

Meet Nuke From Orbit, because protecting your data has never been more important

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to James O'Sullivan, CEO and Founder of Nuke From Orbit, about cybersecurity, digital identity, and the importance of feedback.

What was the catalyst for launching Nuke From Orbit?

While out with friends one night, my phone went missing. Once home, I tried to track my phone from another device, only to find my password had been changed.

I started calling my banks, only to discover that tens of thousands of pounds had been spent across cards saved in my digital wallet. Payments were being declined as well but I couldn't quickly cancel my cards without my phone, creating a catch-22.

It seemed ridiculous that there wasn't a one-and-done way of shutting everything down – not just bank cards and apps, but email, social media and all the other services and subscriptions living on our phones.

That's where the idea came from. We're putting more and more deeply personal information on our phones, so if they get stolen, we're not just losing our contacts; as I experienced, it's much more than that. It's a genuinely horrible moment, but it would have been better knowing I had a 'nuke it from orbit' option that instantly invalidated the data held on my phone.

Why 'Nuke from Orbit'? In information security, 'nuke it from orbit' is a popular term used to mean 'wiping your system and starting from a clean slate'. It's for when a company's IT has been so thoroughly compromised that the only choice is to completely recreate it – exactly like when your phone has been stolen.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

People's mobile phones are their entire lives; these devices genuinely access all areas. It's a payment method, shortcut to bank accounts, communications hub and everything in between. When cybercriminals get access to your Personal Identifiable Information (PII), the financial and reputational damage can be irretrievable, so protecting digital personal data has never been more important.

Nuke from Orbit is a first-of-its-kind digital panic button that decreases the impact of a security breach when you're most at risk. We provide the instant invalidation of stolen data via a consumer-friendly app with security at its core that will integrate with all the major banks and card providers.

It is designed to allow users to shut down access to all personal data. Banking, crypto, health, social media profiles, store accounts, email, etc.; all closed off so that criminals cannot use logins and account information to spend their money and scam others in your name. When customers manage their data through the app, they can:

- Cancel debit and credit cards instantly and simultaneously

- Block phone SIM cards to limit communication and reduce the risk of SIM cloning

- Secure account information and preserve reputations

And it's all done with one simple action.

We are partnering with financial institutions, mobile network operators, social media networks, De-Fi companies, and service providers like hotels and airlines; effectively, anyone that gives users access to platforms and subscriptions through apps and services.

Consumers and businesses can currently sign up for the Nuke from Orbit [waiting list](#) on our website. One of the critical parts of expanding our customer base is our community because there is safety in numbers. The more people that have the app, the easier it is, in the event of a theft, that someone can get access to it and shut their accounts down. We are encouraging users to share the app with their families, friends, colleagues: basically, their personal networks.

We are also expanding our list of partners on a regular basis, with plans for partners to be a key part of our growth strategy.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

We launched in the summer of 2023 and secured funding by the end of the year. We are engaging with prospective partners and hope to reach a critical mass of these to launch the app to consumers later in the year. Having partners onboard is critical – the more comprehensive our offer, the greater security we offer to our customers from day one, so right now, we're full steam ahead on building up our partner ecosystem.

Tell us about the working culture at Nuke From Orbit

We are focused on creating a functional and intuitive platform, making it easy for users to stay in control of their data. We know the problem we're solving and where the roadmap takes us. Too many apps and services end up with feature creep; we're focused on doing one thing well: securing our customers' data when their phone is stolen.

That extends to our working culture. Our lean team is made up of experts in their respective fields, with experience in starting and building tech companies that meet the needs of customers. As we get closer to launch, we will be looking to expand the team, but only as it aligns with our commitment to focus.

How are you funded?

We received £500K in pre-seed funding. The funding comes from several UK-based companies and investors, including Oliver Bridgen, Co-Founder & COO of Ballinger Group and Jordan Hallows, founder of Wey Bridging Finance.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

The strength of Nuke From Orbit rests on our network, and that's the same for partners as it is for customers. If we don't have enough partners on board, we can't offer the full coverage our customers will expect.

Understandably, convincing partners, many of whom are huge organisations in highly regulated industries, is a challenge. They are wary of anything that costs them, or will potentially increase their threat surface area.

To overcome that, we've made sure that we don't expose them to greater risk, there's no cost to them and we're not threatening their customers by existing. In fact, we require less of a connection than Open Banking. We make it clear that our focus is on delivering a secure, quality user experience that doesn't impact our partners at all.

How does Nuke From Orbit answer an unmet need?

When I had my smartphone stolen, I was surprised that there wasn't a way to quickly deactivate and disconnect my accounts quickly, considering how easy it is to connect everything. In theory you *can* do this with tools from the major handset manufacturers through a remote-wipe, but the reality is this is hard or impossible to achieve, and even when successful it's not as comprehensive as Nuke will be.

And with mobile phone theft up an alarming 36% between January 2022 and January 2023 in the UK and a phone stolen every six minutes in London, it's a problem anyone can face. If it doesn't happen to you, it'll happen to someone you know.

Part of the problem is how central the phone has become to our lives – not just in the ways we've previously talked about, but as a way of authenticating ourselves. Two-factor authentication requires phone access – it's great when

you need to get into something, but if you don't have your phone, it's an insurmountable barrier.

In our initial market research, it became clear that most people had no idea it wasn't straightforward either. Another validation of the idea was that we're starting to see manufacturers add services that delay criminals' ability to change log-in details. But not all phones come with these features, and consumers have to choose the order they lock services down, leaving others open. It is only a delaying tactic, not a total lockdown.

Sometimes, the best defence is to attack. That's where we come in, we minimise the inconvenience to put customers back in control of their digital identity.

What's in store for the future?

We have plans to develop our relationship with our partners through a dedicated portal, launch to consumers and if necessary secure further funding. We're launching initially in the UK, with plans to expand globally in the near future, so that the app is available to anyone, anywhere in the world and working with all sectors.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

We've built Nuke From Orbit as a result of a personal experience, but what gave us confidence was the feedback we received as we developed the idea. We started off speaking to friends and family, then gradually widened that network until we were in a position to do some consumer research (the results of which we'll be sharing publicly very soon!). It's been critical to help us not only develop the offer, but also provide us with firm evidence that not only are we offering a solution to a problem, but one that people are likely to need as our smartphones become more central to our lives.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I'm not as much of a routine person as you might think, largely owing to the fact that days can be so varied with such a small team. I've got a young family

so they get me up early and I use the school drop off with my eldest to break the back of my daily steps. This 30 min walk or so is surprisingly useful in just letting me think through the stuff in my head so I arrive at my home office with something approaching a plan for my day.

I'll normally dedicate the first hour to doing the jobs that I don't want to do but have to be done. I know if I don't then I'll get stuck into something a bit fun and I'll be there all day. I run some other tech businesses so I spend a lot of my day jumping across different Slack channels and meetings, unblocking others' blockers and making decisions as needed.

If time allows, I'll collect one of the kids from school (gotta get those steps in!) and will try to finish work by 18:30 so I can spend an hour or so with the family over dinner. By 19:30 I'm into the hardest phase of the day- getting kids to sleep. Seriously, if anyone has tips I'm all ears as the boys are a nightmare.

When peace once again reigns in the house I'll probably do a quick tidy-up of my work to start tomorrow as a new day and either settle in for some gaming with friends (PUBG mainly), or watch some sport / TV with my wife.

Somewhere in the day I'll have carved out 30 mins to play with AI in some way. This is the closest I get to a 'rule' at the moment (apart from no chocolate for the kids after 8pm, see above). AI is going to be the last technology revolution I'll want / need to dedicate time to. I've been through three major technology inflection points: home computing in the late 80s and early 90s, the internet around the turn of the century and finally the move to mobile from 2009. I was well placed to learn and play with these changes and think AI is going to be as big a shift as them all combined so I need to know it inside out. There'll be something else in 20-40 years time I'm sure, but I won't be the person I am today so I will largely let my kids and grandkids talk me through it as I need!

James O'Sullivan is the CEO and Founder of *Nuke From Orbit*.