Meet Cuckoo, the innovative broadband provider disrupting the sector

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Alex Fitzgerald, founder and CEO of Cuckoo Broadband, about its fresh approach to the broadband market, focusing on customer service and giving back to those in need.

What was the catalyst for launching Cuckoo?

The idea for Cuckoo came to me in 2018. I'd seen what Octopus had done in the _energy market_ and Revolut in banking, and I saw how the broadband market was ripe for the same treatment. I was so excited, I emailed myself with the subject line 'Operation Cuckoo', and it all started from there.

It didn't take long for me to realise how bad the broadband industry's problems truly were. The four biggest providers own 95% of the market share. The industry is plagued with opaque contracts and shoddy service, and long standing customers are stuck paying a loyalty tax on their contracts.

I was surprised the market had gone for so long without disruption. I wanted to create a broadband provider that truly put the customer first something that was long overdue in the sector.

Tell me about the business?

Cuckoo is a broadband provider that is disrupting the sector by offering the fastest speeds, flexible contracts and fair pricing. We see how broken the industry is and we're working to fix it. Pricing is unclear and unfair. Customer service is terrible, and penalty fees to end contracts early are excessive. We think that broadband should – and can be – so much better.

Our whole approach at Cuckoo is founded on the idea that customers just want fast and reliable internet. Part of how we deliver this is through our proprietary software technology, which integrates many different wired and wireless networks and simplifies our billing process to provide a better, more efficient service to our customers.

We're also big on paying it forward. There are too many people in the UK and around the world who don't have reliable access to the internet, so we started the Cuckoo Compass initiative to help reduce the digital divide. We take 1% of each bill and use it to help get the internet to places it is needed most – including communities in the UK but also refugee camps and natural disaster sites around the world.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

When we started Cuckoo, we were a team of three sitting around the table. Two years later, we've grown to a team of 50. It's been an incredible ride so far, and a lot of lessons learnt along the way. As the business continues to grow and evolve, knowing you can't know everything is absolutely key. I'm a big believer in giving autonomy to your team and giving them the space to try things, make mistakes and learn and grow.

How are you funded?

We're currently funded by private investors including JamJar. We've raised £4.8M in two rounds so far, and are actually in the middle of our latest round right now so watch this space."

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

Finding great people to build out the team, particularly developers and operations leaders, has been an ongoing challenge for us. Through tackling this, I've realised how key it is to develop networks who can open up access to the best talent, and after having devoted time to establishing these it's now starting to pay off."

How does Cuckoo answer an unmet need?

When I founded Cuckoo with Tommy Toner and Dan McClure, we saw a clear gap in the broadband market for a provider that offered simple, transparent contracts and exceptional customer service. We wanted to build a company that made it easy for customers to leave, but was so good they wouldn't want to – and that's exactly what we've done.

However, there's still a need for industry-wide changes, and Cuckoo is working to make those happen. In 2020, we called on the Government to reduce the outdated broadband tax and reduce VAT to 5%, saving UK households £1.8B a year. We've now launched a campaign to end the broadband 'Price Prison' – the shady practice of hiking prices to above-inflation rates, then charging customers extortionate exit fees when they try to leave.

At Cuckoo, we don't say we'll never raise prices, but we will always be honest and transparent – and we will never tie people into opaque contracts with extortionate exit fees. That's why Cuckoo is campaigning to end the 'fraudband swizz'. We want to raise customers' awareness of these shady industry tactics and pressure the major providers to change.

What's in store for the future?

We're working to make Cuckoo the gold standard for ISPs. We just launched our 24-Hour Eggspress Wi-Fi, which is the world's first wireless-meets-wired product that guarantees customers next-day internet access, and will be continuing to add the highest-speed products to our service. We're also hyper focussed on expanding our customer base and increasing our brand recognition across the UK.

What one piece of advice would you give to other founders?

External advice is a data point, not some hallowed piece of gold. You know your own business best. At the end of the day, you have to trust your gut and trust your team.

Alex Fitzgerald is founder and CEO of _Cuckoo Broadband_.