

The agency used by American Golf, Fosters and Halfords aiming for fame with US expansion plans

A CEO has revealed plans for his digital marketing agency to become “famous for doing amazing work” and to expand over to the USA in the coming years.

Jon Butler heads up Manchester-headquartered TrunkBBI following the recent merger of the two businesses.

Mr Butler is also aiming to grow the firm’s turnover to more than £8m over the next 18 months and boost its headcount to almost 100.

In an exclusive interview with BusinessLive, the CEO addresses the “recruitment battle” waging in his industry in the aftermath of the pandemic as well as revealing how the company can continue to fund its sustained growth.

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TrunkBBI currently has a headcount of 75 and recently opened a new office in Leeds, kickstarting the firm’s expansion plans.

Mr Butler said: “Leeds, for me, is the epicentre of performance marketing which plays an important part in our proposition. There is such a talent pool there.

“Manchester will always be our headquarters but we have identified a number of cities that we are looking at.

“Because we have an international client base, America is also on the cards but that might be a year or two away.

“London is absolutely a city that we are talking about in terms of expanding down there later this year.”

The agency counts the likes of American Golf, Fosters, Arighi Bianchi, General Electric, HomeServe, Greene King, Gallagher and Halfords among its client base.

New clients have recently been added to its roster and it's that success that Mr Butler says is helping to fuel the company's expansion.

He added: “Coming out of the pandemic we have brought on a number of key clients and bringing in bigger companies has allowed us to expand and grow.

“One thing that the pandemic did for everyone in digital marketing is the growth of digital transformation.

“We have seen that in the healthcare sector where they were potentially quite a few years behind but now they have really sped up their digital transformation.

“I see there being enough work out there but it's about making sure that we have enough staff to deliver that.”

The business is also able to fund its growth by having a particular financial target every year.

The CEO said: “We are independently owned and always have been. We fund our growth because we go for 25% EBITDA every year.

“It's been quite difficult through the pandemic to achieve that but we have loan facilities in place and we are very smart with our money.

“We would consider accepting external funding but it's not something that we would be looking to do at the moment.

“It's something that's not required at the minute but we never

say never.

“We are not ruled by a spreadsheet or a private equity firm telling us what we can or cannot do and that’s a key part of us maintaining the majority of our staff and adding to our staff count during the pandemic.”

Mr Butler however added that while the company has “always grown at speed”, a lack of skills in the market could have the potential to put the brakes on his plans.

He said: “There is a recruitment battle going on at the moment and there are probably not enough people with the skill sets we need.

“Culture is a really important part of our recruitment drive and I believe that if we get that right and we produce great work the staff will follow.”

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The chief executive also wasn't shy about his long-term vision for the agency.

He said that he wants the company to be "famous for doing amazing work for clients and driving performance for them".

He added that while it is "difficult to stand out" in the crowded Manchester market, he believes his firm has the "right mix".

Mr Butler said: "We have got Trunk, which is our creative arm and something a lot of agencies don't have.

"A lot of older businesses try to buy that into their company and that integration often does not work.

"Trunk and BBI have grown together and we have one culture and we are one business, delivering for our clients."

On the biggest challenge facing his company at the moment, he added: "Our main challenge at the moment is finding staff. I think it's an industry-wide issue.

"As digital transformation and the industry has exploded there is now a real shortage of talent out there now and there is a battle to win people over and to build a culture."

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