



BUILDING A BRAND TO IPO

An IPO can be the ultimate ambition for a business leader - some of the UK's biggest brands had to start somewhere.

Three successful founders talk to Rebecca Burn-Callander about their journey.



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Tim Warrillow, Co-founder, Fever-Tree

It was only when Fever-Tree founders Tim Warrillow and Charles Rolls secured private equity investment in 2013 that the pair first thought about IPO as a route to growth. The premium mixers brand they had founded in 2005 had reached a turnover of £16m. “When we took on private equity, we started thinking: what next?” says Tim. “We knew we wanted to keep growing the business over the long-term, so an IPO was the natural next step.”

Tom Joule, founder of Joules, went on a similar journey. His company designs and sells clothing, footwear, accessories, homewares and other lifestyle product ranges inspired by family, fun, and country living. He started the business in 1989 selling his products at county fairs and agricultural events across the UK. “I started this company from a table in a field,” he says. “During the first few years, all I thought about was how to survive, then how to differentiate the brand. But as the business evolved, I started to think bigger. Once we took on investment, that was a turning point. I knew that I didn’t want to sell to another company down the line. An IPO made sense.”

In contrast, Debbie Bestwick MBE, founder of Team17, the videogames maker behind the iconic Worms franchise, started dreaming of running a public company when she was just a teenager. “When I was 16, I was reading autobiographies of businesspeople who were running huge listed corporations,” she says. “My dream, from the first day I started Team17, was to float on the London Stock Exchange. That ambition was there all along.”

Listing a business creates an incredible opportunity to grow, but running a listed company presents unique challenges. “It’s a far stricter regime,” says Tom. “As an entrepreneur, you have to make your peace with that. And you also need to make sure you have the resources to run the business while meeting all the obligations that come with being a listed company. I have always had a CEO running alongside me while I focus on creative strategy and that has worked well.”



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These three founders believe there is no set timeframe for an IPO: when you know, you know.

The Fever-Tree founders waited almost a decade to list on London’s AIM market. For Joules, it took just shy of 30 years; the business listed on the London Stock Exchange in 2016. Debbie almost attempted an IPO in 2016 but decided on private equity as a steppingstone. “I realised it was too early, and didn’t know how I’d cope in that environment, dealing with the City every day. It was only when I secured private equity investment that I felt confident enough to start thinking about an IPO again.” The listing process and due diligence may be intense but, with the right advisers and partners, it can be completed quickly. “It only took us 92 days from when we made the decision to IPO,” she says.

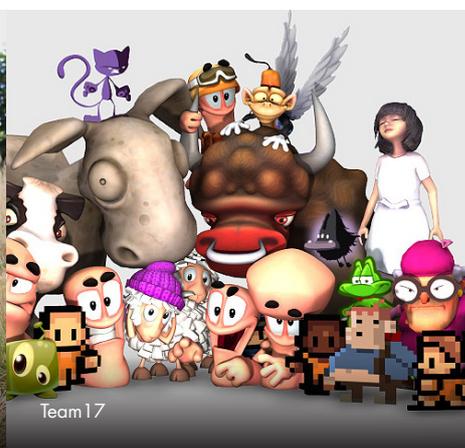
All three businesses have flourished post-IPO. In 2018, Team17 launched on AIM with an oversubscribed listing. “It took us less than two years to treble our share price,” Debbie explains. This sentiment is echoed by Tim: “We are more ambitious than we have ever been,” he says. “Fever-Tree now employs 250 people around the world and as we grow, the size of the opportunity grows too. It’s very exciting, and there’s no doubt that we have benefited from the increased public awareness as a listed business. That has also helped us to build on our international growth, giving overseas partners real confidence in our brand.”



Fever-Tree



Joules



Team17



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“Running a public company gives you the opportunity to attract talent that you never would otherwise,” explains Tom. “And it feels amazing to fulfil your potential as a business.”

Debbie advises any entrepreneur with a fast-growth business to think about the value of an IPO. “I have always had a burning ambition to grow a business, and create something really special here in the UK,” she says. “A lot of gaming companies get sold overseas but I wanted to prove that I, a working-class girl, could build a British success story. An IPO has helped me do just that.”

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