# Talking innovation and company growth with Amazon Web Services

Maddyness speaks to David Roldan, Head of Startup Business Development (UK and Ireland) at AWS – Amazon's cloud computing business.

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In the first of our series of three Q&As with Roldan, we hear about why he's so excited about widening access to machine learning, how AWS helps startups grow through access to the cloud, and how social shopping app Depop used an Amazon data lake.

## What does your role within AWS entail?

I am part of a team within AWS consisting of former startup founders, VCs, and industry experts; we're all focused on discovering and engaging with entrepreneurs and technology startups, and helping them build great businesses on AWS.

Our domain expertise covers financial services, AI and machine learning, retail, healthcare, gaming, and many other industries. Every day our team gets to bring this real-world experience to our engagements with our startup customers.

Whether they need a mentor, advocate or champion, our team exists to help startups maximise the value of working with AWS from day one. We provide guidance on virtually every topic that matters to their success, including technology, go-to-market, fundraising, and hiring talent, to name just a few.

# What area of innovation are you personally most excited about?

One technology that I'm pretty excited about is machine learning. Once upon a time, machine learning was considered super complex – something that belonged in the realm of the technology elite, and was only accessible if you had a PhD in data science. Now, this has all changed.

Through our machine learning services, like Amazon SageMaker, we have been able to level the playing field for all businesses in all verticals – including startups – by democratising access to machine learning.

*We've made it easier than ever before to build AI and machine learning-powered applications, without any machine learning expertise.*

We've developed fully managed machine learning services like Amazon Polly, which translates text to speech, Amazon Transcribe for converting speech to text, Amazon Translate for translating text between languages, and Amazon Textract for extracting text and data from virtually any document – so businesses can innovate with machine learning without having to build and train algorithms.

Today, we see machine learning being applied to every imaginable use case—whether it's protecting users from fraud, improving customer experience, helping people discover entertainment easier, or predicting when maintenance is needed in industrial equipment. And in the fullness of time, we believe that virtually every application will be infused with machine learning and AI.

# How does AWS help businesses grow and save them money? Do you have any

# specific case studies?

Our goal from the beginning was to enable someone in their garage or dorm room to access the same scale, cost structure, and technology as the largest companies in the world.

*We fundamentally believe that making powerful cloud services available to everyone democratises innovation and allows the best idea or business model to win – not necessarily the one with the most resources behind it.*

Take the challenger banks, such as Monzo or Starling Bank, as an example. 15 years ago, before AWS, if you wanted to build a bank, you needed a massive amount of money and resources up front. Cloud computing changed that; it levelled the playing field, giving startups access to the same compute power, security and infrastructure as the big players.

Now, unlike the incumbents, challenger banks don't have to worry about the physical infrastructure and undifferentiated heavy lifting. They can instead invest the precious resource they have in what matters most: their customers.

The cloud allows for cost-effective experimentation, making it an ideal fit for startups since they are the most agile and nimble organisations anywhere. Startups can easily run tests and experiment without significant upfront investment, then scale usage up and down as needed, paying only for what they use. This decreases risk as they grow, and ensures they do not need to invest heavily in anticipation of future demand. They can instead focus on the things that differentiate them and on delighting their customers.

Startups are choosing AWS because we help them build virtually anything they can imagine at every stage of their journey, and they trust us to innovate quickly on their behalf.

Take Depop, the peer-to-peer social shopping app as an example, which built a data lake on Amazon S3, and is using visual recognition and machine learning technologies to categorise their vast inventory of 25 million items. This solution

supports Depop's Personal Shopper search and recommendation service.

# What do you foresee for startups and business for the next couple of years? What does the future look like for AWS?

*Today's startups are tomorrow's enterprises, so continuing to support startups on virtually any and every topic that matters to their success will remain a priority for us.*

From the very beginning, AWS has been the best choice for early stage startups to grow and succeed.

We've created an unmatched startup ecosystem over the past 15 years and today we partner with thousands of VCs, incubators, accelerators, co-working spaces, and universities to ensure that the startups they work with get the guidance and support they need to build strong, disruptive businesses. We also provide startups with access to programmes, guidance, and community that increase their chances of success.

For example, the AWS Activate programme provides startups with free credits, training, and technical resources to help them accelerate their growth and development. We provided more than $1B in AWS Activate credits during 2020 alone.

We also have _AWS Startup Lofts_, physical spaces in San Francisco, New York, Tel-Aviv, Tokyo, and Paris where founders and developers can meet, work, and learn, as well as the AWS Virtual Loft. In response to customer feedback, we also recently launched an _EMEA Startup Loft_.

Additionally, we offer a startup mentorship programme, which matches the right experts with entrepreneurs to help guide them through the challenges they face as they grow their company, their network, and their business.

We help startups when they reach the next stage of maturity. For example, we

offer AWS Connections, a programme that introduces startups to enterprise customers with specific technical and business challenges.

Our AWS Partner Network (APN) Global Startup Programme is built to support mid-to-late stage startups that have raised institutional funding, achieved product-market fit, and are ready to scale. While AWS Marketplace is a digital catalogue that helps startups grow at scale by giving them access to millions of AWS customers and the visibility they need to gain traction in the market, allowing more time to focus on their core business.

We're deeply committed to startups and you can expect to see us do a lot more to continue making a positive impact on the community.

*Discover Amazon Web Services*

Article by DAVID ROLDAN