

SLAUGHTER AND MAY

Alumni Newsletter

September 2016

## Tomorrow's world

In June 2016, our alumni **Trevor Callaghan** returned to the UK - almost five years after making the move to Silicon Valley - to explore new horizons for users of technology.

Having worked as a director in Google's legal team across a range of issues including privacy, competition, copyright and product compliance, he is now focused on but one project: DeepMind, the artificial intelligence (AI) company within the larger Alphabet corporate family that now also owns Google.

**"I am absolutely thrilled to be back. Britain is an amazing country with a huge amount of talent in it, so I'm very optimistic about the future. I wouldn't say London is a new technology hub, because I think people in the know have always been aware of the scientific expertise, talent and intellectual curiosity that exists here, but it's certainly a great place to be in for technology right now."**



In geographical terms, the move to London brings him full circle - back to a city he loves and the place where he first started out as a newly qualified lawyer with Slaughter and May.

During his six-year tenure at Slaughter and May, Callaghan switched from straight corporate work to IP/IT in order to focus more on technology matters - learning the negotiation skills that would equip him for the future.

***"I worked with some amazing people at Slaughter and May and I can safely say that I took something unique from each of them. Overall, what really stands out for me is the understanding I cultivated as to what best practice should be in the delivery of legal services. That's a benchmark that I still try***

***to meet every day, and even when it's not practically attainable in-house, knowing what can be achieved is hugely instructive for the business."***

Leaving the firm was a natural progression for Callaghan, who decided that ultimately his future career had to be more closely tied to the development of new technology.

***"What really attracted me to Google was the chance to work more closely with a form of technology that I loved - especially with a company that made products which I personally saw enormous utility in, and to set myself the challenge of practising in-house. Moving to California was a natural progression of that. The working environment at Google caters***

***fantastically well to the developers, who in many respects are Google's top asset. Things are very different to life at a law firm, where you are focused on fee earners and the business of client service."***

Having been acquired by Google in January 2014, DeepMind already stood head and shoulders above others, according to Callaghan. Intrigued by the whole premise, he immediately took steps to familiarise himself with the company's approaches and current projects.

***"My role with Google was endlessly fascinating and it allowed me to work on a wide variety of extremely high-impact issues, but I've always had a passion for new technology and as soon as I heard about the DeepMind acquisition I was truly inspired."***

Once he knew that DeepMind was looking for its own general counsel, he registered his interest.

***"DeepMind is already taking AI techniques out of the realm of science fiction and showing its potential in real applications - our work with Google to optimise power consumption across Google's data centres is a great example of something with huge positive financial and environmental benefits. AlphaGo was another huge milestone in illustrating that some grand challenges - like a computer effectively playing the game of Go - can now be met. The day-to-day application of technology here is far more grounded and tangible as compared with some of the ideas portrayed in film and media."***

What's the idea behind DeepMind? Its main mission is to solve intelligence, and then apply that to solving 'everything else'. The second part clearly has the potential to radically improve people's lives, explains Callaghan. At first we might see lots of incremental improvements to things people already use in their day-to-day

lives - like consumer electronics, but the potential applications are far-reaching and could be transformative in many different areas. Essentially, it's about making technology work harder for people. How much independent agency that technology might have could be an issue, however.

***"There are some very important discussions that need to take place as to how this technology develops - for example as to how companies in this field should engage with government, regulatory bodies, one another and the public at large with a view to ensuring that there is safe and ethical stewardship of applications for the benefit of everyone. DeepMind is very interested in taking that discussion forward with others."***

In a constantly evolving market, the biggest disrupters in technology tend to be those you don't see coming, according to Callaghan, with things moving on very quickly from niche, original innovation to something that's in everyone's hands.

***"I certainly don't see that progress stopping any time soon. But what always amazes me is people's ability to embrace and adapt to something that may have seemed impossible just a few years prior. It strikes me that, as humans, we don't give ourselves nearly enough credit for being able to do that."***

As a rule, investment in technology companies tends to come from well-known, reputable sources - such as venture capitalists or funds in Silicon Valley. But it can also be less straightforward, with funding coming through people who are personally known to the founders, or sometimes from larger firms prepared to speculate and commit to future trends in technology, for example. Softbank's recent acquisition of ARM Holdings was - according to Callaghan - a useful reminder of the potential of the latter, even for a fully developed and successful business.

## Changing landscape

The regulatory landscape is currently transformed with the industry's transition to a Europe-wide one-stop shop for Internet use - via General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

But while he's certain there will be teething problems, it's a move that Callaghan certainly welcomes.

*“We have to wait and see exactly how the GDPR will be implemented and enforced, but the idea of having a single regulation and - largely - a single set of rules should be good news for everyone. What is already clear is that we are going to need companies to be innovative and take the lead, with regulatory support, on defining what compliance looks like in practice. I think it's important to recognise that the GDPR is an evolution in standards and not a fixed end point. Technology will always be driving a new set of challenges - and the GDPR will gradually adapt to that.”*

For Callaghan, however, there's a clear distinction between regulation and Internet freedoms - a wide basket of issues that incorporates freedom of speech, information and geographical boundaries, and copyright.

*“I have to admit I find it somewhat depressing that over the past decade we have been heading towards an online experience that in many respects is less 'free' - in that what users can do with their data, or with their own equipment is less self-directed and dictated increasingly by governments and intermediaries. I worry about this trend - this blurring of the boundaries - particularly when it becomes embedded in technology in ways that are not transparent to people.*