

COVID-19: Interview with Tiernan Mines, CEO & Co-founder of Hello Lamp Post

Lockdown has led to a resurgence in local community engagement, providing opportunities for Hello Lamp Post in their mission to connect citizens with city decision makers. Maddyness spoke with Tiernan Mines, Co-Founder and CEO to understand how the company is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future holds.

[Maddyness] What is the biggest professional challenge for you today?

[Tiernan] In light of the current C-19 situation, I'd probably say wearing many different hats and juggling many different things at once. With so much uncertainty triggered by the pandemic and lockdown, it was really difficult to know where to keep focus and where to adapt. Thankfully, at [Hello Lamp Post](#), the team doesn't shy away from a challenge and have been brilliant in achieving a lot during such an intense period. We re-focused to help our

existing customers more and managed to rapidly launch a new product which helps communicate with communities 'virtually' when face-to-face engagement isn't possible. The new product, which is an automated friendly chat channel for people to self-serve their council related questions, has turned into a huge opportunity for us and solves pain points for organisations such as Local Authorities, that we were previously unable to help with. Another minor challenge has been no whiteboarding together as a team – I LOVE whiteboards and an impromptu brainstorming session.

What is the biggest personal challenge today?

Maintaining mental and physical wellbeing. It's incredibly easy to not step away from the desk for long periods of time, especially as the line between work and home life is now so blurred. The biggest challenge for me is making sure I'm allocating time for a break and allow for 'thinking time'. To remedy, I've now started to actively recognise when my focus and productivity takes a dip, and that's the time I need a short 'reset'. For me that means, going on a run or taking a walk – keeps me sane! Plus, I've found my focus is much higher when I get back to the desk.

Is remote working a new thing for you?

Not entirely – we always had some working from home, but it's definitely been a step-change for us. Going forward we're now predominantly going to be working as a remote team. However, in the absence of being able to speak face-to-face with each other, we have come to realise the importance of 'team time'. So we will have *some* flexible desk space, available for when people would like to use it, and as a 'hub' for regular whole team catch-ups (and whiteboarding of course!).

Have you had to end or delay your office rent contract?

We're moving out of our 'permanent' office in central London for the time being. Mainly because of our new plans around remote working, but it also

saves on costs.

How is your relationship with your investors?

Thankfully, we have a great relationship with them all. This is highlighted by the fact that we actually closed the first part of our maiden funding round only a couple of weeks ago. Despite the crisis, our investors have been nothing but supportive. Despite much uncertainty around Coronavirus, they all still strongly believe in our vision, which speaks volumes for us. We are really thankful to also have a brilliant close network of advisors, including Microsoft for Startups (we're part of their AI for Good accelerator 2020 cohort), Social Tech Trust and Notwics (to name a few). They have been especially supportive over the past few months with everything from business development, strategic advice, improving our product, fundraising and managing our social impact. We're now continuing to raise the rest of our funding round over the coming weeks.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID?

We've all seen an enormous rise in digital communication tools, with the likes of Zoom and Teams replacing face-to-face meetings. This same shift is happening with public engagement. Local authorities, cultural organisations, construction companies, museums and many other organisations are now looking to digital tools to facilitate engagement with their audiences. This behaviour shift, combined with a heightened interest from citizens in their local community, aligns very well with our vision.

Are there any changes in society/economy that you think will help you?

One of the things the pandemic has re-highlighted is the importance of our local area for people. And this is emphasised in people's increased enthusiasm

to not only explore their surrounding community but also take more of an interest in how it is shaped going forward. This has placed a strain on local and central government comms and increased the need for more automation and digital tools. This fits very nicely with our mission, to help bridge the gap between city decision-makers and their citizens.

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Article by MADDYNESS