

KYAN

SURREY BUSINESS AWARDS

Employer of the Year

Please give background information of the business.

Whether it's Jeff Bezos working from his cluttered garage or Mark Zuckerberg coding in a dimly-lit dorm room, there are a handful of these seemingly perfect and often cliché startup stories. Ours isn't really like that. There was no magic moment, no silent partner or secret investor. Kyan began (and very much still is) the endeavour of three friends wanting to build brilliant products for great clients at a great place to work.

Kyan was founded in 2002 by Laurent Maguire, Piers Palmer and Gavin Shinfield. Back then, 'web design' was a relatively simple thing by today's standards. You were lucky to have a 1024x768 screen resolution, and the first iPhone was five years away, so the responsive web wasn't even a concept.

We built sites for clients large and small, making a name for ourselves as 'those that could'. We became known fairly early on as a reliable web development team, and it wasn't long before we could call ourselves an agency. Our setup was traditional — designers for the front-end, developers for the back, with our founders remaining hands on across all areas of the business.

By 2010, we'd outgrown Smithbrook Kilns, and made the big move into the glitzy centre of Guildford. It was here that Kyan's growth really accelerated almost as quickly as the internet evolved. New disciplines like UX, mobile internet and apps became commonplace. Our client list grew too, and before long we needed Project Managers and a Client Services team to keep everything moving.

During this time, we were able to explore our surroundings, setting the foundations for our now bustling events programme. WMG started as our humble, local-level meetup, and we launched WXG, our flagship tech conference. These events brought together the web community as well as giving us the opportunity to meet new friends, new partners and new colleagues. It also gave our staff a chance to socialise with our clients, business partners and potential employees.

With the award shelf filling up and our portfolio expanding furthermore, we found our services shifting from that of traditional 'web design'. We had launched games, platforms, web and mobile applications, as well as experimenting with new technologies such as VR, AI and 3D printing. With new staff (and new toys) taking up more and more space, the time came again to find some larger lodgings.

In 2017, Kyan moved exactly 538 yards to a new and entirely bespoke studio space. Refurbished to spec, our new home gives us room to grow, and new facilities to make our employee feel valued and supported. This includes a team bleachers area, multiple meeting spaces, meeting booths, a bar, hot desks, chill out areas, recreation options and a fab lab. In our few years here, we've already welcomed many new faces to the team, growing out our marketing, product design and sales teams, bringing the Kyan headcount to over 40 people.

The modern day Kyan is a sum of all its parts and the lessons learned along the journey so far — an independent company built on the importance of culture, care and quality, with a mission to build bulletproof products rapidly, with the best people, for the best partners.

Why your business is such a great place to work?

'Putting our people first' is certainly an overused tagline. But we live by it. Since our formative years, Kyan has put company culture at the very forefront of our values. Of course, we offer the basics which are becoming commonplace in the modern day career space; flexible working hours, pension contributions, and so on. But that's just the tip of the iceberg for us.

Employee wellbeing is fundamentally important to us. We spend most of our lives at work, so it's essential that Kyan is as comfortable and supportive as possible for our staff. We offer subsidised membership to a local gym, which 45% of our staff use regularly. We provide a cycle to work scheme. And because we're mostly desk-based, we have a professional masseuse visit to ensure we've got no lingering knots or strains. Also, if it's your birthday, you get the day off!

But most importantly are the opportunities and environment that we all strive to uphold. Our flat structure means that there's no dated hierarchy or reporting lines. Information is shared and not siloed, and this promotes true collaboration between people and teams.

Weekly 'Lunch & Meet' sessions give staff an opportunity to talk to the company about whatever they like; work or personal. Our Friday wind-down meetings are a look back at the week just passed and are hosted by a different member of staff each time. During these meets, we have a 'shoutouts' section to ensure that staff are recognised for their hard work throughout the week. Anyone can submit a shoutout.

Teams are rotated often, meaning that no one is working on the same thing for too long. This sharing of projects means people can frequently diversify and up-skill.

And then there's our events culture. Which we're most proud of. We're incredibly active, ensuring that we go out as a team at least two or three times a month. This can be anything from archery to escape rooms, games nights to cocktail making, or perhaps an off-site sports day (you're never too old for an egg and spoon race). We also pull out all the stops for our Christmas and Summer parties. During the warmer months, we hold Kyanfest at an undisclosed farm location on the outskirts of Guildford — an afternoon and evening of music, games, food and camping.

How do you ensure your team understands the organisation's goals, ambitions and values and their role within it?

Our company handbook is an online and open-source resource that we are all able to see and edit. In this handbook we talk openly and informally about our Kyan goals and values (Geekiness, Team, Honesty, Loyalty, Innovation and Drive). The handbook is a constantly growing resource, so it's safe to say that it is well used by staff.

We use OfficeVibe to survey our staff on a weekly basis. It polls staff with questions around culture, wellbeing, company goals, relationships between various teams, and so on. It tracks answers and creates a score for the company overall. This score is our indicator of what we can do better, and where we are excelling. OfficeVibe's content is built around our company values, so if anyone is unsure or feels that our ambitions are unclear, it's a good place to leave named or anonymous feedback, which is quickly addressed by our Head of People in a friendly manner.

What have you done to go the extra mile for your staff?

Most recently, we have set up a Mental Health handbook, which is a resource available to all staff. It provides help, advice, articles and information on mental health from a personal and work perspective. Some members of staff have become certified mental health first aiders, and are now qualified to help any staff who may be in need.

Since moving to our new premises, we've built our bespoke meeting and relaxation areas for our staff. So there's always somewhere comfortable to chat, work or just chill out or have lunch. We're proud of the studio that we've built and the entire layout and setup is with a 'people-first' mindset.

We've setup a number of standing desks and foot pads for our staff. Desk work can take its toll on your posture, so we feel that it's hugely important to mitigate any physical health issues. Standing desks can raise and lower, giving staff the opportunity to vary their working position throughout the day. We also encourage our staff to make their desk space 'theirs' with personal items, plants and photos.

We provide a full bar of healthy drinks and snacks for our staff, which is replenished every day. On top of this, we host a monthly wellness breakfast. A member of staff can prepare a healthy breakfast for the entire company, which we all eat together before starting the day's work.

We also cover the inevitable Friday evening bar tab, so anyone who fancies a pre-weekend sharpener can join us without taking out their wallet.

How do employees develop within your organisation?

We provide a dedicated training budget to each employee from the day that they start at Kyan. This is for everyone, not just our technical and creative teams. For instance, our Client Services team may choose to attend a communication workshop, or perhaps our marketing team want to up-skill their photography skills. There's also an equipment budget, so if there's anything that an employee needs to make their life easier, such as an orthopaedic chair, assistive technology, or useful a particular dietary requirement, we can provide that for them.

We periodically rotate our pods. A pod is a team made up of a project manager, developers, designers and an account manager. Rotating staff into different pods means that their projects are varied and they can work with a range of different clients using different disciplines. This is especially beneficial to our software engineers, who can switch between programming languages and platforms.

Describe why you should win this award?

We've put an immeasurable amount of work into making Kyan a great place to work by experience and reputation. Employee feedback is high, with our OfficeVibe score currently at 8.6 and climbing. Clients and partners often work from Kyan HQ and vocalise their adoration for our culture; that it's welcoming to visitors and staff alike. In fact, our door is always open for anyone who'd like to take a peek inside. This is how some employees came to work at Kyan; either via some of our free office-based events, or by taking a tour of the studio via a friend or client who works here.

Our hiring process has always put attitude over aptitude. Of course, we hire skilled people, but cultural fit is really important to us and it's how we keep Kyan a great place to work; by ensuring we give brilliant people a chance to work with us and give them access to the tools they need to feel and be brilliant when working.

Our staff turnover is exceptionally low, with some team members working at Kyan for as long as 15 years.

And finally, our transparency is what we think sets us apart. We approach this in a number of ways. For instance, we'll invite various members of staff into job interviews regardless of their role, because we feel it's important for potential employees to get a good feel for the business, and also for our employees to get a good feel for people who may end up working at Kyan. We are open, top to bottom, with our financial figures and the rationale behind any business decisions, which are usually made as a team rather than a top-down directive.

Going forward, we are always improving, always listening to our staff on what we can do better, and always working towards the common goal of putting Kyan and its people on the map as a great place to work and brilliant people to work with.

“People are friends, not just work colleagues. And so working together, socialising together, helping each other out — it all comes naturally.”

JESS MITCHELL, CLIENT PARTNER

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