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Sacha Michaud

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“Immediacy is a trend that will grow in digital commerce in the coming years”



Sacha Michaud | Co-founder and deputy chair of Glovo.

Sacha Michaud (London, 1969), co-founder and deputy chair of Glovo, is an entrepreneur with more than 20 years' experience in the digital industry. Since founding his first company in the late 90s he has not ceased to participate in the launch of successful digital businesses such as LatinRed, Servidores.com, one of the first online hosting companies, and Binaria, a digital communication agency. In 2015 he and Oscar Pierre created Glovo, an app that allows you to get the best products in your city.

In this conversation we discuss issues such as the importance of digitalisation for small and medium-sized companies, increasing the number of women in STEM disciplines and the value of sustainability for businesses.

Glovo operates in more than 870 cities in 23 countries worldwide and boasts more than 9 million users and 20,000+ associated partners. How do you lead a company of these characteristics? What is your leadership style?

You do it with a commitment to achieving extremely fast growth in a highly competitive market, while safeguarding the company's culture. We have been fortunate enough to know who to choose to accompany us in this project. Even when we hired more senior professionals to create the first management team, greater importance was given to culture than know-how.

Nowadays, although those in positions of responsibility have had extensive careers, they know that Glovo is the great project of their lives and rather than having to know everything, they are part of an ongoing

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learning process. This philosophy is conveyed to the whole company; more than 2,600 people, who feel they can make a difference, that they have a voice. We advocate a horizontal and transparent leadership model. For example, we discuss figures openly and constantly; they are fully accessible. We want to be an open company and for our professionals to share this culture, to feel part of the project.

Glovo's success lies in the capacity to tailor the platform to users' needs. How was this transformation achieved? What role has technology played in this unstoppable growth?

We are a technology company and, as such, technology is the disruptive side of Glovo. We use technology to transform business models. In our case, we have three types of profiles: the user, who uses the app for purchases; the riders, who receive orders and are responsible for their delivery; and the partner or local business, which seeks to increase sales through a new channel. The speed of the changes in consumer dynamics forces us to adapt the platform constantly.

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For example, the pandemic has changed many things. Before we were used to ordering take away food, but the restrictions led to orders being made to supermarkets and local stores that had never offered this type of service. Our aim is to provide entities with the technology they need to order to digitalise their businesses and leverage this sales channel. I also think that that this trend will not disappear once the ongoing covid crisis ends. For this reason, we need to evaluate these three pillars of our marketplace constantly and identify how we can develop technology in each of them.

Without a shadow of a doubt, digitalisation has played a decisive role this year. How has Glovo contributed to the digital transformation of small and medium-sized companies during the health crisis?

This has actually been one of the aims since the project commenced in 2015; we have always been a multi-category sector in which local businesses have had a very central role. They have their day to day business activities and we provide them with an increasing sales channel, using the same infrastructure, the innovation being that now they receive a series of extra orders.

Before the pandemic, we accounted for between 5% and 10% of the sales of these local businesses. As a result of the restrictions, which limited customers' access to premises but allowed delivery, we now account for 30% or up to 40% of the sales of many users; we have become a very important channel. In other words, we are an ally and part of the solution.

However, I think the retail sector, local businesses, have to digitalise to compete with the big e-commerce companies. Consumers want to receive things even faster and being closer gives local businesses the competitive edge. This is a window of opportunity that won't last forever. Where once we were happy to receive an order in ten days, we now want it the same day, in 20 minutes, immediately. This is trend that will grow in digital commerce in the coming years. In the past, the big companies sourced the products, took them to enormous warehouses and then transported them, but they are already changing this dynamic to get closer to the consumer. However, this transformation cannot be achieved overnight. For this reason, retail businesses need to take advantage of this enormous opportunity and become a combination of an in-store retail sales outlet and a kind of virtual warehouse capable of providing users with immediate last-mile delivery.

In the course of your professional career you have founded various digital companies and invested in emerging companies. Who have been your points of reference? Which leaders or role models inspire you?

One of my role models has been Bill Gates not only due to his ability to compete with Apple, which had a much better product than Microsoft, and win almost 90% of the market share. But also because when Apple was on the verge of bankruptcy, he rescued the company, thinking that a world without Apple was unthinkable. Nowadays it is the biggest technology company in the world. I also admire him, because he knew when the time had come to step back and leave the company in the hands of the best professionals.

Closer to home, I would mention the colleagues I work with at Glovo: Oscar Pierre and our chairman. They are both excellent professionals who I learn from every day.

Inclusion and diversity are some the biggest challenges facing companies and society as a whole. However, the number of women pursuing professional careers in science and technology remains very low. What are the keys to attracting female talent in the new digital economy?

The problem lies at the beginning of the value chain, when women are deciding what they want to do with their lives. Young women do not consider technological careers, because they lack female role models, and I think that is what we need to change.

The first step is to teach them about the tech world. Being a programmer is very creative, you are constantly resolving problems, not just typing code day in day out. This is the reason why we need to teach young people about the inner workings of the tech companies so that they aspire to these roles, not only as programmers,

but also as leaders of these companies. Hiring women just to meet the gender quota is not the solution because the talent pool remains unchanged, you are just moving women from one company to another. We need to get to the root of the problem, to its source, when women are choosing their professional career, to show them the advantages this profession offers. The first advantage is the ability to work from anywhere in the world, something which is valued very highly by young people, enabling them to travel and program at the same time. The second is remuneration, they will earn more than a lawyer, more than those professionals who have always been our role models.

At Glovo we have a working group dedicated specifically to Women in tech, visiting schools and teaching young women what a tech company looks like from the inside, demonstrating to them that it is a very enjoyable job, offering many opportunities. In short, the aim is to create role models, for women to get out there and talk about their experiences. I think this is the solution. Sadly, we are not going to make it happen from one day to the next, but that is the way forward. We have started this project in Barcelona and the idea is to roll it out in the other countries where we operate over the next twelve months.

In the area of social responsibility, at Glovo you have commenced work on a project to reduce food waste. Maybe we could talk a little bit about this initiative. How can leaders transmit the importance of sustainability to their teams and stakeholders?

We have developed a project called Glovo Access which basically puts our technology (our platform) and the three pillars that underpin it (businesses, riders and glovers) at the service of not-for-profit organisations and municipal councils.

“Technology allows us to access a great deal of information and organise it in a way that makes it possible to make good data-based decisions”

At Glovo we have access, on the one hand, to waste food from our restaurants and supermarkets and, on the other hand, to entities in contact with vulnerable groups. What we do is put our platform at the service of these players. The idea was floated at the beginning of the pandemic when the restrictions were applied in the cities resulting in the closure of food kitchens, because the elderly were at high risk and had to avoid leaving their homes. That was when we developed the role of going to food kitchens to collect meals and deliver them to people's homes. We realised that the company's true worth lies in our platform and thought we should place it at the service of society not only during the pandemic, but indefinitely.

I think this initiative may also help not-for-profit organisation to put an end to the so-called "hunger queues" which stigmatise food kitchen users in their neighbourhoods.

Although still very new, these initiatives have already raised millions of euros in invested value, achieved hundreds of thousands of delivered orders and we have a team dedicated exclusively to Glovo Access which we will continue to expand.

How can technology help companies achieve their sustainability targets?

Technology is a facilitator that help us do things more efficiently. If something enables you to perform tasks more quickly with less effort, you are ultimately using less energy. A good example of this is the pandemic and working remotely; people travel less and consume less. This is possible thanks to the technology which allows us to work from home in the same way as if we were in the office.

As a society, we need to be aware of the value of technology, but also of its risks. I am not say this is something that companies or we as individuals have to do; however, it is something that regulators should bear very much in mind. Otherwise, I think technology is something incredible which is of great help to us.

To come back to sustainability, technology is a facilitator because it allows us to do more things with fewer resources. It also enables us to use data-driven measurements and make better decisions. In other words, technology allows us to access a great deal of information and organise it in a way that makes it possible to take good data-based decisions.

At Glovo we are fully committed to sustainability and are close to achieving carbon neutrality. We are committed to being a carbon neutral company by the end of the year. However, we are acutely aware that the ultimate aim is to reduce rather than just offset consumption. I believe that leaders should showcase sustainability, not only because saving the planet is crucial, but from a purely selfish point of view, it provides us with access to the best talent. At present, the most brilliant professionals want to work in companies that take sustainability seriously. Therefore, if you want to attract talent these initiatives must be in your company's DNA. So, even if it is only for this reason, having a genuine strategy in this regard is essential.

"Brilliant professionals want to work in companies that take sustainability seriously"

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