

# TECH SOUTH WEST

## Developing the Region's Tech Ecosystem

### Tech Sector Digital Platform Project

#### 1 Project outline

Activity to support and build the tech ecosystem has increased significantly during the pandemic, with Tech South West working with other tech clusters in the region to launch and run several new initiatives:

- The Regional Tech Leadership Forum (80 members)
- Regional Tech Talent STEMM Group (65 members)
- Region's first dedicated news site [www.swtechdaily.co.uk](http://www.swtechdaily.co.uk)
- First full regional virtual accelerator programme for startups <https://www.techsouthwest.co.uk/startupstudio/>
- Commissioning of the first regional tech report in partnership with Deloitte and Tech Nation
- First full region online Tech Talent Summit being organised for Nov 2021 with key partners including Exeter College and Somerset Education Business Partnership

With the digital acceleration spurred by the pandemic, membership has increased, with over 2500 members now part of Tech South West, and a big increase in digital engagement, as the tech sector shifts to increasing online activity at a more regional level, including online events, workshops, networking, collaboration events and conferences etc.

Key new partners working with Tech South West as part of this digital growth include Deloitte, Natwest, University of Exeter, British Business Bank and SETsquared Exeter. The regional Tech South West Steering Group now includes every cluster in the region: Tech Exeter, Digital Somerset, Software Cornwall, Digital Northern Devon, TechSPARK, Software Cornwall, Silicon South, Engine Shed, FutureSpace and Tech Swindon.

A key part of building on this progress is to develop and facilitate an online platform that would take advantage, support, nurture and grow the digital engagement across the sector, to facilitate growth.

## 2 Objectives & Requirements

Provide a digital solution to

- Support connecting, engagement, collaboration and knowledge sharing for the long term
- Allow different groups and interests a digital space for engagement and collaboration
- Allow for targeted flow of relevant information - eg to startups, SMEs, or specific sectors: healthtech, education tech, data science, marine

Requirements include

- Platform has to be hosted and moderated
- Platform has to be futureproof for organisations and individuals to commit and to minimise future change/disruption
- GDPR compliant, secure platform, 2-step authentication password encryption, cyber security best practice
- Core group of administrators able to run it - initial core group (Tech South West and other clusters/interested organisations)
- Easy to use across multiple devices
- Range of functions for example easy communications across the network, set up and run groups, directory, events, forums, networking, messaging, jobs board, resource library, different levels of involvement - e.g tech sector senior leaders, employees, support organisations, suppliers to the sector

## 4 Outline of costs

Initial estimates

Project element	Cost	Notes
SAAS community building platforms fees	Range £75-200 a month for the functionality required for this project	Ongoing annual or monthly fees
Developing and implementing project through to launch	£3000	Research phase and setting up on platform - initial content, user migration etc
Ongoing management - including overseeing groups, new members, content curation, membership engagement	£1000/month estimate	

Marketing and PR to attract new organisations / individuals beyond core membership	£500-1000/month depending on level we want to activate this (LinkedIn campaigns etc)	
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## 5 Funding approaches

- Partnerships - government, relevant tech companies in the SW (e.g. Neighbourly) operating in SW, all tech clusters split cost
- Membership fees introduced (individual level, or organisational level) - helps particularly with ongoing costs and increases revenue as usage grows
- Sponsorship - from across the range of partners/sponsors already operating in SW

## 6 Wider ecosystem considerations

- Platform that the various tech clusters can use
- Platform that institutions/organisations can use - for own groups and to reach out across the wider tech sector ecosystem
- News feeds through from social channels, [www.swtechdaily.co.uk](http://www.swtechdaily.co.uk)
- Areas and ways to bring in and facilitate existing and new groups/forums e.g. Regional Tech Leadership Forum, startup studio cohorts of tech founders etc..

## 7 Options - initial thoughts

1 Develop and build own platform (or in collaboration with other tech clusters and organisations)

2 Use SAAS solution - brand leaders set out below:

<https://www.mightynetworks.com/>

Mighty Networks 'brings together your community, online courses, sales pages, and more in one place under your brand, available on every platform', making it a good choice for "creators" and brands who want to connect with a B2C audience. Mighty Networks is a broad 'all in one' web platform with many features, with online courses being one of its standout features.

<https://guild.co/>

Guild is a simple to use platform available on web and mobile, which was designed for professional groups, networks and communities to connect, communicate and collaborate. This makes it a popular choice for B2B organisations, membership organisations, professional services, and B2B media businesses, as well as providing a safe and secure networking space for professionals.

<https://tribe.so/>

customizable community platform to help organisations launch online communities. Tribe also offers embeddable widgets, comprehensive API, and modular apps that can be installed to improve the functionality of the community.

<https://hivebrite.com/>

A dedicated networking space to share knowledge and experiences, benefit from targeted opportunities, and keep in contact. The platform allows organisations to create a community website with a private portal for their members to interact, and to manage their community by collecting memberships, creating events, sharing opportunities, and sending communication campaigns.

Others include Discourse, Vanilla Forums, Disciple and Spectrum.

Conclusions: More cost effective to use SAAS option as these are now well established in the market, all platforms are customisable, used by a range of reputable brands/organisations, and have the functionality required for this project.

## **8 Next Steps**

- Detail objectives and project scope
- Map out stakeholders and audiences
- Establish potential partners
- Consider funding options and budget requirements
- Develop project timeline
- Develop fully costed brief
- Consider ongoing management, content and curation elements
- Carry out research for steering group to select preferred solution
- Set up and run agile project to build
- Finalise targets for usage / growth per quarter
- Develop supporting Marketing and PR campaign for launch and activation
- Launch
- Activation - including reporting vs targets

## **Background reading**

Reviews and comparisons of SAAS options

<https://www.adamenfroy.com/community-platforms>

<https://www.softwareworld.co/best-community-software/>

<https://www.capterra.co.uk/directory/30800/community/software>