
Tommy Kearns: XtremePush is on track to build a €40m business

Podcast Ep 61: XtremePush CEO Tommy Kearns talks about how the Dublin tech firm is transforming marketing, how it competes with global tech giants for talent and the company's plans to grow in the US and Europe.

After hanging up his boots as a professional rugby player at Connacht Rugby, XtremePush co-founder and CEO set his sights on a bigger prize in the digital world. Almost seven years ago he founded XtremePush with Kevin Collins, the company's CTO, and has never looked back. Only forward.

The prize Kearns has in mind is the ever-evolving world of marketing where the biggest brands with the biggest teams still struggle to make sense of the sheer firepower at their disposal and translate spend into accountable, tangible results.

The Ranelagh-headquartered business has enjoyed practically 100pc year-on-year growth since it was founded, and employs a workforce of close to 70 people in offices in Dublin, the UK, North America and Central and Eastern Europe.

Making marketing more measurable

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Uniquely, Xtremepush has developed a comprehensive tech stack, offering push marketing clients a single, unified platform for customer understanding, engagement and decisioning.

It serves a global portfolio of brands across multiple verticals including retail banking, e-commerce, travel and transport, publishing and media, hospitality and sports betting and gaming.

In 2020 XtremePush announced Beechbrook Capital as its latest new capital partner, having secured €4.25m funding to support the business's global growth and acquisition strategy.

An acquisition fund in the region of €15m is now available to the business with which to accelerate its acquisition strategy.

Last year XtremePush completed the acquisition of Alchemetrics, a UK agency specialising in bespoke Customer Data Platforms. This followed the 2018 acquisition of Emailcenter, a long-established UK email service provider.

The company plans to act swiftly on its acquisition trail, with longer-term goals that would see Xtremepush established as a €40m ARR (annual recurring revenue) business in the year ahead.

Kearns breaks down the mission of XtremePush: “We help brands give their digital customers and physical customers better experiences, drive better outcomes and achieve business outcomes, whether it is revenue or consolidating costs across all the digital channels.

“We help brands to understand their digital users and customers across a single customer view, automate their messaging to one-to-one across email, push notifications, SMS, social media across a single unified platform.”

The genesis of Kearns’ take on creating a single marketing view comes from his origins in the tech world after leaving Connacht Rugby. Stints as CEO of Grupo Azcel in Mexico, being a member of the board of Bord Failte’s East & Midlands Region and running Sapphire Communications and being head of commercial at Imobile Applications in the UK forged his understanding of the complexities of digital marketing.

“I’ve been in the mobile technology business for 17 or 18 years, all the way back to the era of [polyphonic] ringtones and that first wave of instant gratification when you could get Crazy Frog on your phone.”

Working in this business presented Kearns the same question over and over: how do you communicate with the hundreds of thousands of people downloading these applications?

The nexus point was the onset of the iPhone and its rival operating system Android with the creation of push gateways. “And that’s how XtremePush came about, we started as a mobile-first, purpose-built platform.”

The core was understanding the data. “If you could do that with an app or a website you could understand customer intent, behaviour and basically understand your users in a much more granular fashion.

“And we decided to automate that. We went mobile-first and then we built this unified multi-channel engagement and personalisation platform.”

From start-up to scale-up

By enabling brands from banks to telcos and shopping chains to scale their marketing, XtremePush

itself went from start-up to scale-up and now has a war chest of €15m to acquire companies overseas.

“We were profitable within the first 13 months. Through good customers and partners we were able to grow organically.

“Our vision is to build a very big company over the next three-to-five years.”

Kearns said the acquisition last year of Alchemetrics and any future acquisitions will be about completing the missing parts of the puzzle and become a one-stop marketing tech shop for brands to understand, engage and decide, all on one platform.

“The vision was always there among the founders, helped massively by a couple of acquisitions along the way. From a scaling perspective we were able to do that by raising debt rather than equity at the time.”

The opportunity is to keep step with the pace of the marketing technology (mar-tech) industry and presenting brands with a single unified platform for all their marketing needs.

“Our platform can be plugged in and up and running, even with the most monolithic stacks out there, within weeks. That’s our unique selling point and it has allowed us to gain traction here and abroad. The promise we make to customers is to deliver a return on investment within a 16 to 24-month period. That’s the kind of promise we make as a business and we stand behind it.”

Rather than being wrongfooted by the Covid-19 crisis, Kearns said that the pandemic has actually accelerated things for XtremePush. “Covid has accelerated digital, it has put it on steroids for want of a better word. We’ve been able to accelerate our scaling journey. Some verticals such as hospitality and travel have been affected but I’m already starting to see green shoots. Many are starting to gear up and promote their services and are communicating with customers again and drive loyalty again.”

A particular focus for XtremePush is to scale in the US market and the company has made strategic leadership hires for the North American market.

Indeed hiring on the ground in the company’s home market of Ireland has continued unabated by the pandemic. No doubt, competing against tech giants in Dublin such as Google or Facebook presents challenges, Kearns is unconcerned and believes indigenous software companies offer different rewards. “We’ll never compete on salaries, but we compete on ambition, we compete on culture, we compete on innovation and we compete on the speed of where we can move to. And people want to be involved in businesses like that. They want that energy.”

Looking to the future, Kearns harbours significant growth plans. “We’re just under 70 people on a

global basis and we'll double our headcount in the next 12 months. We want to scale up our European and US business organically as well as look at complimentary acquisitions that sit well with our unified engagement stack.

"We want to build a significant business over the next three years. We want to build a business with €30m to €40m in recurring annual revenue. And we're on track to do that as long as we keep innovating, keep true to our culture and our core and drive as hard as we can go."

By [John Kennedy](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com) (john.kennedy3@boi.com)

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