

Surrounding founders with scale-up expertise to create leading international businesses, a profile of Highland Europe

With #QVCS, Maddyness profiles different funds to give founders and entrepreneurs the information they need to choose the right investor. Today we interview Abhishek Lahoti, newly appointed Head of Platform at Highland Europe.

I started out at medical school in the US where I spent one year learning about biology and human anatomy. Yet at the time I was incredibly distracted by the iPhone vs Flash debate in 2010, which blocked Adobe developer tools from being used on Apple products, as well as Facebook's expansion outside schools and colleges. This made me realise that I wouldn't be a good doctor but I loved the tech industry, so I left it all behind to pursue my passion.

I joined a company in San Francisco that was acquired by Adobe. I had well and truly caught the tech bug - I really enjoyed the work and experiencing innovation and I loved the San Francisco startup lifestyle of building teams and processes, winning partnerships and revenue, and even the experience of

losing deals.

From there, I joined Dropbox which led me to Europe.

It was in this role running distribution partnerships for Dropbox in the region and engaging with the London ecosystem that I was spotted by a VC firm. I was there for two and a half years doing a VC platform role, focusing on gaining customers for our portfolio companies and adding value for the firm in the region. I have since made the jump to Highland Europe as Head of Platform, with a focus on building and scaling our advisory network so we can continue to add value to our founders.

Which industries are you working in?

Highland Europe invests in exceptional growth-stage software and internet companies. We focus on all sorts of products across B2B and B2C, including the likes of Contentsquare, Featurespace, GetYourGuide, Huel and more.

We're entirely focused on our entrepreneurs and helping every single one of them build strong businesses, whatever their ambition. We're totally committed to that and we mean it.

Our ethos includes a strong ESG and DEI focus on all our investments and operations.

What do you look for in a founder?

Highland Europe is lucky to have worked with exceptional founders over the last 10 years. As Head of Platform, it's my job to work closely with the founders and their teams to help with business development, advisory work, talent and more. Their ambition, talent and drive inspire me as we build fast-scaling, category-defining businesses together.

Capital has become more expensive again. Founders need to be incredibly resourceful to deliver fast growth more efficiently. Tapping into investor networks for talent and experienced advice can hopefully be part of the solution.

In a previous role, one founder came to me as they wanted to expand into Europe. Rather than me sending them to a consultant or reviewing his deck, we sat down in several 1:1 sessions to assess their expansion plans and understand what their business would need in the region. I also put them in touch with other expansion experts from other companies so they could understand regional differences and how successful brands had expanded in

the past.

We found customers in the region whom they'd never spoken to but served as massive lead generation for their incoming funnel, providing a more positive assessment of business fit.

Ultimately this was not just a "board level" decision to move to Europe, but a concerted effort behind the scenes to make sure the best investment in the region was made

The last bit of help we offered was giving his VP of Sales (who chose to move to Europe) a 1:1 with several other GMs of EMEA to pick their brains and build a network. This is an example of the type of value and support Platform roles can provide at VC firms.

Can you talk about your current portfolio?

Highland Europe has raised a total of €2.75B and has invested in companies such as Adjust, AMCS, Camunda, ContentSquare, Descartes, Deepki, eGym, Featurespace, GetYourGuide, Huel, Jellysmack, Malwarebytes, MatchesFashion, Me+Em, Nexthink, Podimo, Spot, Supermetrics, WeTransfer, Wolt and Zwift. Our full portfolio of current and exited companies is [here](#). It has total revenues of nearly €3B and over 10,000 employees

What does the future look like?

What makes me excited is the opportunity all over Europe and Israel including France, Germany, and the UK, of course, but also some of the newer hubs now emerging.

We still have a lot of work to do in the region, yes, but the trend line is going in the right direction.

Regarding trends, themes and technologies, as our partner Tony says, *we don't really believe in them*. We like to look at companies which have real products and customers. We like to see what they're actually working on. This lets us invest in almost counter-intuitive places, towards industries we might not have considered due to a "lack of hype". It may not have led us to *villa rental sites* or *healthy meal replacement* or other exciting companies we've backed.

What makes Highland Europe different?

The single most important thing we do is aim to help founders and management teams achieve their full potential.

Strategically the firm focuses on rapidly growing software and internet-enabled companies that have reached sufficient scale to confirm the validity of their business model. Highland Europe's core ethos is about surrounding founders with scale-up expertise to create leading international businesses.

When evaluating teams, our scorecard prioritises excellent interpersonal relationships because we know from decades of experience that positivity and a constructive approach always deliver a better outcome. We are proud of our cheerleading role with founders and their teams, while never losing sight of our obligation to provide careful stewardship of capital.

What one piece of advice would you give founders?

This will sound like a broken record in these tough times, but capital efficiency is rightly celebrated. It indicates that you, as a founder, are resourceful and a careful steward of your immense responsibility.

That said, we need to change the conversation around "capital efficiency". This can sometimes mean a lack of ambition. In previous years it meant you weren't hungry enough, that you weren't scaling fast enough and winning the most. This is profoundly wrong.

What we've learned at Highland Europe is that founders that retain control and build with wisdom regularly have the best outcomes. We're founder-focused because we want to work with thoughtful individuals who can build businesses with a tacit understanding that it's a marathon, not a sprint.

Abhishek Lahoti is Head of Platform at *Highland Europe*.