

## A Build-Operate-Transfer partnership with trust at its core

The Financial Times is one of the world's leading business news organisations, recognised internationally for its authority, integrity and accuracy. The FT has a record paying readership of more than one million, three-quarters of which are digital subscriptions. It is part of Nikkei Inc., which provides a broad range of information, news and services for the global business community.

- £4M savings per year to be reinvested in growing the Sofia Team
- Rapid delivery of an effective, vibrant product development and support team in Sofia, Bulgaria
- Smooth transfer of skills to locally sourced talent
- Positive impact on the FT Group overall

### The Challenge

In 2016, the FT explored the idea of creating a product development hub outside of London in order to further invest in core FT platforms. FT CPO John Kundert explains, *"We wanted to retain a presence in the UK for our Product and Technology team while also creating a new hub to own product development and infrastructure support."*

The FT decided to establish the new hub under a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) model, in which a local partner sets up, optimises and runs the centre with the intent to transfer the operation back to the FT. This model provides the benefit of incorporating an experienced partner with deep knowledge of the local market, whilst bringing the entity back within the FT at the appropriate time. In all, over 400 critical services would need to be transferred.

The FT reviewed a number of potential locations and selected Sofia, Bulgaria. The FT awarded the contract to Xoomworks in 2018, noting Xoomworks' track record in completing similar projects, its 'One Team' ethos and values, technical capability and alignment, and ability to source local talent.

Xoomworks immediately began sourcing talent and reviewing office locations in Sofia for the proposed FT Core team. Initial recruitment challenges were shared openly between the FT and Xoomworks under the 'One Team' approach. By the end of 2018, two teams (Membership



and Data, and Content) had taken on full responsibility for the FT Core roles.

Initially, the purpose of the BOT model was to support only FT Core, but in September 2019, the agreement was expanded to include FT Group Products titles.

On July 1 2020, the FT took full responsibility for operation of the Sofia location and team, including the building, salaries, incentive schemes, and regulatory compliance. 19 staff from Xoomworks will continue to support the business through the Professional Service Agreement between the Financial Times and Xoomworks.



One FT team: John Ridding FT CEO & Cait O'Riordan FT CPIO with the FT Sofia team in 2019 celebrating 1 million subscribers.

## The Results

The FT now has fully empowered teams in Sofia supporting a wide range of products and services, including the digital subscriptions business, newspaper distribution and many FT specialist titles. Additionally, the data warehouse platform, which provides customer data intelligence, plays a crucial role in shaping the culture of analytical thinking across the business.

The team has already had a major impact on the business, both in terms of financial savings and raising the bar for other FT sites. ***"Savings of over £4m per annum are expected from the project and we plan to invest these savings into further growth and expansion of the Sofia teams,"*** said Kundert.

The intelligent strategy decisions, for instance moving data centres to the cloud, have also significantly reduced infrastructure costs. Through better reporting and analysis, the FT is getting real insights into product usage,

which is driving product development and enhancements. The team is rolling out intelligent recommendation engines, leading to more personalised user experiences for customers. Another team is supporting the acquisition and retention for subscriptions, chasing enrolment

***"Xoomwork's One Team approach has been built into the DNA of our Sofia team and is having a wide-reaching impact on the culture and of working within the FT. It built trust that has proved to be extremely valuable and de-risked many of the challenges."***

failures due to credit card payment failures and providing single sign-on via Google.

Kundert said: ***"Transitioning to Sofia hasn't been about saving money. It's about the creation of value with new opportunities to re-evaluate almost everything, from the ways our teams work together, to the vision and mission of the group and the technical stacks we work with."***

***"The personnel in Sofia are completely aligned with the FT's culture and values of inclusion and diversity,"*** added Kundert. Staff regularly participate in team-building activities and are involved in the community, including giving support to the SOS Children's Villages Bulgaria Charity by the FT Women Sofia group.

A key member of the team in Sofia (Nikola, FT Core Principle Engineer) described the FT culture in three words: ***"People, excitement and professionalism."***



Images from left to right: Lynne Charles, UK Deputy Ambassador, Yordanka Fandakova, Mayor of Sofia and Cait O'Riordan, CPIO of FT open the Sofia offices in 2019; Building the 'FT One Team in Sofia'; Celebrating the transfer of legal ownership of the FT's award-winning product development capability in Sofia.

Looking to quickly build an effective development and support team you can trust? Talk to a Xoomworks Technology expert: +44 (0)20 7400 6120 Xoomworks Technology [www.xoomworks.com](http://www.xoomworks.com)

