

North-East wholesaler is in the awards as it picks up UK's fastest-growing consumer goods crown

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A North-East wholesaler was recognised as the fastest-growing consumer products firm in the country when it was honoured at a national awards ceremony last week.

Hartlepool-based Phoenix 2 Retail, which is the UK's leading distributor of smoking alternative products, was announced as winner of the category at the UK Fast Growth Index awards in London. Its co-founder, Rachael Kelly, also walked away from the night in the prizes, having picked up the title of Fastest Growing Female-Led Firm.

The Index celebrates the 50 fastest-growing firms in seven UK regions and nations, recognising 350 businesses across a wide range of industries that are achieving extraordinary growth.

Fast-growing firms make up just one per cent of the UK business population but represent 50% of the total small to medium enterprise turnover output, meaning they play a vital role in the UK's economy.

Phoenix 2 Retail is more than playing its part in the story, having grown its turnover from £160m in 2023 to £200m this year – despite having been established just four years ago.

Set up by Rachael and her husband, Chris, in 2020, it now employs 80 people across three sites and supplies millions of vapes and other smoking alternative products each year to a host of leading retailers, including Morrisons, Tesco and Booker.

Chris, who is the company's managing director, said: "First of all I'm incredibly proud of Rachael, whose belief in what we were setting out to achieve led us to establish Phoenix 2 Retail, and whose day-to-day involvement all-too-often goes unnoticed. But not anymore!

"Inevitably, any success we have is a shared project. We want to make a difference to smokers by helping them to access the products they need to find a suitable alternative to the hugely catastrophic damage that combustible cigarettes can cause.

"We have done that by ensuring fully tested and compliant products are being sold legally, responsibly and conveniently in the same retail outlets where they do their weekly shop.

"While this award is a reflection of our hard work as a company, it's also a reflection that what we are setting out to achieve is making a difference to smokers who are looking for a healthier life."

The award was followed up by a silver in the Best Growing Business in the UK Business Awards, which were announced last week, rounding off a successful year for Phoenix 2 Retail.

It has also seen it strengthening its position at the forefront of its industry by launching its own independent testing regime, forging a safe retailing partnership with Safe and launching a recycling scheme for single-use vapes.

Not only did the schemes help address people's concerns with vapes, it helped Phoenix 2 Retail build trust in its operation, strengthen its reputation and boost its turnover, which is expected to reach £200m this year, up from £160m for 2023.

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This press release was issued by Penguin PR. For further information please contact Simon Burch at Penguin PR on 07735 397888 or email simon@penguinpr.co.uk