

Manage and scale your employee benefits effortlessly with Kota

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Luke Mackey, Co-Founder and CEO of Kota about employee benefits, operating across multiple countries and constantly raising expectations and ambitions.

Temps de lecture : minute

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As a founding team, we had all felt the pain of managing health and retirement benefits - both administering them and trying to access them as employees.

The tipping point for me personally was when I was working at Bolt. I was trying to set up benefits for the team and was met with a huge time and resource drain - the process was fragmented, offline, and confusing. I was pretty shocked by how old-school the industry was and how much it lagged behind the tools I had at my fingertips for Payroll, HR, Accounting and so on. I started playing around with some designs and imagining the ideal flow for managing benefits - essentially designing the dream solution to my own problems.

My Co-Founders, Patrick and Deepak, and I tried hard to disprove our assumptions and pick holes in the solution we were coming up with. In large part, this was because we knew how difficult it was going to be to build a company in this space. Ultimately, this process showed us just how much we really did need to build Kota. No one in the market was solving this problem, and we had a solution that we really believed people needed.

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

Kota gives employers instant access to leading insurance and retirement providers with flexible contributions, automated accounting and a delightfully simple employee app. We integrate with core benefit providers around the world to make benefits across markets accessible from a single dashboard.

We automate billing and reporting for HR and finance teams, reconciling all changes during the month and pulling data directly from HRIS platforms to automatically set up new employees' benefits and deactivate old employees' benefits.

For employees, we offer real-time enrolment with a fully digital experience via our employee app and flexibility to alter their plans and pension contributions during the month.

We work with customers directly but are also soon going live with several Payroll and Employer of Record platforms to deliver a fully embedded experience and access to our benefits from within their platforms.

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

We formed Kota (then named Yonder) in January 2022. Pretty quickly, we raised a €2.6M pre-seed round with some brilliant investors, including Northzone, Frontline, Cocoa and angels, including execs in companies like Workday and Personio.

Obtaining a regulatory license, growing our team, and building

relationships and integrations with our benefits providers were our core focus in our first year. Having done that and started gaining traction, we raised a €5M Seed round with EQT Ventures and our existing investors in 2023, which was an exciting milestone.

Since then, we've been building our sales team, forming partnerships with large Payroll and EoR platforms, and expanding into new markets (most recently the UK).

Tell us about the working culture at Kota

We're a remote company, and we very much believe in trusting our team to work in a way that will allow them to do their best work.

We have team members across the UK, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania and India, but Ireland remains our HQ, and we've got an office space where our team gathers when we need to be face-to-face. Our culture is probably most visible in this space - it's a place where we work at pace and with intensity but always with good humour and a lot of laughter.

I think we have a team that likes to solve hard problems and think creatively about how to get things done. When you bring together a group of people with this same mindset and the drive to get there, you get a pretty special culture and working environment.

How are you funded?

We're lucky to have raised money from top-tier European Venture Capital funds including Northzone, EQT and Frontline, as well as some angels who have been hugely supportive in our journey. We're at Seed stage now and have raised a total of €7.6M.

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

We're operating in a regulated industry, which, as a start-up, is particularly challenging. Launching has required becoming regulated to sell in Europe and the UK, which is a long process. Equally, benefits management differs greatly in each country, so our team does a lot of upfront work prior to going live.

We're also building something new in a space with a lot of incumbents and legacy processes, so finding partners on the insurer side who are progressive, willing, and capable of working with us is always a challenge. However, we've been lucky to work with amazing ones to date, and it's getting easier as we grow.

How does Kota answer an unmet need?

The current approach to offering core benefits is outdated, especially for companies operating across multiple countries and employees who are used to dealing with their finances in a few taps. What we are building at Kota has the power to change the game for our customers by transforming it into a seamless and automated experience. We're seeing it deliver significant time and cost savings for HR and finance teams and increased engagement for employees.

What's in store for the future?

We are only two years old as a company and have a significant roadmap ahead. In the immediate term, we're rapidly opening up availability in new markets and levelling up our platform's functionality while also preparing to launch some big integrations into well-known HR and Finance platforms.

In the longer term, we see Kota as the answer to benefits in the way that Stripe has been to payments and Workday to HRIS.

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

Chase the uncomfortable and get comfortable with that being your default state; otherwise, you're not growing as a founder. Your company's success is driven by the founder's ability to raise ambition and standards and move as fast as possible.

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

Monday and Friday are work from home days, so mainly calls and a block of focus work. Then, I exercise in the evening, which I've been quite disciplined on recently, and it has been a huge balance needed in order to mitigate burnout and get headspace. The midweek routine is different: up at 6 am and in the office by 7.30 am; usually, if you are in the office, it means fewer calls and more time with the team. Leave at 8 pm, work out, which could be a run or gym and then meet friends for a sauna. Weekends are used to recharge with friends and family.

Luke Mackey is the cofounder and CEO of *Kota*.