



By Jeff Vance

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INTRODUCTION: 50 HOTTEST TECH STARTUPS OF 2021

Welcome to the **2021 Big50 Startup Report**. The 50 startups featured



below earned their way into this report by one of three paths, which usually overlap: 1) fighting their way in by acing Startup50 challenges, 2) getting on my radar via my startup coverage for *Network World*, *CIO*, *IDG Insider Pro*, and other IDG publications, and/or 3) having strong fundamentals (funding,

team, named customers) and a whole lot of upside (market opportunity, growth potential, product-market fit, etc.).

In the 2020-2021 competition, the startup challenges ranged from video pitches to our VC partners at Sierra Ventures to developing strategies to survive and scale during a global pandemic to a readers' choice challenge.

All told, more than 180 startups competed in at least challenge, with slightly under 100 completing the full gauntlet of challenges. Add it all up, and the 2020-2021 Big50 competition was by far the toughest to date.

Congratulations to the 50 startups that stood out from the pack and earned a spot as a top startup to watch in 2021!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Vance founded [Startup50](#) in 2013 as a site that would hunt for signal within the hyped-up noise surrounding startups. The original idea was to come up with a process, one featuring rigorous competitions and challenges, that would strip away the spin and force startups to focus on what really matters: real people and the real-world problems they're struggling to overcome.

Jeff has been covering tech startups for close to two decades, writing feature articles and startup roundups for *Network World*, *CIO*, *Forbes*, *Wired*, *Telecom Trends*, *Computerworld*, *PCWorld*, *eWeek*, and many others.

He previously served as Head of Marketing Strategy for Aryaka Networks. Clients for his content marketing and strategic consulting services have included Esri, Microsoft, IBM, Citrix, BigPanda, eEye (now BeyondTrust), Qualcomm, SailPoint, ScienceLogic, and others. Follow him on Twitter, [@JWVance](#), or [connect with him on LinkedIn](#).



2021 BIG50 CHALLENGE WINNERS

The startups below earned their way into the Big50 by winning startup challenges. This doesn't mean they wouldn't have made it into the report otherwise. In fact, most of the challenge winners also have strong fundamentals, but by doing well in a challenge (or two), they guaranteed themselves a spot in the report. To read more about the challenges and the winners, visit Startup50.com.



COVID-19 Survival Strategies Challenge Winners

In this challenge, startups pitched me their strategies for not just surviving, but also scaling up during a global pandemic. I featured the best of these strategies in a story for *Network World*, "[Nimble tech startups find ways to navigate the pandemic](#)." The startups that contributed to that story were:

- NGD Systems
- Webscale

Other top startup strategies featured on Startup50:

- Ascend.io
- JetStream Software
- Satori Cyber
- Statum Systems
- Tray.io
- Virgil Security
- Zero Networks

Sierra Ventures Presentation Pitch Challenge Winners

For this challenge, startups recorded a video presentation that answered this question: “How will you win new customers in a tough economy?” Startups taking this challenge were asked to map out their customer acquisition strategy, while also highlighting their company’s key value proposition, product-market fit, and strategy for scaling up enough to challenge incumbents.

Winners

- Ermetic
- PlanetScale

Runners-up

- Ascend.io
- Spectro Cloud
- Styra
- Syncari
- Zero Networks

Tip Line Challenge Startups

In this challenge, we asked readers to help us fill out our 2021 lineup by recommending under-the-radar startups that are making a difference in their market niches but not getting the attention they deserve. Top under-the-radar tip line startups:

- Garden
- Memfault
- Upbound
- Vcinity

Know of a cool startup that should participate in a future Big50 competition? Recommend them through our [Startup Tip Line](#)

BIG EXITS: BIG50 ALUMNI IPOS & ACQUISITIONS

Before we look at the Big50 2021 lineup, let's first take a look at the achievements of Big50 alumni. Big50 alumni not only raised new VC rounds, but several also executed successful exits via IPOs or big-time acquisitions.

On the IPO front, Asana, Cloudflare, Ping Identity, Rackspace, Snowflake, and Sumo Logic all achieved successful IPOs since our last report published in 2019. These follow Big50 alumni Elastic, Pivotal Software, and Zscaler, which all exited in 2018.



On the first day of trading, the share price of Snowflake more than doubled, climbing above \$300/share and closing the day at just under \$254, making this the [most successful software IPO in history](#). As of this writing, Snowflake's market cap has climbed to nearly \$78 billion.

Cloudflare's market cap has climbed to \$36B, while Rackspace's and Sumo Logic's are approximately \$3.7 and \$2.1B, respectively.

This past two years also saw a number of major acquisitions. VMware snatched up both Datrium and Nyansa. Microsoft acquired CyberX, and Juniper purchased 128 Technologies for \$450M.

Arista acquired Awake Security; Fortinet purchased OPAQ, and Veeam acquired Kasten. Rancher Labs landed itself a \$40M Series D round and then was acquired by SUSE shortly after.

BIG50 STARTUPS RAISED \$2B+ IN VC FUNDING

Big50 startups raised boatloads of cash since our last report, raising more than \$2B in VC funding and counting. The major highlight was [DataRobot's massive funding haul](#), while Cato Networks, Wasabi, and Qumulo also reeled in \$100M+ funding rounds.

These Big50 alumni raised more than \$25M since our 2019 report:

- DataRobot – \$320M Series F
- Cato Networks – \$207M (\$130 Series E and \$77M Series D)
- Wasabi – \$169M (\$137M Series C and \$32M Series B)
- Qumulo – \$125M Series E
- Illumio – \$65M Series E

- Verbit – \$60M Series C
- BigPanda – \$50M Series C

Big50 alumni that raised more than \$25M (continued):

- SQream – \$39.4M
- OpsRamp – \$37.5M Series B
- Wasabi – \$30M Series B
- Medigate – \$30M Series B
- Webscale – \$26M Series C
- Platform9 – \$25M Series D

MOVING MARKETS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP GROUP

Is your startup positioned to move an established market in a new direction? Are you ready to show influencers and gatekeepers why the status quo is broken? Are you planning to scale up quickly but know that you need to educate market influencers and prospective buyers, so they understand that there is a new, better way to solve their problems?

All of these goals are easier said than done, especially in markets dominated by deep-pocketed monopolies. In order to move markets, you must first change minds.



Strategic thought leadership content can help you do just that.

If you work for an innovative technology startup, you know how hard it is to position your startup as the up-and-coming powerhouse that

has what it takes to challenge — and beat — the incumbents in your industry.

Does your startup:

- ✓ Develops cutting-edge technology that challenges the status quo
- ✓ Must educate the market before it can truly challenge incumbents
- ✓ Intends to use thought-leadership content to help educate influencers
- ✓ Wants to learn how to appeal to influencers and persuade prospects in a way that convinces them to embrace change

If so, strategic thought leadership content can help you compete faster and with more credibility. [Learn more about how to use strategic thought leadership to outflank the incumbents in your industry at startup50.com.](https://startup50.com)

2021 BIG50 HOT STARTUPS TO WATCH

[Ascend.io](#)

Year founded: 2015

Funding: \$19M

Headquarters: Palo Alto, CA

CEO: Sean Knapp

What they do: Provide a data engineering platform that helps enterprises build autonomous data pipelines

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Ascend.io did well in two challenges. They were one of the COVID-19 challenge winners, and they were a runner-up in the Sierra Ventures customer challenge. In 2020, the startup built out its product portfolio with a data governance tool that tracks how data is used throughout an organization. With a strong team and several named customers, I expect this startup to continue its upward trajectory in 2021.

Burst

Year founded: 2012

Funding: \$35

Headquarters: Houston, TX

CEO: Vic Mahadevan



What they do: Provide cloud-native NAS

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Burst secured its spot in the field at the end of the competition, recommended through our Tip Line during the final challenge of 2021. The startup has a long list of named customers, solid funding, and a product portfolio that will help organizations manage, move, and share data in the cloud.

Canvass AI

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$13M

Headquarters: Toronto, ON

CEO: Humera Malik

What they do: Develop real-time AI platforms for industrial applications

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I first wrote about Canvass AI in a story about [AI-powered startups for *Network World*](#). Canvass also previously earned a slot in the 2019 Big50. Since I last wrote about them, the startup has landed several named customers, including Stelco and Yamaha.

Celona

Year founded: 2019

Funding: \$40M

Headquarters: Cupertino, CA

CEO: Rajeev Shah

What they do: Develop 5G platforms for the enterprise market

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Over the past year, Celona raised a Series B round of funding, securing \$30M from Qualcomm and

NTT, officially launched its enterprise 5G/WiFi platform, and inked a deal with Aruba Networks, which will resell Celona's mobile solutions.

Clear Skye

Year founded: 2015

Funding: \$6.4M

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA

CEO: John Milburn

What they do: Provide an Identity and Access Governance (IAG) solution built on the ServiceNow platform

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Clear Skye's target market, Identity and Access Governance, looks like it will be a land-grab market for the near-term. In 2020, the startup secured a Series A round of funding, raising just under \$5M from Toba Capital, ServiceNow Ventures, and Loop Capital.

DoControl

Year founded: 2020

Funding: \$13.4M

Headquarters: New York, NY

CEO: Adam Gavish

What they do: Develop automated data access controls for SaaS applications

Why they're a Big50 top startup: DoControl came into the Big50 competition through the Tip Line Challenge. In April 2021, DoControl locked down \$10M in funding in a Series A round led by RTP Global with participation from StageOne Ventures, Cardumen Capital, and the CrowdStrike Falcon Fund.



Ermetic

Year founded: 2019

Funding: \$27.3M

Headquarters: Palo Alto, CA

CEO: Shai Morag

What they do: Develop identity-based multi-cloud infrastructure security

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Ermetic was one of the two winners of the Sierra Ventures customer challenge. In April 2021, the startup released a new version of its access management platform for multi-cloud environments. New features enable organizations to protect against unauthorized data access, problematic configuration changes, and suspicious privilege escalations.

filebase

Year founded: 2019

Funding: \$2M

Headquarters: Boston, MA

CEO: Joshua Noble

What they do: Develop blockchain-based cloud storage management software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: filebase applies a trendy, much-hyped technology – blockchain – to a more mundane problem: the lack of vendor-neutral storage management for decentralized cloud storage. In April 2021, the startup secured \$2M in seed funding. The filebase platform currently supports Sia, Skynet, and Storj networks, and the startup intends to expand to include Filecoin and Arweave by the end of the year.

FirstPoint Mobile Guard

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$2.5M

Headquarters:
Netanya, Israel

CEO: Dror Fixler

What they do:

Provide cellular cybersecurity for SIM and eSIM-based devices

Why they're a Big50 top startup: FirstPoint entered the Big50 competition in the Tip Line Challenge, earning a spot in the report through Startup50 readers' endorsements. With mobile and IoT



threats metastasizing at an alarming rate, FirstPoint Mobile Guard is carving out a niche in a gold-rush security market that should only continue to heat up.

ForMotiv

Year founded: 2017

Funding: \$1.4M in seed funding

Headquarters: Philadelphia, PA

CEO: Bill Conners

What they do: Develop software that uses machine learning and predictive analytics to measure user behaviors for two specific use case: 1) to provide optimized online experiences and 2) to predict the potential for risk and fraud

Why they're a Big50 top startup: ForMotiv was one of the 25 finalists in the Sierra Ventures customer challenge, and the startup just recently (June 2021) locked down \$1M of new funding to expand its team.

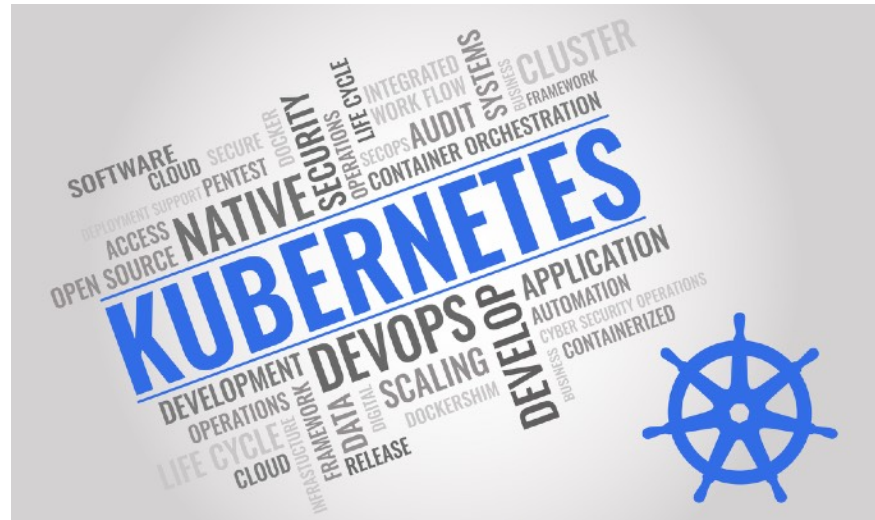
Garden

Year founded: 2018

Funding: €4.2M
(~\$5.1)

Headquarters: Berlin,
Germany

CEO: Jón Eðvald
Vignisson



What they do: Provide a Kubernetes development tool and an automation engine that builds, tests, and deploys apps

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Garden entered the Big50 competition through the Tip Line Challenge. In November 2020, the startup secured €3.1 million in funding in a seed round led by Crowberry Capital with participation from byFounders.

HivelO

Year founded: 2015

Funding: Not Disclosed

Headquarters: Hoboken, N.J.

CEO: Dan Newton

What they do: Provide HCI services

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I first wrote about HivelO for my 2019 [story on HCI startups for *Network World*](#). Since then, HivelO has pivoted to the nearby VDI market. To help organizations go remote during the COVID-19 pandemic, the startup fast-tracked the development and release of its Desktop-as-a-Service (DaaS) software. The startup has not yet made details of its funding public, but it has already closed two rounds from Rally Ventures, Citrix Systems, Osage Venture Partners, and El Dorado Ventures.

HyperQube

Year founded: 2017

Funding: \$3.2M

Headquarters: Arlington, VA

CEO: Craig Stevenson

What they do: Develop replication software that clones network infrastructure, including all the virtual machines, device configurations, and even MAC address settings

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I first wrote about HyperQube for my 2018 story on [datacenter virtualization startups for *Network World*](#). Since then, the startup has raised a \$2.5M seed round. The startup also has strategic partnerships in place with Cisco and BAE Systems.

ISARA

Year founded: 2015

Funding: \$26.9M

Headquarters: Waterloo, ON

CEO: Scott Totzke

What they do: Develop security software to protect against threats posed by the enormous power of quantum computing

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I first wrote about ISARA for my 2019 [story on quantum computing startups for *IDG Insider*](#). Since then, the startup has opened an office in London to expand into the

EMEA market and secured a \$7.2M investment from Canada's Strategic Innovation Fund. In June 2021, ISARA launched a cryptography management platform designed to discover crypto throughout an organization's infrastructure, while also providing management, prioritization, and remediation capabilities.

Jetstream Software

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$11.5M

Headquarters: San Jose, CA

CEO: Tom Critser

What they do: Develop disaster recovery and migration software for multi-cloud environments

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Jetstream has been on my radar for some time. They were one of the 50 startups in the 2019 Big50 report.

I included them in my [hybrid cloud startup roundup for *Network World*](#) in 2018, and they were one of the winners of the COVID-19 challenge.

The startup also had a busy and successful year in 2020. Highlights include attracting a new named customer, the MSP ENS-Inc., and the introduction of a new service, Jetstream DR for Microsoft Azure VMware Solution with Azure Blob Storage.

Know of a hot tech startup that should compete in the Big50-2022 Startup Competition? Tell us about them through our [Startup Tip Line](#).

***Startup* 50**

If you work for a startup, please fill out the [Big50 startup intake questionnaire](#), and we'll be in touch with next steps.

Kentik

Year founded: 2014

Funding: \$61.7M

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA

CEO: Avi Freedman

What they do: Provide SaaS-based traffic analysis and network management software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Kentik first got on my radar when I was writing a feature story about [network automation trends for IDG Insider Pro](#). I also featured them in my [network automation startup roundup for Network World](#). In 2020, the startup raised \$23.5 million in growth funding, and it launched a network monitoring solution that simulates an end-user's experience with infrastructure, applications, and/or services.

Kloudspot

Year founded: 2016

Funding: Undisclosed strategic investments

Headquarters: Sunnyvale, CA

CEO: Guillermo Diaz, Jr.

What they do: Develop AI-based real-time location software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Kloudspot was one of 25 finalists in the Sierra Ventures customer challenge. The startup also found itself at the right place at the right time when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, using its platform to help companies with mask detection, PPE, and density screening to help organizations create safe back-to-office network solutions.

Lightbits Labs

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$54.2M

Headquarters: Kfar Saba, Israel

CEO: Eran Kirzner

What they do: Develop NVMe over TCP SD block storage

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I recently featured Lightbits Labs in my story about [hot enterprise storage startups for Network World](#). Lightbits Labs is positioned in a hot sector within the larger storage market, one that past and current Big50 startups are also targeting, including Excelero and Pavilion Data.

Memfault

Year founded: 2018

Funding: \$11.2M

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA

CEO: François Baldassari

What they do: Develop end-to-end monitoring and management software for connected devices



Why they're a Big50 top startup: As IoT capabilities spread everywhere from ocean-based oil rigs to children's toys, monitoring and managing those dispersed devices has become a massive challenge. In April 2021, Memfault locked down an \$8.5M Series A round to help it target this massive opportunity, and in June, the

startup entered into a partnership with Nordic Semiconductor to help developers debug and monitor low-power-cellular and short-range-wireless IoT devices.

MetaCX

Year founded: 2018

Funding: \$24.5M

Headquarters: Indianapolis, IN

CEO: Scott McCorkle

What they do: Develop B2B relationship management software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: MetaCX's B2B customer lifecycle relationship management is a unique alternative to various relationship management tools in the market, bringing suppliers and buyers together to manage the expected outcomes in a shared system of record. In the past year and a half, the startup officially launched its platform and added \$7.5M to its existing Series A round.

Model9

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$14.5M

Headquarters: Tel Aviv, Israel and New York, NY

CEO: Gil Peleg

What they do: Develop cloud data management software for mainframes

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I recently featured Model9 in my story about [hot enterprise storage startups for *Network World*](#). Mainframe computing data is often stored in proprietary storage silos, usually expensive tape and virtual tape libraries. This data is a potential goldmine, but organizations have no easy and affordable way to access, analyze, and manage it. Model9 intends to change that, and the startup already has several on-the-record customers, including America First Credit Union and Sirius Managed Services.

Morse Micro

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$33.6M

Headquarters: Surry Hills, Australia

CEO: Michael De Nil

What they do: Develop WiFi chips for IoT devices

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Morse Micro came into the competition through the Tip Line Challenge. The startup has locked down a substantial amount of VC funding to develop a unique approach to IoT connectivity: ultra-long-range, ultra-low-power WiFi.

Nebulon

Year founded: 2018

Funding: Not disclosed

Headquarters: Fremont, CA

CEO: Siamak Nazari

What they do: Develop server-embedded infrastructure software delivered as a service

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I first learned about Nebulon through one of its founders way back when it was still in stealth mode. Since then, the startup has locked down its Series A funding, released its server-embedded infrastructure software delivered as a service, and expanded into EMEA.

NGD Systems

Year founded: 2013

Funding: \$42.7 million

Headquarters: Irvine, CA

CEO: Nader Salessi

What they do: Develop NVMe and SSD devices with computational storage

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I first wrote about NGD Systems in my story about [HCI startups to watch for *Network World*](#). The

startup also made it into the 2019 Big50 report, while also winning coverage on Startup50 as a COVID-19 challenge winner. NGD Systems also recently locked down \$20M in Series C funding.

Opsani

Year founded: 2014

Funding: \$20.3M

Headquarters: Redwood City, CA

CEO: Ross Schibler



What they do: Provide cloud optimization as a service

Why they're a Big50 top startup: The COVID-19 pandemic gave startups like Opsani the opportunity to help businesses transition to all-remote workforces. Opsani's machine-learning, AI-based cloud optimization services helps organizations stretch their cloud and networking dollars. The startup also secured \$5.5M in funding in late 2020.

Pavilion Data Systems

Year founded: 2014

Funding: \$58M

Headquarters: San Jose, CA

CEO: Gurpreet Singh

What they do: Provide a hybrid storage platform

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I covered Pavilion Data in my story about [hot enterprise storage startups for *Network World*](#). The startup is backed by \$58M in funding and has lined up impressive named customers, such as Sony Innovation Studios.

Pensando

Year founded: 2017

Funding: \$312.95M

Headquarters: Milpitas, CA

CEO: Prem Jain

What they do: Provide distributed cloud infrastructure for edge computing

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Pensando has raised a boatload of VC funding to build out its edge infrastructure platform, which enables both cloud providers and enterprises to run their infrastructure with the same efficiencies and scalability as a hyperscaler. In Q3 2020, Pensando was one of three vendors (along with Intel and NVIDIA) invited to collaborate with VMware on Project Monterey, a cloud app infrastructure platform.

PlanetScale

Year founded: 2018

Funding: \$25M

Headquarters: Mountain View, CA

CEO: Jiten Vaidya

What they do: Develop Database-as-a-Service software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: PlanetScale was founded by the co-creators of the popular open-source Vitess project. The startup

was one of 25 finalists for the Sierra Ventures customer challenge, and in May of this year, they launched a new version of their DBaaS platform, which is designed to better accommodate developer workflows in hyperscaler environments.

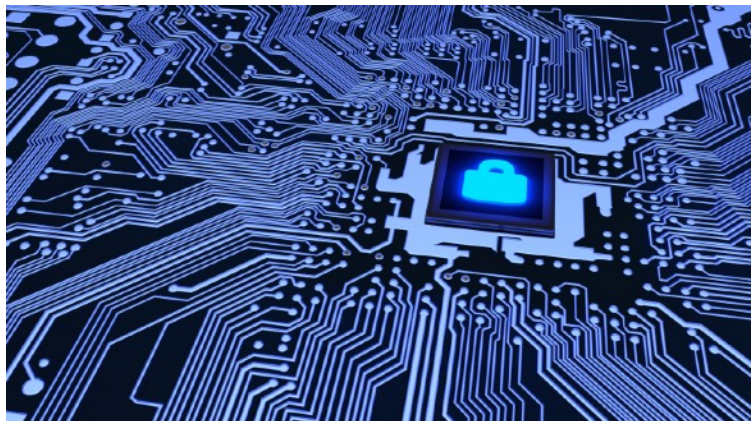
Quantum Xchange

Year founded: 2018

Funding: \$23.5M

Headquarters: Bethesda,
MD

CEO: Eddy Zervigon



What they do: Provide a quantum-safe key distribution system that protects data and communications networks against legacy encryption vulnerabilities and emerging threats from advanced technologies, such as quantum computing

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Cybersecurity is already a leaky ship, and once bad actors have the power of quantum computing at their disposal, the unsustainable status quo of constant ransomware attacks, targeted malware, DDoS botnets, etc. will degrade even further. In January of this year, the startup locked

down \$13.5M of Series A funding to continue developing its quantum-safe products.

Render

Year founded: 2018

Funding: \$6.8M

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA

CEO: Anurag Goel

What they do: Provide a DevOps-free cloud platform

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Render is focused on a cloud niche with plenty of room to grow: DevOps-free cloud alternatives to AWS, Azure, Google Cloud, etc. In October 2020, the startup raised \$4.5M in extended seed funding, bringing their seed funding to \$6.8M. The startup also hit key milestones in 2020, with its platform now handling more than 1 billion monthly web requests and being used to create more than 100,000 services.

RSTOR

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$45M

Headquarters: Saratoga,
CA

CEO: Giovanni Coglitore



What they do: Provide distributed multi-cloud platform services

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I featured RSTOR in my story about [HCI startups to watch for *Network World*](#). The startup has a strong leadership team with a track record of successful exits, and it is backed by \$45 million in Series A funding.

RunSafe Security

Year founded: 2015

Funding: \$12.2M

Headquarters: McLean, VA

CEO: Joe Saunders

What they do: Provide security for embedded systems and IoT devices

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I featured RunSafe Security in my story about [IoT Security startups to watch for *Network World*](#). The startup has already attracted impressive named customers, including the U.S. Dept. of Defense.

Spectro Cloud

Year founded: 2019

Funding: \$27.5M

Headquarters: Santa Clara, CA

CEO: Tenry Fu

What they do: Provide a Kubernetes management platform

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Spectro Cloud was a runner-up in the Sierra Ventures customer challenge, is positioned in a fast-growing landgrab market sector (Kubernetes management), and CEO Tenry Fu sold his previous startup, CliQr, to Cisco. Just as we

were finalizing the report, [Spectro Cloud closed a \\$20M Series A round](#).

Statum Systems

Year founded: 2018

Funding: Undisclosed seed funding and crowdfunding

Headquarters: Boston, MA

CEO: Fred Lizza

What they do: Provide unified mobile messaging, app access, and collaboration for health care workers

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Statum Systems was one of the winners of the COVID-19 challenge. In 2020, the startup launched its medical communications and collaboration platform, and it named Fred Lizza as its new CEO. Lizza previously served as CEO for StrategicClaim, which was acquired by Safelite Group in 2019.

Styra

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$66M

Headquarters: Redwood City, CA

CEO: Bill Mann

What they do: Cloud-native authorization

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Styra was a runner-up in the Sierra Ventures customer challenge, and the startup locked down \$40M in funding in May 2021 in a Series B round led by Battery Ventures. Styra has also notched several impressive customer wins, including the European Patent Office and Capital One.

SupportLogic

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$12M

Headquarters: Santa Clara, CA

CEO: Krishna Raj Raja

What they do: Develop AI-powered customer support and service team software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: SupportLogic entered this year's Big50 competition through the Tip Line Challenge. In 2020, the startup added to its leadership team, adding John Kelly as Chief Revenue Officer and Sreeni Iyer as VP of Engineering. SupportLogic also launched a real-time feedback and coaching feature to its continuous service experience platform.

Swim

Year founded: 2015

Funding: \$25.4M

Headquarters: Campbell, CA

CEO: Ramana Jonnala

What they do: Develop software for real-time contextual intelligence from cloud to edge

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Swim previously earned its way into the 2019 Big50 Startup Report, and I also featured them in my story about [AI-powered IoT startups to watch for *Network World*](#). In Q4 2020, the startup released v4 of its continuous intelligence platform.

[Syncari](#)

Year founded: 2019

Funding: \$26.8M

Headquarters: Newark, CA

CEO: Nick Bonfiglio

What they do: Provide a no-code data automation platform

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Syncari was a runner-up in the Sierra Ventures customer challenge, and in May 2021, they secured \$17.3M in Series A funding. Over the past year and a half, the startup has rolled out several new features in its platform, including cross-platform data visibility, and it added new named customers, such as Redis Labs.

Tecton

Year founded: 2019

Funding: \$60M

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA

CEO: Mike Del Balso

What they do: Provide a feature store management platform for machine learning (ML)

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Tecton is positioned in a relatively new market sector that has a ton of growth potential, and they have carved out a unique niche with their ML feature store platform. In December 2020, the startup locked down a \$35M Series B round of funding. Existing investors Andreessen Horowitz and Sequoia Capital co-led the round.

Traefik Labs

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$11.1M

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA

CEO: Emile Vauge

What they do: Develop cloud-native networking services

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I wrote about Traefik Labs (when they were still called Containous) in [my story for *Network World* about network automation startups](#). The startup raised a \$10M Series A round in January 2020 and has an impressive customer roster that includes Conde Nast and eBay Classifieds.

Tray.io

Year founded: 2012

Funding: \$109.1M

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA

CEO: Rich Waldron

What they do: Provide low-code integration and workflow automation software for enterprises

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Tray.io is backed by more than \$100M in VC funding, and in Q4 2020, the startup announced that it had attracted more than 3,500 customers, including such big names as Eventbrite, FICO, and New Relic.

Upbound

Year founded: 2018

Funding: \$9M

Headquarters: Seattle, WA

CEO: Bassam Tabbara

What they do: Develop management software for cloud applications and infrastructure

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Upbound entered the Big50 competition through the Tip Line Challenge. In May 2021, the startup released its first commercial product, Upbound Universal Crossplane, which is an enterprise-grade version of its popular open-source software Crossplane.



VAST Data

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$263M

Headquarters: New York, NY

CEO: Renen Hallak

What they do: Develop storage software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I recently wrote about VAST Data in my story about [hot enterprise storage startups for *Network World*](#). Immediately after that story published in May, VAST secured a new funding round, an \$83M Series D. This follows a \$100M Series C round raised in Q2 2020, bringing total funding to date to \$263M. Named customers include Squarepoint, AHEAD, and Enterprise Strategy Group.

Versa Networks

Year Founded: 2012

Funding: \$196M

Headquarters: San Jose, CA

CEO: Kelly Ahuja

What they do: SASE and Secure SD-WAN

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Versa Networks earned its way into last year's Big50 report, and I also wrote about the startup in my story about [SD-WAN startups for *Network World*](#). Versa returns to the report this year after locking down an \$84M Series D round in June 2021 and launching a new version of its SASE product for lean IT organizations in March 2021.

Virgil Security

Founded: 2014

Funding: \$4.9M

HQ: Manassas, VA

CEO: Michael W. Wellman

What they do: Provide developer tools for securing user data in cross-platform apps

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Virgil Security earned its way into last year's Big50 report, and the startup was one of the winners of the COVID-19 challenge. In the past year and a half, developers have used Virgil's SDK to add end-to-end encryption to Twilio and Vox Messenger and to facilitate HIPAA-compliant in-app messaging in Firebase.

Volta Networks

Year founded: 2015

Funding: \$22.7M

Headquarters: Cambridge, MA

CEO: Dean Bogdanovic

What they do: Provide virtual routing software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Volta Networks secured an \$11M Series B round in 2020, and the startup has locked down a top-notch reference customer in NTT Communications. Volta is also a strategic partner for Fujitsu's Smart xHaul solution for 4G and 5G transport networks.

WebScale

Founded: 2013

Funding: \$56.3M

Headquarters: Santa Clara, CA

CEO: Sonal Puri

What they do: Provide a cloud-based infrastructure platform for e-commerce



Why they're a Big50 top startup: WebScale earned their way into last year's Big50 report, and the startup was a COVID-19 challenge winner in this year's competition. In March 2021, the startup raised \$26M in Series C funding, and it extended its round in May with an undisclosed investment from the Neythri Futures Fund.

Weka.IO

Year founded: 2013

Funding: \$85.9M

Headquarters: San Jose, CA

CEO: Liran Zvibel

What they do: Develop hybrid cloud file storage software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I first covered Weka.IO in my [hybrid cloud startup roundup for *Network World*](#) in 2018. Since then, the startup has raised an additional \$33.9M in funding, opened EMEA and APAC offices, and attracted a number of new customers, including Stanford Linear Accelerator Center and the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

Wyebot

Year founded: 2016

Funding: \$9M

Headquarters: Marlborough, MA

CEO: Roger Sands

What they do: Provide autonomic WiFi assurance software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: I wrote about Wyebot in [my story for Network World about network automation startups](#). During the pandemic when health care facilities were dealing with rising numbers of COVID-19 patients, Wyebot provided its AI-enabled WiFi automation sensors free of charge to pop-up hospital. Named customers include Hachette Book Group and Audi FIS Women's Ski World Cup.

Zero Networks

Year founded: 2019

Funding: \$4.7M in seed funding

Headquarters: Tel Aviv, Israel

CEO: Benny Lakunishok

What they do: Develop zero-trust network access control software

Why they're a Big50 top startup: Zero Networks was a runner-up in the Sierra Ventures customer challenge. The startup has developed an innovative approach to network access control based on “automating self-service least privilege networking.” During the pandemic, the startup made its automated network control service free for companies in industries hit hard by COVID-19.