



# HARNESSING IT

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## INTERVIEWS

Paul Greatbatch

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

**feefo** 

The Global Feedback Engine

**Taylor Made**  
COMPUTER SOLUTIONS

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## INTERVIEWS



In a series of interviews with Taylor Made Computer Solutions, directors reveal what they perceive to be the issues if IT is to deliver key objectives.

**The interviews will be brought together as a report to be published by DECISION magazine and then as a digital book.**

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**AS A CONCEPT IT couldn't be simpler. Arguably the best ideas always are. Someone purchases a product or service and then they are contacted by an independent third-party to give a view which can be read on the web.**

The idea, which led to Feefo being set up in 2010 by founders Matt Eames and Andrew Mabbutt, is that independently verified and accredited customer feedback helps companies to create trust and so get more sales. Every Feefo review is authentic because it is triggered and matched to an actual transaction.

"They got the idea from seeing people selling products on eBay and seeking buyer feedback," explains the company's technical director Paul Greatbatch. "The advantage of the eBay rating system is that you can be confident that the reviews have come from genuine customers. The founders thought why doesn't every online business have a rating system like this, which would create transparency and trust in reviews?" One issue with other feedback systems is that reviews can be fake. For example people might be paid to post positive reviews, or conversely rivals might leave bad reviews on each others' sites.

The other problem is that feedback tends to be either very positive or very negative. Because the Feefo system encourages all customers to give feedback, whether good, bad or indifferent, there isn't the same polarity of opinion. "People like to see a mix," says Greatbatch. "They don't trust a system when they see only five-star or damning reviews. Traditional rating systems don't give the full picture. For example, a customer could give a four point five score out of five because they like the

product. But the supplier has no way of knowing that the customer won't order from them again because the delivery was late. Conversely, the customer might leave a bad score purely on the basis of the late delivery, which would hide the fact that they really like the product."

It's IT that enables Feefo's 2500-plus clients to see and measure how they are performing and where they need to improve. The problem, Greatbatch points out, is that they probably don't have time to read and analyse all their reviews to get meaningful insight. "So what we're doing is taking away the mundane from the client, and analysing the data for them.

"That's the reason we're looking at artificial intelligence. There is no business that doesn't want customer insight. What they don't have are the resources to put into understanding the reviews. So we don't just give them that dump of information, we structure it to get to the true value of the data. By 'reading' reviews in aggregate, we can see the most common issues that customers are talking about. Using sentiment analytics we can highlight the top positive or negative comments to help companies to evaluate their service."

Artificial intelligence? "The technology is not perfect," muses Greatbatch. "For example natural language can't yet pick up on sarcasm, so we still need humans involved, but it will get more

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accurate. As artificial intelligence comes in, it will give clients the insight they need without employing five people to read the reviews.”

Greatbatch says IT is an intrinsic part of every aspect of the business. “When I worked at a big insurance company, there was a divide between the IT department and everyone else, but here IT is part of everything from project management to innovation, from delivery to system operations and development. Our approach is ‘what do we want to do and how do we use the IT to manage that’? We don’t even call it IT anymore. We talk about IT in its constituent silos: such as insights, machine learning, software as a service.”

The company uses both industry standard software (such as project management software Jira) and builds its own, based on clients’ needs. Greatbatch says:

“There is no point in reinventing the wheel if there are APIs [application programming interfaces] out there we can use.” But on the other hand, he adds, being relatively small and young makes Feefo agile. “Some companies get so bogged down in legacy systems that they can’t move because adopting new software becomes painful for them, but we’re in a position where we can adapt to new technology quickly.”

So is there a danger of adopting new IT because

it’s available? “We do review our systems regularly,” Greatbatch replies, “and the strategy is to look at what could help the business. It comes back to having a road map. It’s not the case that we always want the next thing and the next thing; it’s what do we need, and how do we integrate it.”

Feefo is offered on a software as a service basis which can integrate with most websites, with the price based on the number of feedback requests the client sends out. Historically, there have been a lot of versions of the software as the business would customise it for particular clients’ needs. “We have been guilty of trying to be all things to all people,” admits Greatbatch. “It resulted in having too many versions and too many customers needing a lot of development. That was unmanageable and restrictive. So now the aim is more standardisation and consistency. But that doesn’t mean less innovation.”

There is an ideas forum at Feefo, and a process for asking staff what they think of new ideas and tools. And Greatbatch says developers are often allowed time to think about possible new uses for the large amount of data the business has access to.

In 2016 the company was ranked fifty-five in the Sunday Times tech track list of the fastest growing private technology companies. It now has some 120 staff and an office in Boston, USA.

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I N T E R V I E W S



**Established in 1994, Taylor Made Computer Solutions are one of the largest and most highly-ranked IT service and support organisations in the south, currently employing over 110 staff.**

Taylor Made are the first technology company in the region to have gained a third consecutive gold award from Investors in People. Taylor Made are also ISO 9001:2008 certified.

The company has been ranked in the top 10 managed service providers in Europe the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) in a leading annual industry survey from MSPmentor since 2012. Taylor Made are a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, HP Preferred Partner and a NetApp Silver Partner.

#### **Services include:**

IT support, IT strategy, IT consultancy, hosted telephony, project management, Securo online back-up, hosted solutions, remote management and monitoring, cloud solutions, disaster recovery, remote access, outsource engineering, security, service desk support.

Researched and published by

**DECISION magazine**

[www.decisionmagazine.co.uk](http://www.decisionmagazine.co.uk)

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