

THE ENTREPRENEUR BEHIND INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS STORY TEXTHELP

Martin McKay, Founder & CEO Texthelp



Entrepreneurs form the backbone of the UK economy and are the creators and problem-solvers conquering some of the great conundrums of our times. Martin McKay, founder of Texthelp, is one such innovator.

His business helps millions of people with communication issues to understand others and be understood. His technology has dramatically changed the lives of dyslexic people around the world – both within education and in the workplace. Martin McKay shares the catalyst for his entrepreneurial journey and reveals how he turned Texthelp into an international success story.

“When I was young, my dad had a stroke,” says Martin. “I have first-hand experience of what it’s like to be unable to communicate well. So in the early nineties I became one of the founders of a company making software for people with profound communication disorders like motor neurone disease and cerebral palsy.” In 1996, Martin began learning about dyslexia. “That’s when I realised the scale of the market,” he says. Texthelp now provides a wide range of products, including spell-checker designed specifically for dyslexic people, who often make phonetic mistakes that existing software can’t catch. “In America alone, 12% of the kids in school are in special education,” says Martin. “Many are dyslexic and others have English as a second language. We support them through their studies.” Texthelp’s suite of tools won the coveted title of Google’s Technology for Education Partner in 2015.



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The business currently boasts 40m users and Martin hopes to reach 100m in three years – and even a global pandemic hasn't stunted his ambitions. "The use of our maths product went through the roof last year," he reveals. Innovation has helped the company to thrive despite the crisis. "In 2019, we took on private equity investment and LDC, our partner, helped us to ramp up research and development," he says. "We released a new product last year, and we have a very healthy pipeline of new releases for this year and beyond. When your software company is 30 years old, you have to keep reinventing yourself. If you don't innovate, you become a dinosaur." Texthelp also switched all its marketing over to digital last year for the first time, which has been a game-changer. "We use data wherever we can to help us run the business faster, better and to be more on top of what's working and what's not," he says.



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Texthelp's 250 staff coped well with the transition to home working, he adds, but he has increased his focus on mental health provision to ensure no one feels overwhelmed. "I'm a big fan of mindfulness and meditation so everyone at the company has a Headspace account," he says. Martin finds his own balance through learning new skills – "I try to do something every year to stretch me intellectually, from robotics to welding to building my own 3D printer. Right now, I'm learning to fly!" – as well as giving back to the next generation of entrepreneurs. "I was young and inexperienced when I started out in business, until my mother introduced me to The Prince's Trust," he says. "I hadn't a clue back then. I really appreciated the help and support so I have now become a Prince's Trust mentor myself. It's great to be advising those in the same boat I was 30 years ago, and I know the LDC team are enjoying supporting tomorrow's leading entrepreneurs in The Prince's Trust Enterprise Programme through their [Backing Youth Ambition](#) partnership.

Martin's focus now is on his ambitious goal to reach 1bn people around the world: "Dyslexia doesn't care what language you speak," he says. "Around 6% of the global workforce can use our tools." The 50-year-old also wants Texthelp to continue to be a pioneer in inclusion. For example, Martin proactively hires dyslexic team members. "To serve this market the people who make our products need to understand what it's like to be dyslexic," Martin explains. He believes the pandemic has forced many leaders to reprioritise and rethink old systems, biases and ways of working. "The world is being more thoughtful," he says. "We want to change the world and make it easier for people with dyslexia to find a job and to thrive in the workplace."

Texthelp's growth strategy has been supported by [LDC](#), the UK's leading mid-market private equity firm.

[Discover more about Martin's journey from young entrepreneur to global CEO](#)

