



THE LDC TOP 50 MOST AMBITIOUS LEADERS



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THE TOP 50

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CONTENTS

- 3 Introduction from Andy Grove,
Head of New Business, LDC
- 4 - 23 The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious
Business Leaders 2019
- 24 - 25 Ones to Watch 2019
- 26 - 27 Ambitious Partnerships –
How Private Equity Supports Growth
- 28 - 29 Celebrating Ambition
- 30 - 31 Close by Paul Drechsler CBE

Andy Grove
Head of New Business, LDC



BRITAIN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT KNOWS NO BOUNDS.

LDC's Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders aims to find and celebrate the most exceptional entrepreneurs from across the country. Those people that are generating significant gains for the UK economy, often beating the odds and overcoming barriers to create successful, resilient businesses. These are the innovators, the calculated risk-takers and the strategists that will ensure the future of the economy.

We believe ambition should always be celebrated, but the entrepreneurs and business builders showcased this year deserve extra credit. To grow a business and remain ambitious against the backdrop of uncertainty is especially tough.

While the natural reaction for many is to retreat in more testing times, it's those that go against the grain and push on for growth that often reap the greatest rewards.

Against this backdrop, we've been amazed by the calibre of the individuals we have met this year and the success of the businesses they run. Their stories are truly inspirational and just what British business needs.

At LDC, we understand the importance of supporting ambition. We've been backing the ambitions of British business leaders from across every region and sector of the UK economy since 1981.

In the time, we've seen business leaders thrive and go for growth at every point in the cycle. It's why we're committed to investing £1.2bn into growing medium-sized businesses over the next three years to help ambitious business leaders to grow bigger, more sustainable businesses.

The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders programme is a reminder of the scale of ambition and endeavour that this country has to offer.

These stories of success have the potential to inspire other entrepreneurs, and encourage them to pursue their goals, and we hope you enjoy reading them.

Andy Grove
Head of New Business at LDC

READ ON TO MEET THE LDC TOP 50 2019 →



NAVEEN AHMED

MANAGING DIRECTOR, THE PARKLANE GROUP

When he was 18, The Parklane Group boss Naveen Ahmed wanted to make £1m, drive a Jaguar, and live on a sought-after street in Leeds. The property mogul achieved that goal within 10 years. Now, he is driven by an ambition to make Parklane's portfolio of property companies – from short-term living to co-working spaces – the best in class, and create a global brand.

His student accommodation brand, IconInc, which was launched just four years ago, already boasts £120m in assets. "I want to take that to £1bn," says Naveen. Ultimately, he wants to pass on Parklane to the next generation and focus on Parklane's charitable arm: "We come from Malawi in Africa and I want to give back."



LIZ ASHALL-PAYNE

CEO, ORCHA

Liz Ashall-Payne, a former speech and language therapist, built ORCHA to review and recommend the world's most effective healthcare apps. "My mission is to help people with manageable health conditions everywhere stay healthy and well through digital health," she says.

In just four years, Liz has secured country-wide deals in Ireland and Holland and works with 25pc of the NHS; ORCHA is already significantly reducing patients' need for drugs or further intervention.

Her passion to help people live healthier lives convinced former Tesco boss Sir Terry Leahy to invest when ORCHA was just an idea. She says: "People tell me we've achieved so much but we're just scratching the surface."



GRAHAM BEST

CO-FOUNDER, REBOUND

Graham Best has disrupted the painful business of returning purchases by turning the whole process into a smart, efficient service that produces useful data for brands like ASOS, Wiggle and JD Sports.

His company, ReBOUND, now works with 500 brands. Crucially, his platform helps reduce waste; saving money and the environment. "What makes me get out of bed every morning is the transformational effect we're having on the industry. We change behaviour. We help the planet. We are making a difference." Graham has spent his whole career driving efficiency in supply chains. His next move: to expand further internationally. "There's no reason we can't operate anywhere in the world."



CHARLIE BIGHAM

FOUNDER, CHARLIE BIGHAM'S

When Charlie Bigham started his eponymous ready-meal brand in 1995, he shook up a tired category, bringing home-cooked, delicious meals to supermarket shelves.

Now, 23 years later, he is focused on raising the bar even further: "We don't look at our recipes and think, 'That's selling well, let's just churn it out.' We are always looking at ways to improve." Charlie Bigham's now produces meals for 600,000 people each week, selling its lasagne and chicken tikka in 1,500 shops from Penzance to John o' Groats. Charlie says: "We are a principled business that wants to grow sustainably over the long term and be a great place to work."



MIKE BRANNEY AND CLAIRE HENDERSON

FOUNDERS, OH POLLY

In a world dominated by fast fashion, Mike Branney and Claire Henderson, Founders of Oh Polly, dare to stand out. They set up their own factories to ensure a high standard of worker welfare and a quality product. "Our fashion lasts," says Mike Branney. "People buy from us because we go that little bit extra." Oh Polly was borne out of a social enterprise; Co-Founder Claire Henderson sold old clothes on eBay to make money for a charity in Cambodia.

They launched Oh Polly in 2013. Today, the business generates £21m in turnover, and the ambitious pair want to reach £100m by 2022.



BRUCE BRATLEY

FOUNDER, FIRST MILE

Bruce Bratley left a career in environmental academia to start recycling firm First Mile in 2014. "I'd seen a lot of committed environmentalists without a plan," he explains. "I decided the best way to make a change was to create a purpose-led business." First Mile now works with 25,000 businesses, taking away their recyclables, and finding the most environmentally friendly plants to process the waste.

Bruce has raised funding to help scale the business nationwide, and the entrepreneur has international ambitions too. "We could get to £100m in revenue in London alone but we don't want to be some regional lifestyle business, we really want to go for it."



MARC CHANG

CEO, BLOCK SOLUTIONS

Block Solutions is an IT company that helps customers including the NHS, Harrods, and Westfield solve complex problems and become more efficient using technology.

Co-founded in 2006, Marc Chang became CEO two years ago with a focus on rapid growth. *"When I took it on, we were at £23m,"* Marc explains. *"Now we're on course for more than £55m next year across the group. I've moved us away from doing too many things for too many clients to making fewer but more strategic deals which has driven growth along with acquisitions."*

"I would love to get to £100m in turnover within three years, and then look to IPO."



MARGOT COOPER

FOUNDER, LIMBS & THINGS

Medical artist Margot Cooper gave up illustrating after her third child was born, and started making anatomical models to order at home to fit around family life. That's when she spotted an opportunity: *"Nurses and trainee doctors really needed models to practice on,"* she says. *"I had seen some unacceptable incidents in the operating theatre and really wanted to make a contribution to training."*

In 1990, she launched Limbs & Things, which makes a wide range of lifelike models. Now, she is expanding the company around the world, helping to shape the next generation of medical professionals and, ultimately, save many lives.



LYALL CRESSWELL

CEO, TRANSPORT EXCHANGE GROUP

Lyall Cresswell is a technological pioneer who has spent his whole career anticipating market trends. *"I like building tangible things, which improve efficiency and profitability,"* he says.

Having successfully grown and sold his first venture, he launched freight-tech business, Transport Exchange Group, in 2000. It matches customers with carriers that have space, reducing wasted space, and provides real-time data on every job. The company now boasts 7,000 clients across the UK, US and Europe and the amount of freight activity on his platform is rising 30pc a year. *"My mission is to get every business with a need on the platform,"* he says. *"We are scaling significantly because of our focus on that mission."*



OWEN DAVIES

CO-FOUNDER, ENTHUSE GROUP

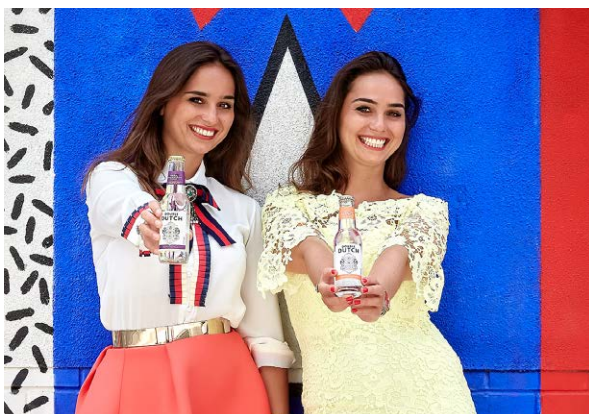
Enthuse Group Co-Founder Owen Davies specialises in turning heritage titles into multimedia brands, and has created an innovative business model.

If you're an avid woodworker, have a passion for quilting, or collect stamps, you may have heard of the business.

Since its inception in 2006, it has acquired 40 different specialist titles dedicated to hobbies and niche communities. Its latest coup – the AA's inspection and accreditation business – will help take the company to a turnover of £25m this year. Owen said: *"I enjoy building businesses, especially taking unloved assets and breathing new life into them. I also feel that it is important to keep some of these brands alive."*



LDC Top 50 celebration event 2019



JOYCE DE HAAS AND RAISSA DE HAAS

FOUNDERS, DOUBLE DUTCH

While at university, 28-year-old Dutch twins Raissa and Joyce de Haas would serve their own homemade mixers at house parties. Years later, in 2014, the artisan spirit boom was in full swing and they decided to turn these homemade concoctions into a mixer brand.

Today, Double Dutch's bestselling product is a cucumber and watermelon tonic, and the London-based company is selling 750,000 bottles a month into 25 countries.

When asked about the twins' entrepreneurial endeavour, Joyce de Haas said: "We have always been entrepreneurial. When we were young, we used to sell flowers locally, and at university we had a clothing business." The twins manufacture their drinks locally, where possible, and the company is 100pc carbon neutral.



TRACY EBDON-POOLE

FOUNDER, TAXCALC

Tracy Ebdon-Poole is the former "business trouble-shooter" who helped grow Dyson into a world-beating brand.

She made her first foray into the accounting world back in 2004 and is now challenging the giants Sage, Iris and Digita with her Wokingham-based accountancy platform TaxCalc. "I like to empower people to think freely and see the big picture," she says.

Her secret? Her staff to go the extra mile to support customers through all their tax needs. Nearly half of new business enquiries are generated through word of mouth and the business achieves double-digit growth every year. "I wanted to revolutionise the tax software market and make it accessible and affordable," she says. "Customers are moving to us at a rate of knots."



ROD AARON GAMMONS

CEO, ROTOLIGHT

Father-and-son team Rod and Rod Aaron Gammons launched professional lighting firm Rotolight in 2008.

"We are a huge disrupter in our industry. Our competitors were huge, global companies," says CEO Rod Aaron. "They dismissed us and then suddenly we were growing 100pc year-on-year while they were declining." The pair designed the lighting kit used on James Bond's Skyfall, the first film shot on a digital camera.

Their innovative LED lights can produce the effect of lightning or gunshot on a film set, saving hours of post-production work.

The entrepreneurs have spread the word about Rotolight through an online army of ambassadors – established directors and new talent alike.



MATTHEW GAVINS

FOUNDER, EVOLUTION POWER TOOLS

"I'm an inventor at heart. I'm always looking for a problem to solve." Matthew Gavins started repairing power tools when he was a teenager, landing a job at Bosch aged 19. He forged his own path in 1997, launching Evolution Power Tools.

He still helps design every product - *"I learned the value of having the right tools for the job."* Matthew believes the purpose of business is to help others, with profit a secondary concern. He donates a minimum of 10pc of profit to good causes each year. *"We have three pillars here: helping staff, friends of the business, and charities."*



CATHERINE GAZZOLI

FOUNDER, PICCOLO FOODS

Since launching organic baby food start-up Piccolo in 2016, Catherine Gazzoli has been on a mission to introduce parents and babies to the wonders of the natural Mediterranean diet.

Her brand has been championed by gastronome Prue Leith, is stocked nationwide and has just started selling overseas.

Catherine used to work for the UN, where she saw first-hand the need to educate young families about healthy eating. *"My career really helped me see what was missing on the shelves."* The business will turn over £5m this year. It donates 10pc of its profits to charity and has given away over 200,000 meals to families in need.



ARON GELBARD

CO-FOUNDER, BLOOM & WILD

Aron Gelbard is a man on a mission: *"to make sending and receiving flowers the joy it should be".*

His letterbox flower delivery firm, Bloom & Wild, has achieved extraordinary growth since inception six years ago, and is now on course to deliver 2m boxes of flowers and plants this year. Aron admits that launching the venture was daunting: *"My father was an entrepreneur and had his ups and downs so I knew it wouldn't be plain sailing."* However, the opportunity to shake up a staid industry was too good to pass up. He's raised £22m of growth capital to fuel international expansion, and plans to create the market leader in Europe.

Rebecca Burn-Callander,
Former Telegraph Enterprise Editor
and LDC Top 50 Judge



ROBERT GINSBERG

MANAGING DIRECTOR, HiB

Founded in 1990 by Warren Ginsberg, HiB has given the humble bathroom a hi-tech makeover, manufacturing steam-free mirrors, LED colour-changing lights, Bluetooth speakers and bathroom charging sockets for modern consumers.

In 2012, his son Robert moved from Accenture with the aim of making a difference in a smaller, growing business and he's done just that; sales have soared from £8m to £26m under his leadership. The business has started exporting into Europe and the Middle East, and has been growing more than 20pc each year since 2015. "We tend to ignore external barriers and focus on what we can do," says Robert.



SIMON GOODENOUGH

CEO, DSP

Serial entrepreneur Simon Goodenough joined IT services provider DSP as a non-executive director in 2014 but soon realised he wanted more than an advisory role.

"I could see the market moving and we were being left behind," he explains. In 2015, he took over as CEO and has since delivered a 400pc rise in profit by investing in innovation, making acquisitions, and *"taking a few risks"*, he says.

Now, he is expanding into the US. Simon is a born entrepreneur: *"When I was nine, I was the first kid at school to get a ZX Spectrum. I hooked it up to the school's TV and charged 20p a go."*



DAVID HALLAM

FOUNDER, WISE SOFTWARE UK

"When I was at school, my teachers all wrote the same thing on my report: 'David's a nice lad but he's thick'."

Wise Software founder David Hallam left school at 15 with no qualifications but when he first sat in front of a computer, he knew he'd found his calling. *"Computers have always made sense to me. Like second nature,"* he says.

He wrote the first version of his business software single-handed, and OrderWise is now used by the likes of John Lewis and the Ministry of Defence. He is winning customers from the likes of Amazon and Salesforce; his software is now used by 1,000 companies across the UK.



HARRY & GEORGE HASTINGS AND DANIEL & DAVID OX

FOUNDERS, OCEAN HOLIDAYS

Founded by two pairs of brothers in 2003, Ocean Holidays is made up of Ocean Florida, which specialises in selling holidays in Florida directly to consumers, Ocean Beds which provides vacation homes to the travel trade, and Winged Boots, a high-end travel concierge service.

Harry and George Hastings and Daniel and David Ox all co-own the business, which grew 20pc last year to hit £65m in revenue. The secret to Ocean's success is their bond, according to Daniel Ox, as they all have complementary skills. *"We are two sets of brothers, four equal partners. We have been through the fire together with this business and now we have a powerful bond, and nothing can stop us."*



EMMA HEATHCOTE-JAMES

FOUNDER, LITTLE SOAP COMPANY

Emma Heathcote-James began making her own soaps in 2008 after struggling to find natural, organic bars in the supermarkets. By the end of that year, she had secured a listing in Waitrose, and now sells her products across nine major retailers and independents.

The Cotswolds-based company has survived many challenges over the years. *"Our main manufacturer went into administration and I had to sell my house to afford to fulfil the outstanding orders,"* explains Emma. But now it is gearing up to launch a range all in plastic-free bars. The business grew 42pc last year.



DARREN JOBLING

CO-FOUNDER, ZEROLIGHT

Darren Jobling is a videogame entrepreneur turned automotive disruptor and was a Top 50 One to Watch in 2018.

His company, Zerolight, creates virtual reality cars for the likes of Audi and Lamborghini, helping them sell more features to customers. It is now the world leader, growing at 50pc a year. *"The automotive industry was crying out for change,"* explains Darren. *"We can now do what we do at scale."*

The Newcastle-based company generates 100pc of its revenues from outside the UK. *"I come from a family of engineers so I want to prove we're still world leaders in engineering, albeit software engineering."*



SARA LOU-ANN JONES

FOUNDER, CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Mum-of-three and neurolinguistics expert Sara Lou-Ann Jones founded the Centre for Excellence in 2016 as a way to work from home and spend more time with her family.

She created an online neuro-linguistic programming course, advertised it on daily deals site Groupon, and was suddenly making thousands of sales each week.

Since then, she has built her start-up into an online learning platform with 1,000 courses, ranging from aromatherapy to meditation. She says: *"What excites me the most is being able to make the impossible possible. We want to see how big we can get and how many lives we can touch."*



NISHA KATONA MBE

FOUNDER, MOWGLI STREET FOOD

"Our mission is to enrich the lives of others." Nisha Katona MBE was a successful barrister when she started Mowgli Street Food. She felt compelled to preserve the ancient Bengali recipes that were slowly disappearing from living memory: *"I didn't want to lose the flavour of my mum's dhal or her cauliflower curry."*

She opened her first restaurant in Liverpool five years ago. Within four months there were queues around the block. *"That's when I quit the Bar,"* she says. *"It was a big risk but now we have nine restaurants nationwide."* Nisha is a passionate philanthropist, supporting several charities, and flying staff over to India once a year to volunteer in poor communities.



ANDREW KEEBLE AND DEBBIE KEEBLE

FOUNDERS, HECK FOOD

When Andrew and Debbie Keeble sold their eponymous sausage brand in 2005, they hadn't yet fulfilled their ambition to change the industry. So, in 2013, they started premium sausage maker HECK Food.

The company employs all four of the founders' children, and has won 50pc market share with its tasty, high quality products and cheeky branding.

Now at £25m in revenue, the pair hope to reach £100m, and have started exporting as far afield as Australia. *"Because we are a family business, we make decisions really quickly – no one has to wait for some financial controller to sign off,"* Andrew explains.



EDDIE LATHAM AND PJ SCOTT

FOUNDERS, VELOCITY COMMERCE

Eddie Latham and PJ Scott met working at Play.com. Experts in search engine optimisation and e-commerce, they created Velocity Commerce as a side hustle in February 2013, selling clearance products online out of a garage. *"We invested £3,000 of our own money, and woke up at 5am to send parcels,"* says Eddie.

By the end of that first year, it was turning over £100,000 and the pair took voluntary redundancy to focus on Velocity. It now offers consultancy and half its £20m turnover comes from helping major brands like Sony and Brita get their products to the top of results pages on Amazon and eBay.



TOBY MCCARTNEY

CEO, MACREBUR

Toby McCartney remembers the day that sparked his vision for MacRebur. He was at his six-year-old daughter's assembly. The topic was: what lives in our oceans? "She said 'plastic'," he says. *"She had done her research and knew that by the time she reached 40 there would be more plastic in our oceans than fish."* This spurred the serial entrepreneur to find a solution.

He developed a patented way to use plastic to replace bitumen in roads, launching the Lockerbie-based business in 2016. The company has now opened one factory with plans for 30 more, and has laid roads from Yorkshire to Australia, all using locally produced waste plastic.



ROBIN MODAK

FOUNDER, GENMED

One word sums up Robin Modak: determined. He came with the idea for a disruptive new business in 2002, one that would supply services, equipment and consumables to the NHS - saving it money and making it a lot more efficient. He attempted two joint ventures but his partners failed to realise his vision. In 2005, jobless, with two small children, he decided to do it alone, launching GENMED two years later.

Today, he is revolutionising the way the NHS procures everything from scalpels to Hepatitis C testing equipment. GENMED is used by 40 NHS trusts and manages contracts worth £220m. Robin's determination will see the firm reach £500m in revenue by 2022.



ADRIAN MOORHOUSE MBE

MANAGING DIRECTOR, LANE4

Adrian Moorhouse MBE won gold for Britain in the 100m breaststroke at the 1988 Olympics. When the swimming legend retired in 1992, he knew that wasn't the end of his career. *"I didn't want to just be some ex-sportsperson,"* he says. Realising he owed much of his success to the sports psychologists who helped him develop a winning mindset, he set up Lane4 in 1995 to bring these learnings to the business world.

Lane4 now offers all kinds of management training and consultancy, and Adrian doubles the size of the business every four years. He has ambitions to reach 1m learners worldwide.



RACHEL PARSONAGE

MANAGING DIRECTOR, KMI BRANDS

Rachel Parsonage, Managing Director of KMI Brands, has positioned her Teddington-based beauty brand at the “masstige” end of the market – premium yet mainstream products with the “wow factor”.

The company makes beauty products on behalf of Ted Baker and Orla Kiely, as well as creating own brands like Noughty Haircare. *“It’s really exciting that we’ve created this niche for ourselves in a sector that’s highly commoditised,”* she says, adding that it is *“recession-proof”*. This strategy has generated growth of 11pc, on average, each year since 2014. Rachel is currently driving forward international sales, and aims to reach £30m in turnover within three years.



LDC Top 50 celebration event 2019



STEVE PEREZ

FOUNDER, GLOBAL BRANDS

Serial entrepreneur Steve Perez launched Global Brands in 1997 after spotting an opportunity to sell a pre-mixed vodka and energy drink in a can. He created the original range in his back garden, and now his £50m-turnover business sells brands such as Hooper's and Franklin & Sons into 69 countries.

He has grown the business 30pc over the past year through launching new brand, All Shook Up, and expanding in the US. Steve, who was also a professional rally driver until an accident last year, says that it takes the same qualities to win races and build businesses. *"You have to prepare, work hard and take calculated risks. Being an entrepreneur is just like being a sportsman."*



MARTIN PORT

FOUNDER, BIGCHANGE

Successful technology specialist Martin Port sold his last business in late 2009 and was back with a new venture just a year later.

The Yorkshire entrepreneur created BigChange to help companies with mobile workforces manage staff, jobs and digitise their processes. *"I saw a massive gap in the market for this technology,"* he says. *"I was still young – only 50 – and I wanted to build a great team one more time."*

Martin's next move is to keep expanding into new geographies: *"It keeps the product sharp because you're up against different competitors in every market."* Martin believes BigChange could be a "unicorn" - worth £1bn - by 2024.



DAVID RAI

CO-FOUNDER, SPARTA GLOBAL

David Rai is helping to overcome the IT skills shortage in the UK by finding raw, young talent and training these recruits in cutting edge technology skills, from software development to robotics.

His company, Sparta Global, which he created with Tim Staton in 2007, currently boasts 300 consultants, and its client list includes the likes of ASOS, AXA and the Home Office. The entrepreneur prides himself on hiring young people from diverse backgrounds: Sparta has its own rigorous assessment process to determine ability.

The company currently turns over £23m and David's ambition is for it to hit £100m within five years.



STEVE RICHARDSON

DIRECTOR, NRG FLEET SERVICES

Specialist vehicles, from tankers to refuse trucks, use NRG Fleet Services to manage their tyres.

Director Steve Richardson is the driving force behind the business, which is the “Carphone Warehouse of tyres”. He cut his teeth in the corporate world, working at the likes of Michelin, and is now disrupting an “archaic” industry by leveraging data to help customers cut costs and become more efficient. Steve plans to grow the business 20pc a year until 2022.

His mantra is: if it is to be, it is up to me. *“That might sound corny but I use that continuously,”* he says. *“If you expect someone else to do it, it’s not going to happen.”*



MARK ROBERTS

FOUNDER, LIGHTFOOT

Serial entrepreneur Mark Roberts is a man on a mission: he wants to make good driving “cool and fun”. He has created Lightfoot, “the Fitbit for cars”, which listens to a car’s engine and feeds information back so drivers can become more efficient, saving 20pc on both fuel and emissions, on average. *“We are making a fundamental impact,”* he says. *“No one else in the world is doing what I’m doing.”*

Mark recently launched a lottery to “gamify” good driving by offering players cash prizes and this move is set to accelerate growth. His company now boasts 30,000 users, and is winning 2,000 more each month.



SHAUN RUTLAND

CO-FOUNDER, HUTCH

“I empower people to be creative,” says Shaun Rutland, Co-Founder of Hutch. Rutland’s approach allows small teams to build and launch a new game in months - not years.

If it’s popular, he invests further resource. This makes the London-based developer, which makes racing games for mobile platforms, incredibly agile. *“We built our first game in seven months and it made \$1m,”* he reveals. Shaun, who founded the business with four ex-PlayStation colleagues, says that Hutch is the antidote to corporate life: share options and complete financial transparency for staff. Their model has generated incredible results: 500,000 people play Hutch’s titles each day, with 250m downloads in eight years.



Carl Castledine, CEO, Away Resorts
and LDC Top 50 Judge



GUY SCHANSCHIEFF MBE AND JO SCHANSCHIEFF

FOUNDERS, BAMBINO MIO

The founders of reusable nappy brand Bambino Mio, Guy and Jo Schanschieff are on a mission to eradicate disposable nappies from the globe and help families save money at the same time.

Sold in 50 countries worldwide, the company generates 70pc of its £5.5m revenue from overseas. Guy and Jo started the business in the front room of their terraced house in Northampton more than two decades ago. Now, they employ 80 people. *"Consumer attitudes to single-use plastics are changing fast and nappies are a big offender. We plan to double in size every year,"* said Guy, who has received an MBE for his services to the industry.



WAYNE SPRIGGS

FOUNDER, LUSSO STONE

Founded in 2014 by Wayne Spriggs, Lusso Stone designs all its own products, offering luxury at affordable prices.

Wayne was previously a property developer but couldn't find high-end bathroom products without spending tens of thousands of pounds. *"I visited factories around the world that made high-end bathrooms and took the risk and set up a website,"* he says.

Today, the business is opening centres in the US and he is building a legacy for his son who joined the business earlier this year. *"The brand is so popular that I'm confident the sky is the limit for us."*



HELEN SWABY

FOUNDER, DEMONTFORT FINE ART

In 1990, Helen Swaby was searching for some art to decorate her new cottage in Shenstone. *"I went to a gallery in London but found it pretentious and elitist,"* she says.

She spotted an artist she liked and tracked her down independently. That was the beginning of DeMontfort Fine Art, which now sources original works from 275 emerging artists and 20th century masters.

The business runs 54 galleries under the Whitewall and Clarendon brands; Swaby plans to open another 50 in the UK. *"I knew nothing about art when I started but I had a good eye. And now I employ 400 people and represent some of the UK's best-selling artists."*



RICHARD TANG

FOUNDER, ZEN

Richard Tang has one rule at Zen Internet, the broadband provider he started 24 years ago. *"We put people first, always,"* he says. *"We provide a better service than anyone else."* His Rochdale-based firm has the lowest churn in the business, and has grown to 80,000 customers nationwide.

Richard is hungry for further growth - *"We've been a niche player too long. I want to grow by a factor of 10"*. The entrepreneur is passionate philanthropist, and also helps staff launch their own ventures through an in-house incubator scheme. *"I am driven by the desire to make a positive difference to the world."*



MICHAEL TEIXEIRA

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, MVF

Michael Teixeira left a successful corporate career to join digital marketing start-up MVF as its CFO back in 2012. He became chief executive in 2017 and under his stewardship the firm has grown 30pc a year, and generates an impressive 95pc of its revenue from recurring business.

"I've helped to realise the potential of the company," he says. Michael is aggressively expanding MVF overseas, with sales from the US up 70pc year-on-year. "I've also acquired five businesses in the last 2.5 years and I want to do more of that," he reveals. "I want MVF to be the global leader in customer generation."



MAX TOTI

FOUNDER, CAPTEC

When Max Toti was 13, he saw an advert for a programmable calculator. He mowed lawns, washed cars and cleared attics until he'd raised half the money.

Impressed by this entrepreneurial zeal, his father helped him buy the device. *"That was the dawn of my north star,"* says Max, whose passion for electronics saw him found Captec, which provides the specialised IT that keeps the London Underground moving and powers the satellites behind UK navy submarines.

He grew the company organically for two decades but has been making acquisitions over the past five years that are now helping to propel the £20m-turnover company towards an IPO.



CLAIRE TROTT

FOUNDER, PLANTFORCE

"I don't see myself as an entrepreneur," says Claire Trott, Founder of Plantforce, which hires out machinery for major construction projects. *"I fell in love with the construction industry and I love hiring out diggers."*

She may be reluctant to shout about her achievements but, over the past two decades, she has disrupted the industry with a focus on technical innovation and customer support. Plantforce is now trusted to supply machines, labour, and training for projects like Hinkley Point C.

She is an innovator in the market, creating a virtual simulator to train up new talent and ensure that workers are fully competent before they reach a site.



WINNER - SOCIAL PURPOSE

EBEN UPTON CBE

FOUNDER, RASPBERRY PI

Eben Upton CBE is the founder and inventor of Raspberry Pi, the affordable and programmable device that has become the best-selling British computer of all time.

His mission is to make technology fun and accessible to all: *"Every Raspberry Pi we sell has the opportunity to trick someone into becoming a digital programmer,"* he says.

Eben's ultimate goal is ambitious in the extreme: *"to give every young person on the planet access to a computer" but the brand is grabbing serious market share. "We have sold 25m units so far. If we sell 15m units next year, we'll be in the top five,"* he says. *"It would be nice to be number one."*



SCOTT VINCENT

FOUNDER, PARKER FITZGERALD

After the 2008 financial crash, investment banker Scott Vincent saw the need to help the world's leading financial institutions win back the trust they had lost. His strategic consultancy Parker Fitzgerald focuses on eliminating financial risk.

"We are famous for just one thing," says Vincent. *"Our mission is to reinstall confidence in financial services."* The London-based specialist is competing with the global accountancy giants – and winning. It is growing 20pc year-on-year and employs 300 consultants.

A father of three, Vincent says that creating security for his family is what drives him. *"Second to that is the urge to create a legacy."*



JUSTIN WHITSTON

FOUNDER, FLEETONDEMAND

When serial entrepreneur Justin Whitston created mobility-as-a-service firm Fleetondemand in 2012, he was a pioneer in the industry.

The company allows corporate business travellers to book flights, trains, taxis, car clubs – even scooters and bikes – and bill it back to their employer. He's built five platforms now, operating in six European countries and plans to roll out to 82. The 46-year-old wants to create a billion-pound "unicorn" within the next decade. *"This will be a solid, profitable technology business,"* he says. *"An ambition of mine is to build a truly global platform from Yorkshire, and allow employees to participate in our success."*



DAN WILLIAMS

MANAGING DIRECTOR, OREAN PERSONAL CARE

When Dan Williams joined Orean Personal Care, the private label cosmetics manufacturer was turning over just £3.5m.

Over the past six years, he has focused the company on premium clients, making skincare and hair products that end up on the shelves of Space NK and Sephora. He has also followed customers into the US, setting-up a factory, and from a standing start, the company now generates \$4m a year from sales across the Atlantic. His ambition and strategy has helped the business reach a total turnover of £20m in 2019, with the potential to double in size over the next two years.



WINNER - MOST AMBITIOUS BUSINESS LEADER

CLINT WILSON

GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE, PARENTPAY

Software specialist Clint Wilson was working for a payments processing company when he met ex-teacher Lynne Taylor in 2004. She was looking for a way to help schools collect fees and money for trips and lunches. *"Children were bringing cash to school in Tupperware",* says Wilson. *"There were major issues around safety."*

Clint spent six months building a solution. *"I came home and told my wife that I wouldn't be drawing a salary for a while,"* he says. *"Little did I know it would take 2.5 years."* Under his leadership, ParentPay has become the leading payments platform for UK schools, serving 5m parents nationwide.



GORDON WILSON

CEO, ADVANCED

When Gordon Wilson took the helm at Advanced back in 2015, the software business was a patchwork of 13 different brands, which had been acquired over the previous decade. *"There was no integration between the businesses,"* he says. *"I spent two years bringing them together,"* he says. *"People say I'm a turnaround guy but I'm not, I'm a growth guy."*

His strategy helped the business to cross sell different products and offer a better service to customers, meaning revenues soared. Wilson also brought a unique hiring strategy to the business, focusing on talent and enthusiasm, and then training in-house, rather than demanding a degree.



DAN WRIGHT

FORMER CHAIRMAN, VISION SUPPORT SERVICES

Guests at the Hilton and Dorchester hotels sleep on sheets sourced and laundered by Vision Support Services, a textile specialist that comprises three heritage brands.

The company was led by turnaround specialist Dan Wright from 2005 until June 2019, and revenues rose tenfold to £65m under his leadership. Dan comes from a family lineage of textile entrepreneurs so he has a deep understanding of the market and the importance of customer service. He explains: *"From Dublin to Dubai, our products are all of the same high standard. Hotels like the Hilton were crying out for that kind of service."*



LDC Top 50 celebration event 2019

ONES TO WATCH.

The volume of nominations for the Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders programme was a testament to the health of small and medium-sized enterprises. While there could only be 50, we could not resist compiling a “ones to watch” category to showcase the ambitious leaders behind tomorrow’s top firms.

These business leaders have built brands that punch above their weight in the growth and export stakes – and many are generating value in other ways too, be it via social change or environmental credentials.



STUART MCLACHLAN

CEO, ANTHERIS GROUP

The Highly Commended Award for the Ones to Watch, showcases the business leader who is making their mark and is destined for great things. Stuart McLachlan founded Anthesis in 2013 on the belief that sustainability and commerciality go hand in hand. His business now supports 25pc of the FTSE100 and delivers 20 - 30pc year-on-year organic growth.

NAME	ROLE	BUSINESS	WEBSITE
Robert Anderson	CEO	Protean Software	proteansoftware.co.uk
Nick Brackenbury and Max Kreijn	Co-Founders	NearSt	near.st
Nick Bradley	CEO	AdviserPlus	adviserplus.com
Danny Brooks	CEO	Virtual Human Resources Group	v-hr.com
Christopher Burke	CEO	Brickendon Consulting	brickendon.com
Chris Chapman	Managing Director	GlucoRx	glucorx.co.uk
Suzie Cregan	Founder	Jimmy's Iced Coffee	jimmysicedcoffee.com

NAME	ROLE	BUSINESS	WEBSITE
Scott Davis	Managing Director	Delta Rock Group	deltarock.co.uk
Bernie de Le Cuona	Founder	de Le Cuona	delecuona.com
Martin Flick	CEO	Olive Communications	olive.co.uk
George Graham	CEO	Wolf & Badger	wolfandbadger.com
Paul Hanley	Managing Director	ER Travel Services	easirent.com
Sean Hoban	CEO	Kimble	kimbleapps.com
Iain Hutchinson	Founder	Merlin ERD	merlinerd.com
Chris Liversidge	CEO	Orion Global Managed Services	orion247.com
Paul McElvaney	CEO	Learning Pool	learningpool.com
Stuart McLachlan	CEO	Anthesis Group	anthesisgroup.com
Tim Mercer	CEO	Vapour Cloud	vapourcloud.com
John Michael	CEO	iStorage	istorage-uk.com
Michael Nabarro	Co-Founder	Spektrix	spektrix.com
Laurence Newman	CEO	CurrentBody	currentbody.com
Richard Paterson and Will Saville	Co-Founders	Unily	unily.com
Adam Reynolds	CEO	Webexpenses	webexpenses.com
Mark Robinson	Founder	Rocksteady Music School	rocksteadymusicschool.com
Khalid Saifullah MBE	Managing Director	Star Tissue UK	startissueuk.co.uk
Giles Salt	CEO	M&I Materials	mimaterials.com
Calum Smeaton	CEO	TVSquared	tvquared.com
Richard Smith	CEO	Office Freedom	officefreedom.com
David Spencer-Percival	Founder	No. 1 Rosemary Water	rosemarywater.com
James Stander	Managing Director	Ronin Value Creation & Sustainable Advantage	sustainable-advantage.com
Paul Venners	Managing Director	LEEC	leec.co.uk
Oliver Waring	CEO	Reflex Vehicle Hire	reflexvehiclehire.com
David West	Medical Director	Veincentre	veincentre.com
Matt West	CEO	Feefo	feefo.com
Jonathon Whiteley	CEO	Incisive Media	incisivemedia.com



AMBITIOUS PARTNERSHIPS: HOW PRIVATE EQUITY SUPPORTS GROWTH

In addition to being the driving force behind the Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders, LDC backs the management teams of UK mid-market businesses to help them build bigger and more sustainable businesses.

For many ambitious leaders, private equity brings a mixture of financial backing, strategic discipline, as well as support with everything a growing business needs, such as access to top talent. We are passionate about giving the management teams in our portfolio everything they need to achieve great things and meet ambitious growth goals.

Carl Castledine, Founder of holiday park operator Away Resorts, chose the private equity route when he wanted to capitalise on Britain's buoyant 'staycation' market and pursue aggressive growth plans. He secured investment from LDC in 2015 to acquire new sites and facilities.

"LDC represented patient capital and could provide follow-on funding, which was important to us," he explains. Over the four-year partnership, Away Resorts' turnover increased from £17m to more than £63m.

"LDC has been incredible," explains Carl. "It was willing to invest in us as a management team. It also had a big portfolio of other businesses that we could lean on to help us." Carl is now one step closer to his ultimate ambition: "We want to be a billion-pound business within 10 years."

Debbie Bestwick MBE, Founder of games developer Team17, has dreamed of running a public company since she was 15 years old. She chose to secure investment, not just as a source of capital, but "to test myself in the boardroom environment and check that I had the patience and skill to cope at that level." As the developer behind the hit Worms series, Team17 received many offers of investment but, in 2016, she chose LDC.

"LDC, with its association with Lloyds, brings a global name," explains Debbie. "And LDC really helped me prepare for an IPO. They nurtured me well." She realised her ambition in 2018, when Team17 listed on AIM. "I'm more ambitious than ever now," she says.

BOFA International is a multi-award-winning world leader in fume extraction and filtration. LDC backed the business in 2015, helping drive international growth and product development. "The chairman wanted to retire and if we had chosen a trade sale, we wouldn't have realised the true value of the business," says Managing Director Tony Lockwood. *"Private equity helped us to professionalise and to accelerate growth. We have gone from a small, not-very-well-known family business to a market leader."*

But private equity isn't always an obvious choice for people who have built their own business from scratch or nurtured growth over a number of years. Tony had some reservations about choosing the private equity route: *"I knew very little of private equity. I worried about whether I would still have autonomy and be able to make the right decisions for the business. Would I be hamstrung or helped?"*

The chemistry was right with LDC. They not only invested in the business but we had two LDC non-executive directors on our board, who were very useful in terms of access to their networks and as a sounding board." During the partnership, revenues at BOFA doubled. Tony says: "My ambition is to make BOFA the default name in fume extraction, in the same way as people talk about Hoover."

For many businesses, the best private equity partner is one that doesn't micromanage.

Martin Audio provides the audio equipment for a wide variety of venues and major music festivals worldwide. The business secured investment from LDC in 2018 to support a management buyout by Dom Harter and his team. The company grew revenues 20pc following the deal.

"Private equity can represent a distraction but LDC has trusted us to get on with it," says Dom. He plans to maintain double-digit growth and hopes that Martin Audio will win even more market share around the world. "LDC was the right partner because they have lots of experience with midmarket companies, and they see the same opportunities we do."

CELEBRATING AMBITION.

Such was the calibre of individuals involved this year, we are proud to showcase not one but six of the business leaders. These awards recognise the different ways in which business leaders are fulfilling their ambition and the different stages of their business journey.



THE MOST AMBITIOUS BUSINESS LEADER

CLINT WILSON GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE, PARENTPAY

Clint Wilson, Group CEO of leading payments platform for schools ParentPay, was named The LDC Most Ambitious Business Leader of 2019. He set up the business to use technology to solve the problems created by children taking cash into schools to pay for school trips and lunches. The business now serves 5 million parents worldwide, has expanded internationally and is making acquisitions.

The judges praised the scale of his determination and belief when he first founded the business, and his continued passion and ambition.

INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION

**GUY SCHANSCHIEFF MBE
AND JO SCHANSCHIEFF**

FOUNDERS, BAMBINO MIO

The International Expansion award showcased the business leader our judges felt had the most-impressive global outlook, who demonstrates the greatest ambition to drive international growth.

Guy and Jo Schanschieff have grown their brand internationally with Bambino Mio reusable nappies now sold in 50 countries worldwide. The company generates 70pc of its £5.5m revenue from overseas.

SOCIAL PURPOSE

EBEN UPTON CBE

FOUNDER, RASPBERRY PI

The Social Purpose award highlighted the leader that our judges felt put people at the heart of everything they do, demonstrating the greatest ambition to do good.

Eben Upton has a grand mission: “to give every young person on the planet access to a computer”. He’s well on his way, having sold 25 million of the affordable and programmable devices worldwide.

INNOVATION

MARGOT COOPER

FOUNDER, LIMBS & THINGS

The Innovation award recognised the business leader our judges felt has a true disruptor mentality, with the ambition to transform a sector with fresh-thinking and bold ideas.

Margot Cooper has revolutionised her industry with life-like anatomical models. Her 20-strong R&D department, are constantly working on new models to help the company save lives and ensure babies are born safely on five continents.

ALUMNI’S LEADER

CLAIRE TROTT

FOUNDER, PLANTFORCE

The Alumni’s Leader was selected by our Top 50 2018 alumni and is the person last year’s success stories think is deserving of recognition.

Claire Trott the founder of Plantforce, which hires out machinery for major construction projects, is in love with the construction industry! She has a disruptive, innovative and determined attitude with a focus technical innovation and customer support.



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Paul Drechsler CBE, Chairman of Bibby Line Group
and Chair of LDC Top 50 Judging panel

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Ambition is the fire in our belly. It's the extra 10 per cent that makes good, great. Frankly, for many businesses, it's the difference between doing or dying. Of course, you need a clear vision, a sound strategy and a track record to succeed but that state of mind is what keeps you there. These business leaders symbolise just that.

”

Paul Drechsler CBE

Chairman of Bibby Line Group and Chair of LDC Top 50 Judging panel

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BACKING AMBITION