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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

What it takes to be a CFO+

Ben Averis is CFO at Yoto — the screen-free audio platform for kids that's scaling fast across global markets. In this conversation, he shares how he's balancing finance, operations, and supply chain while helping build a resilient, product-led business.

Speakers



David McClelland
TV Journalist Host



Ben Averis
CFO, Yoto

Ben Averis's role at Yoto is bigger than finance – and that's by design. As CFO of the fast-growing kids' audio platform, he also oversees operations, systems, and supply chain.

From managing seasonal inventory flows to navigating international expansion, Ben's work touches every part of the business.

In this episode of CFO Playbook, he joins David McClelland to talk about what it really means to be a CFO+ in a product-led, hardware-enabled company.

They explore the strategic value of seasonality, how to build financial resilience with flexible capital tools, and why a strong sense of product passion – paired with financial discipline – is essential for modern finance leaders.

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

David McClelland: What does Yoto do?

Ben Averis: Hopefully, some listeners are familiar with Yoto. We've been around for four or five Christmases and have seen a lot of success. Yoto is a great product for kids. It's simple—through high-quality audio, which helps children learn independently. The focus is on giving kids control. Those who know the product will recognize it as a speaker that works with physical cards. You insert a card, and it plays music, stories, educational content, or even interactive games we've introduced—all designed to keep kids away from screens, which is the most important part.

David McClelland: You described it as a speaker that uses a physical card or cartridge. How do you typically explain that to others?

Ben Averis: That's right. It's a credit card-sized card that slots into the player. The device recognizes whether it's Winnie the Pooh, an Enid Blyton story, or a Beatles song, and plays it accordingly.

David McClelland: You've got a broad catalogue, but you mentioned the importance of keeping kids away from screens. So there's no screen on the device—deliberately. That's interesting. As a parent, what has your relationship with the product been during your time at the company?

Ben Averis: It's a product my kids have grown up with. When I started at Yoto four years ago, my eldest was around three or four and was using it occasionally. As they've gotten older, they've used it more and more. It's a great bedtime tool—they use it regularly to fall asleep and also in the car. We recently visited friends on the other side of the UK, and all the kids were in the back with headphones on, listening to different tracks and songs, which kept them entertained. It's a great product. I have three boys, all of whom are pretty tough user testers.

David McClelland: You mentioned how many Christmases Yoto has been selling products. Can you tell us more about the scale of the business—what markets you're operating in, and any metrics that highlight where Yoto is today and how you're scaling?

Ben Averis: I mentioned Christmas because we're a seasonal business. Our product is often at the top of Christmas wish lists, which brings specific challenges—we can touch on supply chain and related topics later.

Currently, Yoto operates in five countries. The U.S. is our largest market, accounting for over 60% of sales. We started in the UK, and also sell in France, Canada, and, most recently, Australia. All are predominantly English-speaking markets, except France. We've been able to scale quickly by leveraging a strong catalogue of English-language content.

Now in our fifth year, we have millions of families using Yoto—many with multiple devices in the same household. One key metric we focus on is our North Star: weekly active families. We track engagement closely, asking: how well is the product serving families and encouraging consistent use?

We set a high bar for engagement. A “weekly active family” means the player has been used for at least five minutes in a week. That may not sound like much, but when you consider that many of the audio tracks are short—like songs or book chapters—it's a meaningful threshold.

Ben Averis: When a large number of families use Yoto each week, we see that as a sign it's becoming a habit—a part of daily routines. For example, using it at breakfast while making porridge and the kids are listening to Yoto Daily—these are strong leading indicators for us. From my perspective, consistent engagement like that is what drives long-term success and revenue.

David McClelland: What's the story behind the product? I understand one of the founders is still the CEO. Where did Yoto come from—and what's the story behind the name itself?

Ben Averis: There isn't a particularly dramatic story behind the name "Yoto." The founders have been asked about it many times—they chose it because it worked, and because it was easy for kids to pronounce.

The company was founded by Ben (now CEO) and Filip (CTO), both of whom came from a background in music streaming. After leaving their previous company and becoming parents, they realized there wasn't a good way for children to listen to audio. You could repurpose a Bluetooth speaker or hand over a phone or tablet, but those options felt suboptimal.

Ben often tells a story about shopping for a stroller for his youngest child. The sales rep highlighted a model that came with an iPad holder, and he thought, there has to be a better way. Putting a screen in front of a baby just didn't feel right. That moment sparked the idea for Yoto. They combined their experience in music and industry connections to bring the product to life.

David McClelland: As CFO working alongside the two founders—now CEO and CTO—what has that relationship been like? In your experience, how does it differ from working in senior roles at companies where the founders aren't involved? Do founders tend to have a different connection to the product compared to professional executives who come in later?

Ben Averis: You mentioned the relationship to the product—and that's key. I've held similar strategic finance roles in other companies, often in more traditional, professionally led environments where CEOs or shareholders had finance or sales backgrounds.

This is different. Yoto is product-led. There's a strong belief that if the product is high-quality and people love it, everything else—growth, revenue, success—will follow.

You can't replicate that kind of passion with a hired CEO focused solely on performance or share price. When founders are involved, there's a genuine commitment to making the product the best it can be. That clarity of purpose makes decision-making easier in many ways. If we all agree that improving the product is the priority, then we stay aligned.

David McClelland: Ideally, in any role, we're fully engaged and aligned with the product and the company. But given how closely you work with the two founders—and how connected they are to the product—do you feel that influences your own relationship with the company and the product? In other words, does their deep involvement shape how you connect with and approach your role as CFO?

Ben Averis: It's quite infectious, actually. Their passion—down to the coding level in some discussions—really influences how I approach my role. I never look at things purely through a finance lens. For me, context is everything. The more you understand the broader picture—by reading, listening, and engaging across teams—the better your decisions will be.

Their enthusiasm rubs off on me. I want to understand why we're pushing for investment in one area or trying to approve a specific budget. It's never just about spending more—it's about improving the customer experience. That clarity makes decision-making easier.

If someone simply asks to double their budget, without context, it's easy to say no. But if they explain it's to enhance the customer experience in a meaningful way, it changes the conversation. When customers love the product, better unit economics and recurring revenue follow—and that's exactly what I'm responsible for. It all connects.

David McClelland: Does that also bring you closer to your customers and users—especially since you're a user yourself? Of course, many CFOs engage with their company's product or service, but do you feel that your relationship with the founders creates a greater sense of immediacy or connection to the end user?

Ben Averis: Yes, I'd say that's absolutely right. But at the same time, I have to be conscious of not becoming too much of a fan. Shareholders wouldn't respect my role if I simply said yes to everything we wanted to pursue. Every business has constraints, and it's important that I approach decisions objectively.

That's where data plays a critical role. From listening to other CFOs on your podcast, it's clear that data is a common thread. You can talk about how something might benefit the customer, but it's much more powerful when you can validate it through user testing and real data. It removes subjectivity and leads to faster alignment across the business.

So, while I'm deeply passionate about the product and want it to be the best it can be, I balance that with the financial discipline and rigor that come from a strong data-driven approach.

David McClelland: Absolutely—it's important to have that passion, but also to temper it with real data. You mentioned metrics like weekly active users, which suggests you've found a healthy balance.

Before we dive deeper into Yoto and your approach to finance and operational strategy, let's take a step back. Ben, can you tell us a bit about your background? What's been your journey in finance that led you to Yoto?

Ben Averis: I started out at PwC, initially in audit, and then moved into M&A, focusing mainly on consumer transactions. I spent about seven or eight years there before deciding to move into industry. That was a deliberate decision—my family has run businesses at various points, and I've always had a strong interest in understanding the broader workings of a business, beyond just the deal side of M&A.

My first industry role was with a consumer business—a home and garden centre chain owned by Terrafirma. It was a clear, structured play: a three-to-five-year plan with specific goals.

After that, I joined Audley Travel, a private equity-backed business supported by 3i. I spent five years there in a strategic finance role, helping chart the business's progress—identifying what was working, what needed to change, and ultimately preparing for key investment or divestment moments.

That's the path that led me to where I am now at Yoto.

David McClelland: You were at Audley Travel during the pandemic, which must have been a particularly interesting and challenging time—especially in the travel industry. What was that experience like?

Ben Averis: Whenever I'm asked about the moment I learned the most in my career, I always come back to that period—being at a travel company when COVID hit. It was, without question, the most intense learning experience I've had.

There was a lot of anxiety and concern, of course, but also a sharp focus on fundamentals. We went from business as usual to almost zero revenue overnight, and had to immediately focus on the basics—above all, cash flow. No one was traveling, no holidays were being booked. It became all about managing liquidity, day by day.

You don't really learn that kind of crisis management from professional exams. You might study it in theory, but nothing compares to building those models under real pressure and understanding why they're absolutely critical.

As strange as it sounds, I look back on that time with a kind of appreciation. It was incredibly difficult for everyone—professionally and personally—but I learned so much. And those lessons have shaped how I approach my role now at Yoto.

David McClelland: What was it about Yoto that made you want to make the leap—from professional practice to retail, then travel, and finally to an early-stage scale-up like Yoto? What drew you in and made it feel like the right move?

Ben Averis: I was definitely ambitious about moving into the next role—I wanted to become a CFO and take that number one seat. But making that transition isn't easy. Someone has to take a chance on you. It's not just about doing your time; most companies hiring a CFO are looking for someone who already holds that title. So, one of the key opportunities with Yoto was that chance—the shareholders gave me my first CFO role. Four years later, it's going really well.

Another big factor was the quality of the investors. Paul McCartney is a shareholder—though not on the board—and we've had backing from some very high-quality venture capital firms. That kind of network and calibre of investment is incredibly exciting to be part of.

And of course, there's the product, which we've talked about. But also Ben. He's been through multiple businesses and knows what it takes to grow something from the ground up. When you're considering a move, the people you'll be working with are just as important as the role itself.

David McClelland: It's similar to what investors look for—not just the product or service, but also the founder and leadership team. The same applies when considering joining a company. You're asking: are these people going to be the right environment for me to grow, to develop my career, and to help support the business?

With that in mind, let's talk more about your role at Yoto. Like many early-stage or scale-up businesses—though I'm not sure how you'd describe where you are right now—people often wear multiple hats. Is that the case for you? Would you describe your role as CFO-plus, so to speak?

Ben Averis: I'd describe us as being in the scale-up phase now. We've moved beyond the startup stage, found product-market fit, and we're growing. We're now just over 200 people, so definitely in scale-up territory.

As for the "CFO-plus" description—yes, that's accurate. When I joined, I was the first person in finance. I built the team from the ground up, hiring the second and third members, and we're now up to seven in the finance team.

But my role extends well beyond finance. I also oversee operations, systems, and supply chain. That includes working closely with our manufacturing and logistics teams. This year alone, I've visited China, Thailand, and Vietnam to stay close to our production and supply chain processes. I also work alongside our operations director to ensure fulfilment runs smoothly—from the moment an order is placed to when it reaches the customer.

It's a broad remit, and while some areas fall outside my formal training, I believe I can add real value—both strategically and by mentoring talented people across the organisation.

David McClelland: You mentioned your interest in business more broadly—finance being a core part, of course—but also in understanding the full operational picture. Having the opportunity not only to serve as CFO, but also to oversee areas like supply chain and visit regions like China sounds like a great advantage.

That said, how do you reflect on the pros and cons of wearing so many hats in your role? It clearly offers breadth and impact, but are there challenges that come with it? It sounds like a significant workload—as it often is in startup and scale-up environments.

Ben Averis: It's definitely a lot of work, and wearing multiple hats can be challenging—especially when it comes to switching contexts. But from a business and decision-making perspective, it's also a huge advantage. As I mentioned earlier, context is everything. When you understand what's happening across the business—including finance, operations, and supply chain—you're better equipped to make decisions that impact multiple teams and functions. That breadth of understanding is a real positive.

The main challenge, though, is time. I have a large number of direct reports, and I want to give each of them my full attention. But when something urgent comes up in one area, it can mean less time for another. I have to be very intentional with how I allocate my time and energy across the teams I support.

Another key challenge is making sure I'm not just managing the work, but also nurturing the people doing it. I don't want to do everything myself—I can't. It's important to me that the teams are constantly developing. Whether it's the supply chain team or finance, I want them to grow into more senior responsibilities and evolve with the business. That takes time outside of the day-to-day, and finding space for that is something I care deeply about, even if it's not always easy.

David McClelland: That kind of time investment pays off in the long run—developing your team now ensures they can step up as the business grows. Without that support, you'd likely face even more pressure down the line.

How much of your role is focused on the other critical piece: fundraising? Are you heavily involved and in the trenches when it comes to raising capital?

Ben Averis: We use a mix of debt products, and they've been really effective—thanks in large part to the support we've received from our banking partners. On the equity side, Ben typically takes the lead, and I support him behind the scenes, especially when it comes to financials and analysis.

On the debt side, that's where I lead. And yes, it does take up a significant amount of time. But I've found that it's very relationship-driven. I stay in regular contact with our finance providers so we can have fast, agile conversations—whether it's exploring ways to support growth or assessing if there are new products that might be a good fit.

The “little and often” approach really works. By checking in consistently and keeping them informed about what's happening in the business, we've built strong relationships. Then, when we really need their support, they're ready and willing to step in.

David McClelland: That's quite different from the typical annual or quarterly investor update—it sounds more like an ongoing, open dialogue. In those regular conversations with investors and financial supporters, what are they most interested in hearing from you? Are they looking for reassurance, signals of strategic shifts, or insights on navigating a competitive market? What tends to come up most often in those chats?

Ben Averis: We check in with our investors and banking partners about once a month. On the shareholder side, one of the key themes is scalability. The question we get most often is: How scalable can Yoto be? We want to move fast and stay agile, but we also want to ensure we're building a business that could be 10 times larger than it is today.

So a lot of the questions are strategic. For example: How's the investment in this area going? How are we progressing with systems upgrades? We're very conscious that investing in the right systems is what will make us truly scalable. It's not about constantly growing headcount—we want efficiency and long-term capability.

On the banking side, the conversations are a bit different. Banks are more focused on the fundamentals—how we're performing versus expectations, cash flow, and metrics. But we also lean on them for external insights. We ask things like: How are other consumer businesses responding to ongoing tariffs? What trends are you seeing in your portfolio?

The best banking partners are the ones who share that context with you. When they say, “Yes, other companies are also seeing softness,” or “Others are experiencing growth,” it opens the door to a deeper relationship. You're more comfortable being transparent about how Yoto is performing. That shared understanding creates something greater than the sum of its parts.

David McClelland: It's a fascinating and challenging space—especially launching a physical product in a world where software has dominated, and now AI is reshaping software itself.

You mentioned tariffs and earlier touched on supply chain challenges, which have been especially prominent over the past four or five years—right in the time Yoto has been operating.

Given all that uncertainty, how do you begin to project 12, 24, even 36 months ahead—not just in terms of financials, but in product direction as well? What kind of pressure does that place on you as CFO when you're having those forward-looking conversations?

Ben Averis: Forecasting has always been a big part of my background—I came up through FP&A, so financial planning and analysis is second nature. In many ways, it's like trying to read a crystal ball. Everyone wants certainty, clear assumptions, and reliable predictions.

But volatility seems to be an increasing constant. Maybe it's easy to look back and imagine things used to be more stable, but today, it feels like assumptions are shifting more than ever. That makes forecasting a real challenge.

I've learned not to get too fixated on the details because they often change. Instead, I focus on building solid assumptions and clearly communicating the potential outcomes on either side—the sensitivities and scenarios that could play out. It's less about saying, "This will happen," and more about saying, "Here's what could happen—and here's why."

Another core focus for me is control. When there's external volatility you can't influence, the key is making sure the things you can control are strong. That's where I put a lot of my energy.

Ben Averis: A sound organisation, the right people in the team, smart investment in technology, and a clear, aligned vision—those are all things you can control to a degree. The key is to make sure those foundations are stable and reliable. Then, when something unpredictable hits—something outside your control—you're in a much better position to respond. It doesn't eliminate the challenge, but it makes it easier to organize around it and stay focused.

David McClelland: You touched earlier on your experience during the COVID pandemic—navigating uncertainty by focusing on what you can control.

Switching gears a bit, I'd love to hear more about Yoto Playdates. What are they exactly? Who are they designed for, and how have they evolved over time? What role do they play for Yoto today—whether in engaging your community, building brand advocacy, or signalling what's coming next to media and supporters?

Ben Averis: I think the Playdates have been a great initiative. We're now on our second one since we started. So far, they've been focused primarily on our partners rather than consumers, serving as a platform to share our direction and ambitions.

The first Playdate was centred around a hardware launch. It was our way of unveiling the new version of our product—giving partners the opportunity to see it in action, experience how it works, and physically interact with it. That hands-on exposure was incredibly valuable.

The most recent Playdate, held just last month, was more software-led. It focused on how the Yoto platform is evolving—particularly in how we enable creators to produce high-quality content in multiple languages. Our ambition is to be a product that has something for everyone, and language is a key part of that.

Of course, we can't publish every Yoto card in every language ourselves. But what we can do is empower local communities—like in Romania, for example—to create content in their native language. That's where tools like "Make Your Own" come in. It's been part of Yoto since the beginning, allowing families to record their own stories onto a blank Yoto card—similar to how cassette tapes worked. We're building on that idea, giving people the tools to personalize the Yoto experience in a meaningful and scalable way.

Ben Averis: That flexibility has always been a core part of what our CTO envisioned—giving families the ability to create their own stories and put them on a Yoto card. I use it myself. When I travel, I'll record a story for my son, Alfie. He can then pop the card in and hear me read to him. Sure, I could call or FaceTime, but there's something special about him having the control to listen whenever he wants. That's powerful.

This latest Playdate centred on that philosophy—opening up our tools so the community can do more on Yoto. As we expand this creator ecosystem, the platform grows with it. Yoto becomes richer, more diverse, and ultimately better.

The event brought together a wide range of attendees: journalists, content creators, banking partners, shareholders, and even some of the people who provide our systems and tools. That cross-section was intentional. I can explain to HSBC what we're working toward on a call—but when they came to the event, they said, "Now I get it. Now I can see exactly what you're trying to build—and how we can support you."

You can achieve in a couple of hours at a live event what might take weeks to piece together through video calls or occasional office meetings. It was a really powerful experience. I haven't done anything quite like it at other companies and seeing it in action made a lasting impression.

David McClelland: It also seems like a valuable part of maintaining a continuous dialogue with banks, investors, and other supporters. I imagine it's also a great opportunity to gather feedback from all these stakeholders—whether or not you act on every piece of it. Getting that feedback in one place, from such a wide range of perspectives, must be incredibly informative—not just for your operations, but for shaping the direction of the product itself.

Ben Averis: Exactly. It's all about working toward a shared ambition. The more people you can align around that—whether they're part of the Yoto team or part of the wider support network—the better the outcome, in my view.

And what makes it even more powerful is that many of them are parents. Whether they're auditors, bankers, or lawyers, they understand the product on a personal level. That connection goes a long way in helping explain what we're trying to achieve. It makes the mission resonate more deeply and creates stronger alignment across the board.

David McClelland: Coming back to funding—once you've raised the capital, what's your strategy for ensuring those funds are allocated as efficiently and effectively as possible across the organization? With so many competing priorities—marketing, product development, and the systems and processes that are critical to Yoto's ability to scale—how do you approach resource allocation to make sure each area is getting what it needs, without compromising overall efficiency?

Ben Averis: Resource allocation often comes down to balancing growth with existing operations. It's rarely a binary choice—you're effectively building the plane while flying it, as the saying goes.

For me, the key is having a clear, well-communicated strategy. That's easy to say, but incredibly hard to do in practice. Clear strategy means being able to consistently tie every investment decision back to your broader goals. We haven't perfected it, but we try to make sure each initiative links back to something concrete.

One thing that's been especially helpful for us is having a clear North Star metric: Weekly Active Families. When we're deciding whether to invest in something—whether it's marketing, product, or systems—we ask: Will this move the needle on weekly active families? That connection has been powerful in helping us prioritize and stay focused.

Another major area is people. A big part of investing well is investing in the right people—bringing in talent who not only contribute individually but also attract and build strong teams around them.

Ultimately, if you have the right group of people aligned around a clear strategic goal, you'll make good investment decisions more often than not. Of course, there will always be disagreement or debate, and that's healthy. But with the right alignment and a shared vision, the path forward becomes a lot clearer.

David McClelland: I like that connection back to your North Star metric—weekly active families—and how it helps guide resource allocation. As the company grows, I imagine the weightings and priorities behind that evolve too.

But I'd love to shift focus slightly: what's your approach to building financial resilience? Given the challenges of the last few years—and now, with the rapid rise of generative AI and other unpredictable shifts—how do you ensure Yoto can stay agile and respond quickly to new opportunities as they emerge?

Ben Averis: As we grow, we're always looking for more fuel in the tank—whether that's through equity or debt financing. A key part of my role is making sure the capital structure is built thoughtfully, with the right funding product matched to the right purpose. It's about aligning sources and uses appropriately.

For example, if we need to fund working capital—say, purchasing inventory ahead of the Christmas season—we'll use a product suited to that need. HSBC has been a great partner in this area, providing us with a trade finance facility that's helped manage those seasonal demands.

When it comes to resilience and seizing new opportunities—like a sudden opening in a marketing channel—we've used a different tool: revenue-based financing. It allows us to borrow against projected future customer revenue. It's more expensive, as you'd expect, but it's incredibly flexible. We can draw on it as needed, which gives us the agility to act quickly.

That flexibility proved valuable. If we saw strong performance in a particular marketing channel, we could move fast and use that funding to double down in that area. It's a good example of how financial strategy can support speed and responsiveness, especially in an unpredictable environment.

David McClelland: CFO Playbook is powered by Soldo, which recently published its Spend Index for the first half of 2025. With visibility into business spend across more than 25,000 companies in the UK and Europe, the report offers a valuable year-on-year comparison of spending trends.

One standout insight was a 130% increase in investment in AI services. While there's certainly been a lot of AI hype, the commentary suggests that businesses are now identifying the specific areas where AI is delivering real value—and are beginning to double down in those areas.

Ben, how does that resonate with you? How have you seen the use of AI evolve at Yoto? And which areas are beginning to show the most tangible impact?

Ben Averis: We're seeing AI primarily as a boost for staff—to help teams do their day-to-day work more efficiently. It's something we picked up on quite early, and we've made a conscious effort to implement a responsible framework around its use.

Because AI tools are so easy to access—available in any browser—it does introduce risk. Employees can inadvertently share information, and there's often little clarity around how that data is stored or used. That's why we've focused on adopting AI in a controlled way: using paid, secure services and equipping employees with the right tools within defined guidelines.

Personally, I use it regularly, mainly in a text-based context—for drafting, brainstorming, and summarizing. We've also started applying it in finance, though I'd say it's still a work in progress. For example, asking it to run trend analysis can yield mixed results. Sometimes it's helpful, other times it's not quite reliable enough yet.

But we're investing time and effort into exploring those use cases further looking at where it can genuinely augment our decision-making. I was reflecting on this recently and asked myself: Why do I use it? And the answer is, it helps me think. It gives me a starting point, and that's incredibly valuable in a fast-paced environment.

Maybe it's because I'm still early in my CFO journey, but I remember what it was like before stepping into this role. You'd often get questions from a senior like, "Can you just tell me this?" or "Can you just pull that number?"—and as an analyst, you'd spend your day constantly context-switching to respond. Often, those quick asks were for an email or a meeting, but they disrupted your ability to focus on more meaningful work.

I'm trying to be very conscious not to recreate that dynamic with my own team. I want them to focus on the big questions—the real intent behind the work. I want them to have the time to sit with a problem for half a day if needed, without unnecessary interruptions.

That's where AI has been really useful. I now use it to surface information quickly—about Yoto, about metrics, about internal documentation—without needing to pull someone off task. Because we've invested in writing things down and use tools like Notion, I can often get what I need through an AI prompt instead of pinging an analyst to dig through a spreadsheet.

Ultimately, I want the team focused on value-added work, not spending their time retrieving data on demand. AI helps me respect their time and enables me to self-serve the information I need.

David McClelland: I often think of my brain during context switching like a slightly aging computer—it's as if the ability to Alt+Tab between tasks is getting slower, and each new window takes just a bit longer to load. That's why your point about reducing interruptions is so compelling. Giving people space to focus deeply on problems instead of constantly surfacing to answer small questions makes a real difference.

Coming back to the Soldo Spend Index, the report shows a 59% increase in UK business spend on outsourced professional services. What's Yoto's approach to outsourcing in this space? Are you on board with that trend—and if so, what benefits or challenges have you seen from outsourcing professional services?

Ben Averis: We've intentionally kept a lean finance team, and we rely heavily on our professional service network. I think of it as an on-demand model—these services are available when we need them, and technology has made that much more efficient. It's now incredibly easy to brief and collaborate with third parties remotely.

This approach allows us to keep fixed costs low, which is important from a finance perspective. For example, we don't necessarily need an in-house tax accountant—we can rely on an external advisor for that. Similarly, in logistics, we don't run our own warehouses. That's not a core capability for us. Instead, we partner with third-party providers who are experts in that space.

At Yoto, we lean into outsourcing where it makes sense—but only with partners who are capable, reliable, scalable, and aligned with our quality expectations. We simply can't afford to scale headcount indefinitely, especially given the seasonal nature of our business.

Christmas is a critical period for us, and while we can forecast and prepare, we still face uncertainty. So, I have to be careful not to overcommit on fixed costs. Outsourcing gives us the flexibility to scale up or down, depending on how the season plays out, without exposing the business to unnecessary risk.

So yes, we're definitely using the market, and I can see us leaning into it even more. If Uber has effectively outsourced taxi driving, it's clear how powerful technology can be in enabling businesses to operate efficiently without owning every function. I see that same principle being applied more and more to companies like Yoto—where smart outsourcing, supported by the right tech, can augment our capabilities as we scale.

David McClelland: What about the challenges that come with that approach? While outsourcing offers flexibility—especially for a seasonal business like Yoto—some might argue that it comes at a cost. When you rely too heavily on external partners, you risk losing specialist knowledge of the product or the company that would otherwise grow within in-house teams. How do you think about that trade-off, and where do you draw the line?

Ben Averis: That's absolutely right—it's an ongoing conversation. We regularly evaluate what should remain core to Yoto and where the risk profile or strategic importance is high enough to justify bringing something in-house.

Cybersecurity is a good example. It may have been outsourced in the past, but we've now brought it in-house because it's so fundamental to our business. There are clear risk areas where we've said, This is too important—we need full control over it.

At the same time, there are many situations where it makes sense to lean on larger partners—especially when expanding internationally. You simply can't replicate every capability in every market with in-house teams. Partnering with trusted third parties can provide the scale and reach we need, without adding fixed overhead in every geography.

So it's really about finding the right balance: protecting what's core while being smart and strategic about where we can partner to enable growth.

David McClelland: From your perspective—given your responsibilities across finance and operations—what would you say is the biggest hurdle Yoto faces on its growth and scaling journey? Is it operational challenges like managing supply chains? Is it the seasonality of the business? Or is it financial—raising the investment needed to support foundational areas for further growth? Where do you see the most pressure?

Ben Averis: If I had to pick, I'd say the biggest challenge is the seasonality. We're working with a physical product that naturally peaks around Christmas. While we are exploring ways to diversify and reduce our dependency on that seasonal spike, the reality is—it's a children's product, and that means Christmas will always be a major focus.

That seasonality creates challenges across the board: forecasting, operations, even fundraising. It's harder to present a consistent growth curve to investors, and for some, that unpredictability can be off-putting. They might prefer more evenly distributed revenue models.

That said, I actually see this as a form of protection. The fact that it's hardware is part of what makes it defensible. If we were purely a software company with an app, I'd be more concerned about competition—because someone could replicate or compete with our offering in a matter of weeks.

But with hardware—especially hardware that's seasonal and supply chain-intensive—it's not something competitors can spin up overnight. While we're not complacent, that complexity acts as a strategic moat for us. So even though seasonality is a challenge, it's also part of what makes Yoto stronger and more differentiated.

Ben Averis: You have to look at it through the lens of: Yes, it's hard. It's challenging, and there are definitely moments when we all take a deep breath and say, Let's just get through this.

But if it weren't difficult, I'm sure many more people would be doing it. And that would create a much more crowded, competitive environment—one that might be even harder in the long run. So, the difficulty is part of what makes the opportunity valuable.

David McClelland: I find that fascinating—because while some might say, “Hardware could be overtaken by software,” you’ve flipped that idea. You’ve argued that being a hardware company is actually part of Yoto’s competitive advantage. It’s harder to replicate, more defensible, and in many ways, a strategic strength.

There’s so much more we could explore—from subscription models to long-term customer engagement—but in the interest of time, we’ll pause there for now.

Here at CFO Playbook, we speak with financial leaders from all over the world, across industries, each offering unique insights. So we created a virtual CFO playbook, where each guest leaves behind a contribution—a piece of advice they wish they’d received, an experience that helped shape them, or a tip that might help fellow finance professionals.

So, Ben—what would be your contribution to the CFO Playbook?

Ben Averis: I thought about this and wanted to keep it very specific, even though the idea itself is broad: never stop reading around your subject.

There’s this sense that once you finish school or complete your professional exams, the intense learning phase is over—and from then on, you’ll just pick things up on the job. But I think that mindset can really limit you. If you’re not reading, if you’re not actively seeking out other points of view, your growth slows down.

So, my advice is simple but powerful: read widely and often—especially around your function and industry.

Practically speaking, I recommend subscribing to a few high-quality email alerts. For me, McKinsey’s daily newsletter has been incredibly valuable. It’s consistently well-timed, relevant, and focused on topics that often mirror what we’re thinking about at Yoto. It acts as a daily nudge—a prompt to reflect on something important.

So, my tip: sign up for two or three high-quality daily emails, and give yourself 10 quiet minutes with a coffee to read them. It’s a small habit that compounds into better thinking, sharper decision-making, and broader perspective over time.

It’s the modern equivalent of getting the Financial Times through the door and sitting down with a coffee to read it—except now it’s all digital. I don’t get the print version anymore, but I do scroll through those emails, and it’s about building the discipline to do it regularly.

It’s easy to let them pile up or send them to the spam folder, but staying intentional about it makes all the difference. You have to carve out that time—to pause, read, and reflect. It’s a small commitment that really pays off.

David McClelland: Great suggestions—and yes, good emails and a good podcast or two can go a long way. That was a fantastic entry into the CFO Playbook—thank you for sharing that, Ben.

To wrap things up, we like to end each conversation on the CFO Playbook with what we call our showstopper question. In this series, we're asking all our guests to reflect on the same phrase:

"Progressive finance."

Ben, what does progressive finance mean to you?

Ben Averis: For me, progressive finance means constantly asking the question: "Is there a better way?"

It's something I encourage my team to ask regularly—whether they're reviewing a process, partnering with another department, or even just preparing a report. That simple question drives improvement. It doesn't need to be revolutionary; often, it's a small change. But every small improvement adds up.

There's always a better way. Technology evolves at an incredible pace. There's almost always a simpler, faster, or more reliable method just around the corner. To me, progressive finance is about leading the agenda for change by embedding that mindset into everything we do.

So, whether it's in the tools we use, the conversations we have, or the decisions we make—progressive finance is about staying curious, open, and committed to continuous improvement.

David McClelland: Exactly—it's the definition of progress. If you're consistently finding better ways to do what you already do, that's a powerful mindset. Thank you, Ben—that's a great way to frame it.

And that's all we have time for today. Ben, thank you so much for joining us on CFO Playbook. It's been a pleasure having you with us.

To our listeners—don't forget to join us each month for more insights from leading finance professionals.

And if you're looking to take what you've heard today and turn it into action, we've created a resource to help. After every episode, we put together a free, high-value guide that breaks down key insights from the conversation into simple, practical steps you can implement right away.

You can download it from the show notes or head to soldo.com/ben—that's soldo.com/ben.

Until next time, from me, David McClelland:, thanks for listening.

Ben Averis is CFO at Yoto, a screen-free audio platform for kids that's scaling fast across global markets.. David McClelland is a technology journalist and podcast host. Comments and opinions expressed by interviewees are their own and do not represent or reflect the opinions, policies, or positions of Soldo or have its endorsement.

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