Don't be so Glum, Britannia!

Rupert Baines, Picochip (www.picochip.com)

The Daily Telegraph in the UK has recently run a blog post titled, "No wonder the UK lags behind America: we're a bitter and broken nation," and I couldn't disagree more. (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/8382898/No-wonder-the-UK-lags-behind-America-were-a-bitter-and-broken-nation.html [1]) Don't get me wrong, there is always the British character of "glass is half empty" - and the cliche of the whinging Pom has truth. But while this article praises California's optimism the writer is so blind to any touch of it here. It's easy from a short time in California to only see the positives and come back to the UK full of doom and despair, but we've actually got a lot to be proud of.

People are quick to praise Apple for the iPAD - thoroughly deserved. But rarely mention that the iPAD relies on technology developed in Britain: its brains of A5 processor based on ARM, its graphics based on Imagination Techologies? Not just the old standard of "invented here but made successful elsewhere" but both companies based in UK. Indeed, ARM is one of the few companies that Intel is worried about.

What about Britain's success in wireless? Vodafone may not have the most customers, but by revenue it is still one of the biggest wireless companies in the world - and while hardly a baby it is younger than Apple, and the same age as Cisco. Not bad as an example of British business creation.

Or Dyson? Autonomy? CSR? Wolfson?

In terms of exciting start-ups who might change the world in a few years, there are examples too.

What about Icera in phone chipsets: a few years old, employing hundreds of people and ballsy enough to take the fight to Qualcomm.

Or Picochip (who I work for!) changinging the whole way cellular networks work, together with fellow British companies Ubiquisys & ipAccess.

Or the hundreds of companies based in the (amusingly misnamed) Silicon Roundabout ?

Surely a country which was so negative to start-ups would not have quite so much activity?

Sure, there are problems in UK start-up land -- and many of them are serious. Most of the CEOs I meet have their worries and complaints. But EU regulation doesn't feature anything like as often as banks support (at Picochip we moved our bank account to Silicon Valley Bank, rather than any of the British banks because they understood what were are doing and were willing to support us). Armies of regulators or elf'n'safety are hardly a great examples of how UK concerns ouweigh USA.

Most of the technology companies I know are definitely hurting from lack of engineering graduates and this is a real problem. And finally, there is the huge, long-lasting worry about finance, and the mismatch between UK venture and US. Indeed, the puzzle about how come UK is so good at doing start-ups, at innovating - but that most get acquired, while few of them go onto massive scale.

So there are certainly serious issues, and genuine worries that need to be addressed - lets talk about them

Don't get me wrong: I love going to Silicon Valley, the can do attitude and the optimism. I hate British sneering and defeatism. Which is why it so annoys me when people come back from California trips with such a shortage of American optimism and ability to see the bright side, and instead double up on British whinging. Instead let's celebrate all that's good with business in Europe and at the same time learn what we can from the American model.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/18/2013 - 9:38pm*):
http://www.ecnmag.com/articles/2011/03/dont-be-so-glum-britannia

Links:
[1] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/8382898/No-wonder-the-UK-lags-behind-America-were-a-bitter-and-broken-nation.html