

TOUGH CHALLENGES  
NEW POSSIBILITIES

It's a time for creativity,  
collaboration & honest  
communications

Simon Jones

Senior Consultant, Chime Group

Welcome to 'Tough Challenges, New Possibilities', the interview series that asks world class business advisors and executives to reflect on success and key challenges for small business in difficult times. Next in the series is Simon Jones, communications advisor to global CEOs and leading tech entrepreneurs.



Photography: Thomas Skovsen

## Simon Jones

Senior Consultant, Chime CGroup

Simon delivers strategic counsel in communications and reputation management for governments, corporations and individuals around the world. He advises chief executives and chairs of global organisations, in addition to managing complex and global communications campaigns for some of the world's leading brands, including Barclays, the BBC, Coca Cola, Facebook and Vodafone. Simon is currently on the Pollinate Advisory Board.

### What's been your biggest business challenge?

Saying "no" to the late Lord Tim Bell, the formidable former adviser to Margaret Thatcher and co-founder of PR firm Bell Pottinger. I had joined Chime in its acquisition of Harvard PR, where I was managing director. But in 2012, Lord Bell announced he was spinning off the Bell Pottinger side of the business and asked who was coming with him. Most of the team stood up but I said I was staying. PR had to be about more than spin. I was searching for authenticity and truth and wanted to do things the right way.

### And your biggest personal challenge?

My father's passing two years ago taught me a lot about dealing with loss and finding a way within myself to move on. It was a very difficult time. Loss is a great challenge that human beings are not programmed to cope with.



### What's the biggest challenge small businesses face coming out of the pandemic?

Dancing with fear - overcoming an all-pervading sense of fear and uncertainty. The cushioning against Covid-19's full impact, with furloughed workers and bank loan payment holidays, could present a false reality, preventing firms from restarting trading in dynamic and different ways. Small firms need to look at regenerative business models to restore prosperity without resorting to defensive or protective strategies.

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What are you most excited about in today's small businesses?

The really exciting ones have a genuine passion and a vision to make their dream into a reality. A crisis requires courage and commitment to stick with a vision. There are many entrepreneurs with those qualities and I'm hopeful they will pull through.

How important will good leadership and communications be?

Both are absolutely vital to maintain public trust and faith and overcome fear and uncertainty. This will allow small firms to continue pivoting into new areas, such as the gin distillers who moved into making hand gel sanitiser during the Covid-19 crisis. When you pivot, you create new exciting environments around you.

Will there be a “new normal” after the crisis? Or will everything return to business as usual?

“New normal” is a cliché but there's some truth in it. There's no turning back. Covid-19 is with us. Let's forget trying to recreate what we had and focus on doing something fresh and new, investing in how we evolve out of this.



## What role can technology play?

Technology has to be viewed in terms of who it serves, rather than just what it does, with humans at the very top. It has to be in the service of what we want it to do. It's in the service of science when it comes to finding cures for pandemics and in the service of efficiency as we create aqueducts to move money around more effectively.

## How can financial companies do better at helping small firms?

Applying and distributing technology in more equitable ways can create real social impact, enabling finance to flow much better. That requires strong leadership and a people-centric approach and will be vital as the world emerges from the pandemic and adapts to new opportunities and possibilities.



## How can technology enable small businesses to make a difference?

Technology can level the playing field, giving small operators the same power as larger companies to achieve goals such as reaching new customers and entering new markets. In advertising and communications, social media enables brands to get messages across in brighter and more accessible ways.

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## What excites you most about what might be possible over the next five years?

I get excited about democratisation of technology. It makes my heart leap when a London Underground busker has payment technology enabling electronic tipping. What other problems can technology solve for the small guy?



## If you were to start in business again, what would you like to disrupt?

People-powered delivery. I recently sourced last-minute concert tickets in Cardiff for an event at Wembley. Old-fashioned infrastructure wouldn't get the tickets there in time, yet trains left Cardiff for Paddington every hour. Any passenger could easily have delivered them. An Uber-style platform allowing people to deliver products as part of journeys they're already making would revolutionise this area and vastly improve our lives.

## What's impossible in business today that will be fully possible within the next ten years?

Convergence of AI, 5G and the Internet of Things will transform business models, changing every business sector. Fusing biotech data with business will bring the currently "impossible" within reach. Biometrics will transform what we eat and how we exercise, learn and work. From payments to the discovery of cures for diseases, biometric data will become the currency of the new social economy.



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