



Sintela

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2023 rank 6

Annual sales growth over three years 231.40%

Remote sensors developer

The US-Mexico border, oil pipelines, and busy railways are among the critical infrastructure that can be constantly monitored thanks to this Bristol company. Its distributed fibre-sensing technology allows clients to keep track of the position of trains, identify damage to oil pipelines, and secure electricity pylons against metal theft.

The chief executive, Magnus McEwen-King, 51, set up Sintela six years ago with four co-founders who had previously worked together at QinetiQ, the listed defence technology company. Sales hit £10.4 million last year, 90 per cent of them drawn from overseas.

What it's really like managing rapid growth

The brains behind three of this year's Sunday Times 100 companies give their advice

Entrepreneurs need help to turn their ideas into reality, but who to turn to and the best way to work with them can differ markedly. The founders of three of this year's Sunday Times 100 companies — including our No 1 ranked star [Join Talent](#), an outsourced recruitment agency — say they have adopted a range of strategies, from striking exclusive distribution deals with global corporations to teaming up with social media influencers.

Magnus McEwen-King is the co-founder and chief executive of [Sintela](#), based in Bristol. His team of 42 engineers make devices that turn long stretches of fibre optics — often 50 to 100km — into a sensor by conditioning the light that enters the fibre. The devices measure temperature, vibration, acoustics and strain, meaning that rail lines can be remotely monitored for wear and tear, oil pipelines protected from attack and national borders policed, all in real time.

“Our technology is a niche technology and very few people in the world can do the physics that is necessary to achieve the sensitivity [of our sensors],” McEwen-King said. “A lot of large companies struggle with that deep technical ability, [especially] one that is rapidly changing. Our challenge [as a company] is the opposite. How do we take a niche technology and apply it globally?”

His solution is to work with larger companies that supply into specific industries where its sensors can help with maintenance and security. It has struck deals with SLB (formerly Schlumberger), Frauscher Sensonic, part of a global rail industry group, and the like, as well as well-known telecoms company that can't be named.

“‘You help us with a problem, and we help you with a problem’,” is how McEwen-King describes the mutual benefit of the arrangement. Sintela takes on the continuous development of its cutting-edge technology while its partners sell its kit to their customers across the world. It's a winning formula: founded in 2017, Sintela had sales of £10.4 million in the year to June 2022, and they will be considerably higher this year.