive about the future and continue to invest in the factory, having recently spent £400,000 in a new coating department that is currently operating 24 hours a day," explains Richard. "Our business was growing before COVID-19, but our focus is now servicing current demand, which we expect to continue, while making production more profitable and efficient, as well as reducing lead-times."

Richard admits that there are still a lot of unknowns that all businesses in the region will need to contend with, but having confidence is important to aiding recovery. "Without that, people won't seek funding, they won't launch new products and services, and they won't look to expand overseas. Business confidence is key."