



# THE LDC TOP 50 MOST AMBITIOUS LEADERS

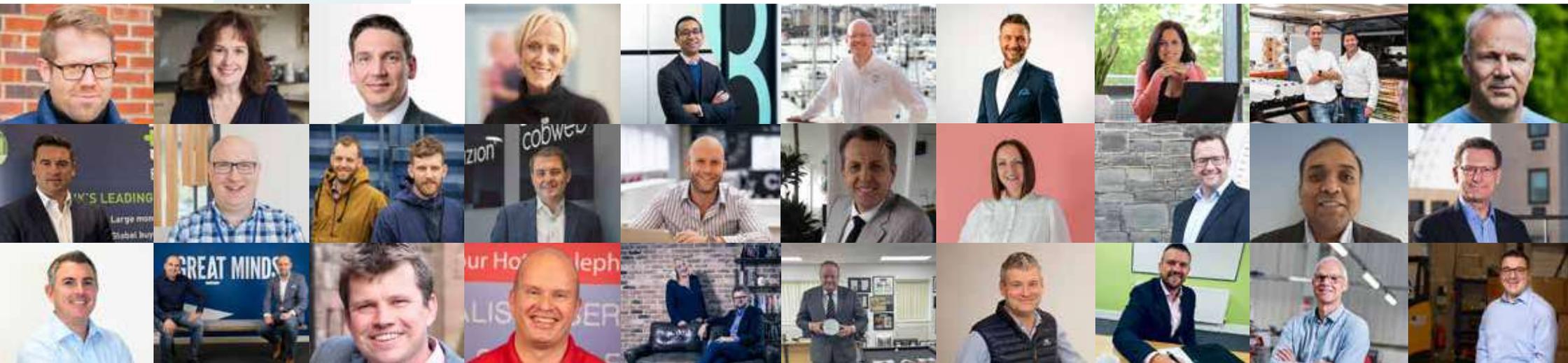


IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



# THE TOP 50

2021





# AMBITIOUS BUSINESS LEADERS GOING FOR GROWTH

Now in its fourth year, and supported by The Times, The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders programme celebrates the inspiring individuals that are driving forward some of the UK's most successful and fast-growing mid-sized firms.

In a tale of resilience, strategic excellence and export success, the individuals celebrated in this year's Top 50 hail from every corner of the country, operate across a multitude of different industries and together they employ 9,500 people and grew revenues by an average of 179% across the past three years.

This year we received more than 600 nominations – almost double the number of nominations received in 2020 – and it has never been more difficult to choose just 50.

From pet food connoisseurs to IT whizzes and engineers to marketeers, each business leader has a personal mission to make a difference and all are ready to prove that even in the most difficult of times, businesses can find opportunities and grow.

We are proud to celebrate every business leader within this year's Top 50, as well as our Ones to Watch – those business leaders who are tipped for great things. We hope you enjoy reading all about them.

**John Garner**  
**Managing Partner**  
**LDC**

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## BACKING BUSINESS AMBITION

At LDC, we understand the importance of supporting ambition.

The importance of mid-market businesses to the UK economy can't be overstated, and LDC, the private equity arm of Lloyds Banking Group, has been supporting the ambitions of fast-growth mid-market businesses for the past 40 years.

To date, it has backed the management teams at more than 650 businesses with over £5.5 billion of investment.

**Discover more – [www ldc co uk](http://www ldc co uk)**



## SOMAYEH AGHNIYA

### CO-FOUNDER GEEKS

In 2004, Somayeh Aghnia left Iran for the UK to take a Masters in software development. When she entered the IT industry, she became frustrated that projects were often late, poorly executed or never delivered at all.

She created Geeks in 2007 with software engineer husband Paymon Khamooshi "to do something different". Geeks has been automating the software development lifecycle, while delivering software solutions, and this strategy will see the almost £6m turnover company hit £35m in three years. But growth will never come at the expense of her impact goals, she says. From gender equality in tech to green business practices, "There's no limit on the impact we want to make."



## IMRAN, NOHMAN AND RIZWAN AHMED

### FOUNDERS CREP PROTECT

"We made shoe care sexy," says Rizwan Ahmed. Rizwan, alongside his brothers Imran and Nohman, are the founders of Crep Protect, maker of unique hydrophobic protection sprays and cleaning products aimed at extending the lifespan of sneakers.

Launched in 2013, the company is now the global shoe care partner chosen by sportswear giant adidas, and counts DJ Khaled as a brand ambassador. The brothers credit their entrepreneurial father, who came to the UK in the seventies and launched his own restaurant, for their ambition and drive. "We're just getting started," says Nohman. "In four years, we'll be a billion-dollar group."



## MARK ARNOLD

### MANAGING DIRECTOR ENVAIR TECHNOLOGY

When pharmaceutical companies need to handle dangerous compounds, they call on the containment specialist Envair Technology. The Cheshire-headquartered company designs, manufactures and installs every kind of containment equipment – even fume cupboards for school science labs.

When Mark took over in 2018, the business employed 30 people; in 2021, Envair Technology has grown to 122 staff and turnover is set to hit £20m. Mark plans to grow the business further through a focus on international sales. "I love taking things from concept to completion," he says. "Put the work in, treat people well and empower them, that's how you drive things forward."



## RUSSELL ATTWOOD

**FOUNDER  
ROUTE 101**

"We bring together the best technologies under one platform. That's our secret sauce," says Russell Attwood. His cloud-based contact centre company, Route 101, helps the likes of Shell and Holland & Barratt to handle high multi-channel contact volumes and offer an exceptional service.

Demand has soared and turnover will rise from £9.5m in 2019 to almost £15m this year. Russell is a serial entrepreneur. "I've been running businesses since I was 17," he says. Russell sold his last business to Capita but this time, he's in it for the long haul. "My dream is to employ 1,000 people in 10 years," he adds.



## CHRIS BAGNALL

**FOUNDER  
TRANSMISSION**

Chris Bagnall is the man behind Transmission, the marketing agency chosen by the world's biggest B2B and technology companies – from Microsoft to HP – to handle their global marketing and communications.

"I've been entrepreneurial since the age of nine," he says. "I would bottle up the fridges at my parents' pub before school. I worked in a skittle alley. I have always worked out ways to make money." Chris founded Transmission seven years ago: "We want to be the biggest and best in the world." "Ambition is borne out of success," he says. "Once you get a taste of what's possible, you can't stop."

**WINNER  
THE INTERNATIONAL AMBITION AWARD**



## CHRISTIAN BLEAKLEY

**CEO  
FIRSTCOM EUROPE**

"I have only had one interview in my life," says Christian Bleakley. The telecoms veteran was offered a job in telesales back in 1992, and rose through the ranks, leaving to set up his own telecoms firm in 2009. That company, Telesis, was acquired by Firstcom Europe and Christian became CEO last year.

Since then, Christian has pursued an ambitious expansion across Europe: "We're seeing traction in the UK, Germany and Scandinavia. The important players in this industry are sitting up and taking notice now," he says. The former professional rugby league player credits his love of sport for his focus and drive.



## ANDREW BUD CBE

**FOUNDER  
IPROOV**

Few people have made a bigger impact on technology than Andrew Bud CBE FREng. But he believes his work on nuclear fusion and his pioneering inventions within mobile telecoms will pale in comparison to the achievements of his latest business, iProov.

Launched in 2013, the company uses its patented authentication Flashmark technology to create identity assurance that works on any personal device. He says: "Our vision is to keep people safe when they use their digital identities worldwide across every sector of online activity in every moment of their lives. I think we can get there within seven years."



## ALAN BULLOCK AND SIMON ARTHUR

**CEO AND MANAGING DIRECTOR  
INSAFE INTERNATIONAL**

Alan Bullock's career has come full circle: his first employer was Chubb & Sons, the oldest safe maker in the UK. Today, his company, Insafe International, is the sole distributor for Chubb in the UK.

He founded his venture in 1985 and today, it is the company chosen by high street brands and some of the world's wealthiest people to keep their valuables safe. Insafe now has more than 100 staff and Managing Director Simon Arthur has bold plans for growth: "We want to develop our factory here in the UK and invest in manufacturing and innovation," he says.



## STEPHEN CANN

**DIRECTOR  
BOLLIN GROUP**

"Entrepreneurship is in my blood and I'm very proud of what we have created," says Stephen Cann. When he joined his father's business in 1992, Bollin Group was a distributor of torches, cutlery and Swiss army knives. Over the past two decades, he has acquired a number of businesses; Bollin now owns 70pc of its brands outright.

This strategy has helped the company to diversify – it's now a big player in outdoor clothing and equipment owning brands such as Mountain Equipment, Sprayway, Ronhill and Bridgedale – and has grown turnover from £6m in 1992 to £71m in 2020. For Stephen, being a family business has been fundamental to Bollin Group's long-term success.



## JULIE DEANE CBE

**FOUNDER  
THE CAMBRIDGE SACHEL CO.**

Julie Deane CBE created The Cambridge Satchel Co. in 2008 to help raise money to provide a great education for her children. She started with just £600 and now the brand is an export champion, selling its unique range of British-made bags into 100 countries.

All the bags are still made by hand and Julie now employs 130 people. "A focus on China and US could bring extraordinary growth over the coming years," she says. She wants to use her 12 years of experience to help other entrepreneurs to generate lasting success for the UK economy.



## MART AND ROB DRAKE-KNIGHT

**FOUNDERS  
TEEMILL**

Growing up on the Isle of Wight, Mart and Rob Drake-Knight spent all their time outdoors and saw the impact of plastic waste on their beaches and local community. After university, the pair started Teemill in their parents' shed.

Their vision: "To create a circular economy for t-shirts," says Mart. The organic cotton t-shirts are designed to come back to Teemill to become new t-shirts in a factory powered by renewable energy. "We help people and companies go green and wasteless," adds Rob. "No one can compete with reusability once it is established." The business is doubling revenues every year. Mart says: "We are creating a different fashion economy."

**WINNER  
THE SUSTAINABLE IMPACT AWARD**



## BRENDAN FATCHETT AND SARAH FATCHETT

**FOUNDERS  
365 RESPONSE**

"We live in an age of Uber yet, in patient transport, you're dealing with legacy systems where important information slips through the net," says Brendan Fatchett. He and wife Sarah founded 365 Response to revolutionise transport management after seeing the consequences of delayed or inadequate transport to places of care and education.

"We are focused on removing harm," says Sarah. 365 Response is growing 35pc a year and the duo want to be responsible for transporting every patient with complex needs or child with a special educational requirement in the UK.

# EXPORT EXPERTS DO A GREAT DEAL

Overseas trading isn't always plain sailing but smart UK business leaders are growing revenues by boosting export operations – and there's potential for even greater growth.

Expanding your business overseas has never been straightforward. The logistical hurdles include everything from navigating local laws and taxes to building brand awareness in potentially unfamiliar cultures. Add in the upheaval of a global pandemic, and geopolitical shifts such as Brexit, and things are bound to appear even more complex.

Yet statistics from the Department for International Trade (DIT) show exports were still worth more than £560 billion to the UK economy in the 12 months to June 2021. The UK remains one of the world's top five exporting nations, with nearly 150,000 UK businesses exporting goods.



Astonish's ethical values have helped to build a global brand.

And that figure could easily be higher. According to UK Export Finance, which offers financing advice and support to exporters, one in eight firms with a turnover of more than £500,000 are not exporting but could be.

“There’s a massive untapped export potential in the UK,” says Carl Williamson, head of trade finance at UK Export Finance. “And DIT research shows exporters are more productive, more resilient, more innovative and more profitable.”

Some CEOs and MDs have exporting baked into their DNA, and nowhere is this more apparent than among our Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders. Take Astonish, one of the only vegan, cruelty-free cleaning brands in the UK – it is proving that its ethical stance is just as popular with international customers as it is with those at home.

“We’re proud of the fact that a quarter of our turnover is from overseas,” says CEO Howard Moss, who took over from his father, Alan Moss, in 2006 with an ambition to take the ethical brand into the mainstream.

“We’re the number two cleaning brand in Israel,” he explains. “We send in excess of 60 containers there every year.” Beyond Israel, the company has 15 exclusive distribution partners around the world and sends its products to such far-flung spots as Korea, Bulgaria and Ghana. “People love the performance of the product, love that it’s British-manufactured and our cruelty-free credentials.”

For some companies, having boots on the ground has opened up even bigger opportunities abroad. Marketing agency Transmission, which works with some of the biggest names in tech – from Microsoft to HP – spied a gap in the market for a global agency in the sector.

“We were predominantly working with US companies, running their European marketing but we launched in San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney in 2019 and the company just skyrocketed,” says CEO Chris Bagnall.

Transmission adapted during the pandemic, launching a virtual events solution to help its clients stay connected to their customers. “We continued to push on while a lot of the market was retreating, furloughing and making redundancies. Our clients made the stuff that helped people work from home.”

Last year, it also launched in Beijing and Delhi – “To be global you need to be in the biggest and fastest-growing markets in the world” – and more recently, Transmission announced three new offices in the United States, namely Austin, Denver, New York, and one in Warsaw, Poland.

“By the end of the year, we’ll have 12 offices around the world. Some international markets are still having a tough time. But we are building the infrastructure so that we are ready when they are ready to bounce back.”



**Our category is gigantic, worth £200 billion across all products. Getting one per cent of that business would make us a £2 billion turnover company – and one per cent of that is achievable.”**

Chris Forbes, Founder  
The Cheeky Panda

Pet Food UK is a Hertfordshire-based dog and cat food business, with brands including Barking Heads and AATU, which now offers its natural, nutritious products in more than 30 countries. International trade makes up a third of its turnover, with three markets now bringing in more than £1 million and growing rapidly.

One of the keys to the company’s international success is its seamless merger of its online expertise with the physical world – a digital-first approach that helped the company remain resilient through the challenging Covid pandemic.

“We’re working on building a true omnichannel business in the UK and overseas,” says managing director Sarah Kaye. “We’re entering new markets through digital first, then supporting that with bricks and mortar. As well as partnering with platforms such as Amazon, we also continue to invest in our own direct-to-consumer platform. It’s so much more than a shop window now. It’s a one-stop shop.”

Research suggests that companies overseas are willing to pay a significant premium for UK brands. Kaye’s experience reflects that: last year, Pet Food UK turned over almost £20 million. It aims to hit £40 million by the end of 2023.

“Confidence in UK brands is still high,” says Kaye. “In Asia, one of the biggest markets for our super premium brand, people treat their pets as they would their children. And they still have the conviction that the UK is a stamp of quality, trust and confidence.”

## **BUILDING A BRAND ABROAD**

When three brothers from London, Nohman, Rizwan and Imran Ahmed, decided to turn their love of sneakers into a business back in 2013, they ended up giving the world a whole new retail category: aspirational shoe care.

Crep Protect, which offers 32 shoe cleaning products, is now distributing to 52 countries worldwide, with 65 per cent of its business outside the UK.

“We made it cool to clean your sneakers,” says Rizwan. Crep Protect’s brand ambassadors range from Premier League footballer Dele Alli to American DJ and record producer DJ Khaled.

It has a 1.5 million-strong following on Instagram and millions of people watch the company’s YouTube stunts – whether they involve sending a pair of Kanye West Yeezy sneakers into space, or filming someone jumping into a

bucket of melted M&Ms wearing a \$30,000 pair of rare Nike Air Jordan trainers (and then cleaning off the chocolate to an Eminem soundtrack).

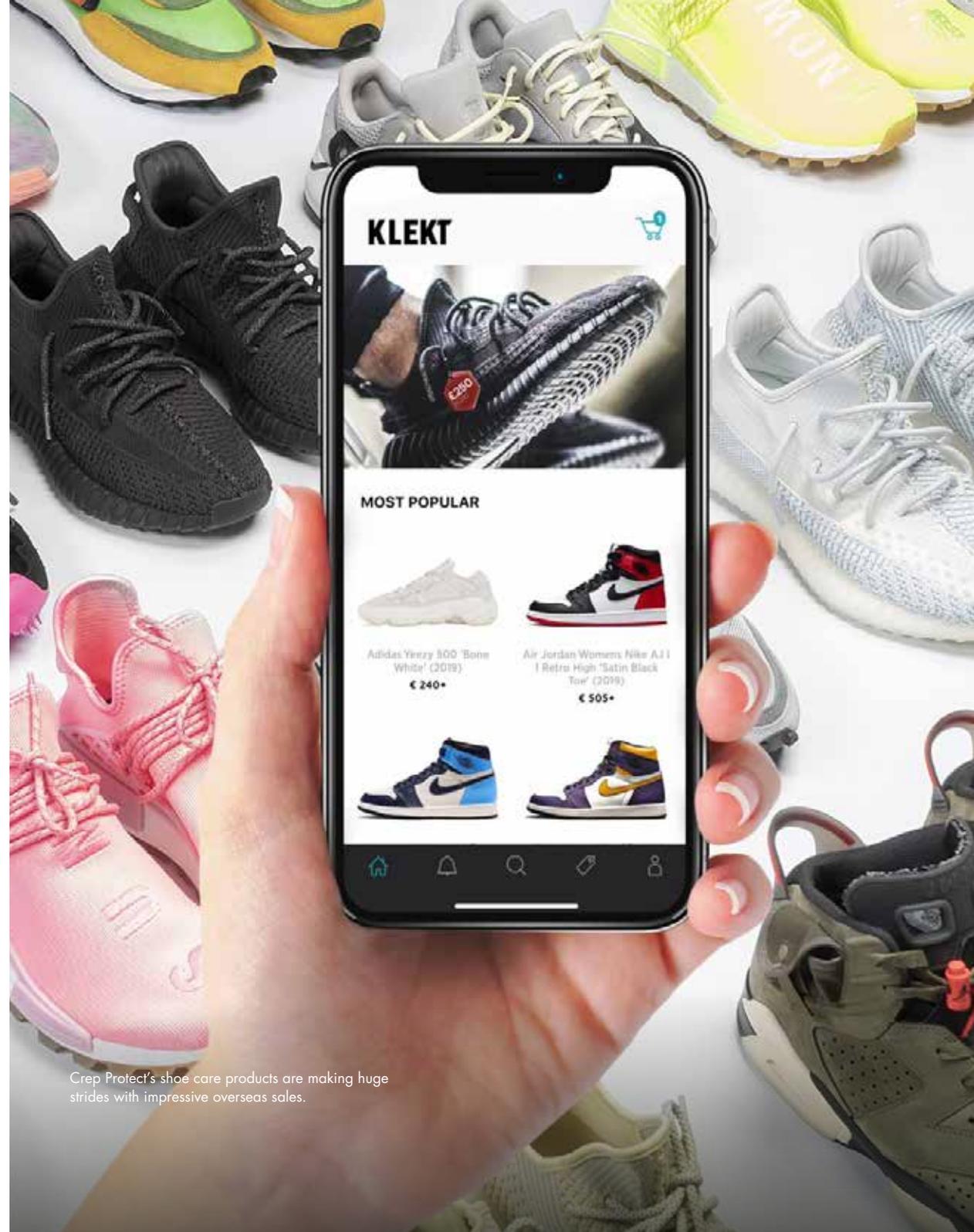
“The more outrageous we are, that’s what people tag on to,” says Nohman. “We know what our audience likes.”

But brand building abroad isn’t limited to celebrity endorsements. For The Cheeky Panda, which sells its sustainable bamboo loo roll in 35 countries, it’s about creating a strong brand look and a sense of itself that people across the world will recognise and respond to.

“When you go to a new market, you have low visibility, and people have to see you five to seven times to understand the brand,” explains founder Chris Forbes.

He credits co-founder and CEO Julie Chen with bringing the clean lines of fashion design to their range.

“People love our brand,” he says. “Lots of companies struggle to globalise, as they have to change their design and messaging for local markets. But from San Francisco to Stockholm and Shanghai, we don’t have to change the name.



Crep Protect's shoe care products are making huge strides with impressive overseas sales.



## CHRIS FORBES AND JULIE CHEN

### FOUNDERS THE CHEEKY PANDA

Chris Forbes and Julie Chen were both running their own businesses when they met in 2014. They fell in love and, in 2015, Julie had the idea to create a sustainable bamboo brand to replace everyday paper products. They launched The Cheeky Panda, which sells everything from loo roll to baby wipes.

"We've doubled the business every year since we started," says Chris. The Cheeky Panda, which sources its bamboo from China, is now selling its products back to the affluent Chinese market. "We have so much ambition," adds Julie. "We innovate and disrupt, and we want to IPO in 2022."



## MICHAEL FRISBY

### MANAGING DIRECTOR COBWEB SOLUTIONS

Michael Frisby has been passionate about technology since he was eight years old. "A family friend wrote a game in an afternoon on my home computer and I was mesmerised," he says.

He joined cloud specialist Cobweb Solutions after a career working for technology giants HP and Microsoft – where he was part of the team which created the first version of Tesco.com. We have got to the top of our game with an ethos of "see it, say it, fix it." In the last five years the business has become a leading international provider of Microsoft's cloud services.



## MICHAEL GIETZEN

### MANAGING DIRECTOR IDENTITY

The G7 Summit, Cornwall. NATO Leaders Summit, London. The upcoming UN Climate Change Conference, Glasgow. What do all these events have in common? Michael Gietzen's Identity, the specialist agency in big-ticket, high stakes events.

"We have rapidly become one of the events industry's major players," he says. Michael is a former chartered accountant who fell into events when he joined his father's exhibitions business. He has grown Identity into a global powerhouse. He says: "There's nothing that motivates me more than seeing our events televised and reported on to millions around the world."



## JOSH GILL

### FOUNDER EVERFLOW WATER

“Our original business plan was to hit £8m in turnover in five years. We hit over £57m instead, despite the pandemic.” Josh Gill is the founder of Everflow, the ethical water business aimed at the small business market.

Based in Teesside, Everflow uses technology to offer low prices and top customer service; since 2017, 50pc of the customers who switched water company moved to Everflow. “We have only just scratched the surface,” Josh says. “We will internationalise and also move into telecoms and energy because our technology is miles ahead of companies in those sectors. When I see a problem, I just have to fix it.”



Simon Arthur and Alan Bullock from Insafe International at The LDC Top 50 2021 event.



## MICHAEL GLANVILLE

**MANAGING DIRECTOR  
MDL MARINAS**

Boat lover Michael Glanville is Managing Director of MDL Marinas, a leading marina provider in the UK. He joined 15 years ago and has worked across several marinas and departments, taking charge in 2018. "I had a vision for how the business should look in five years' time," he says. "Now, I'm fiercely ambitious about delivering it."

He will give MDL a life beyond boats: this year, Michael launched a green gym concept at MDL's marina in Plymouth, where runners give energy back to the grid as they sprint on the treadmill. "It's my ambition to keep MDL at the forefront of innovation."



## ANDY GOUGH

**CEO  
EQUALITY SOLUTIONS**

"I have two children with physical disabilities, hidden disabilities and mental health issues. My children could one day be facing the same challenges as the students we help, and that really drives me to push this company forwards."

Andy Gough is the CEO of eQuality Solutions, which helps students with disabilities to succeed in higher education. After completing his first acquisition last year, Andy is focused on helping as many young people as he can. "My ambition is to keep removing barriers in education, employment and life," he says. "In 10 years, I want us to be a leading global provider in diversity, disability and wellbeing."

**WINNER  
THE PEOPLE FIRST AWARD**



## MARKUS GRAD

**FOUNDER  
BRITISH MEDICAL AUCTIONS**

When Markus Grad was approached by a London hospital to sell an old CT scanner, he recognised immediately that there was an extraordinary niche market for second-hand medical equipment in the developing world.

"We extend the life of used medical equipment by 10 or even 20 years," he says. 25 years on, British Medical Auctions fulfils a vital role in e-waste reduction, saving over 10,000 items from landfill each month. Markus remains passionate about building a global ESG business. "Our corporate ambitions are evolving to meet the insatiable market demand" he says. "I just want to keep doing more, and doing it better."



## SIMON GRAY

### FOUNDER BOOST DRINKS

"I was a big consumer of energy drinks at university," says Simon Gray. "Years later, I saw the market was still growing but there were no brands aimed at local convenience stores, so I trademarked one, found a manufacturer and off we went."

Leeds-based Boost Drinks is now a major player in soft drinks, from energy drinks to protein shakes to coffee – at times it has even outsold Coca Cola. Simon is focused on UK and overseas expansion and developing strategic partnerships – he's just agreed a distribution agreement with the tropical drink Rio. He says: "When you know you're onto something – you see the figures for yourself – that success breeds confidence."



## JONATHAN GRUBIN

### FOUNDER SOPOST

Jonathan Grubin has been creating businesses since he was a teenager – he caught the bug aged just 13. He claims to have had "more failures than successes", but his latest business SoPost, has become a global disruptor.

The Newcastle-based technology company helps its corporate clients to take a data-centric approach to sampling. Through AI and machine learning, the likes of Neal's Yard Remedies and L'Oréal target the right consumers with the right products at the right time. SoPost has doubled in size over the past year. "We're headquartered in Newcastle but we're generating 65pc of sales outside the UK," says Grubin.



## TONY HAGUE

### CEO PP CONTROL & AUTOMATION

"You don't take over a business and pour in blood, sweat and tears if you don't have a burning ambition to see it grow," says Tony Hague. PP Control & Automation builds control systems and assemblies for many of the world's biggest equipment manufacturers.

Tony has grown the business tenfold to reach almost £30m this year and isn't done yet: "We want to become a major global exporter," he says. An apprentice engineer by training, Tony works with local schools, colleges and universities to bring new talent into the industry. "Kids today still think manufacturing is low-paid, dirty and Dickensian. We have a moral obligation to change their minds."



Scrumconnect Founder Praveen Karadiguddi and LDC Top 50 Resident Editor Rebecca Burn-Callander.



## TOM HOPKINSON

**CEO  
TAYLOR HOPKINSON**

"I want this to be the biggest renewable energy search and recruitment business in the world," says Tom Hopkinson. "All over the world, net zero commitments are becoming more ambitious and governments are pushing for a transition from fossil fuels to renewables, so our growth potential is limitless."

Tom founded Taylor Hopkinson in 2009 to supply personnel to the world's biggest owners of wind and solar farms. The ambitious founder, who runs triathlons in his spare time, has supplied talent to work on some of the biggest green projects in the world. "I feel we're having an impact on the biggest challenge of our time."



## RACHEL JENKINS

**MANAGING DIRECTOR  
CURVY KATE**

"I'm a bra fitter who is living her dream," says Rachel Jenkins, "I love helping women to feel amazing." Rachel has spent her whole career in the apparel industry, working for brands like Wonderbra and Zoggs. Now managing director of Curvy Kate, which specialises in larger cup sizes, she has helped quadruple the size of the brand in nine years.

Curvy Kate has an extraordinary following. "We have an army of girls on our side," says Rachel. Her latest challenge? "Turning our pink brand, green," she says. "We're reducing waste and using recycled materials and those that need washing less frequently."



## PRAVEEN KARADIGUDDI

**FOUNDER  
SCRUMCONNECT**

Praveen Karadiguddi credits his entrepreneurial success to his MBA from Imperial College London – and his complete lack of ego. "I built Scrumconnect with a vision to bring people together so they could learn and unlearn," he explains. "If you think you know everything when you work in technology, that will be your demise."

His software consultancy is a "community of freelancers where we all learn from each other", he explains. Some 86pc join through referral and there are currently 240 contractors in the talent pool. Praveen hopes to employ 1,000 people within three years. "I love building this business," he says.

**WINNER  
THE INNOVATION AWARD**

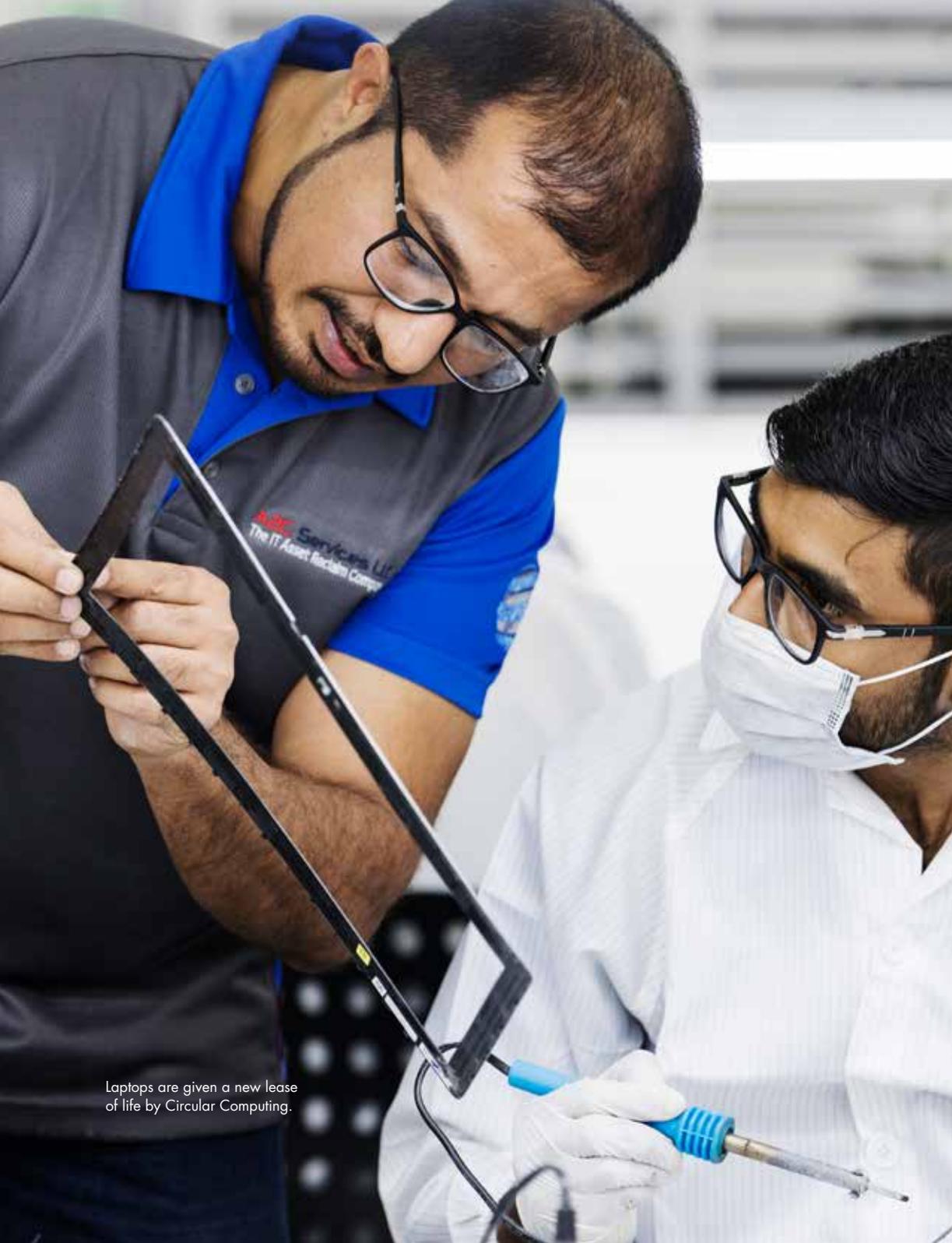


## SARAH KAYE

**MANAGING DIRECTOR  
PET FOOD UK**

Sarah Kaye joined Pet Food UK in 2017 and has helped take its brand Barking Heads to the next level. The brand's mission is to create better food for dogs of all ages, shapes and sizes and as a result it's become the go-to choice for dog lovers around the world.

Sarah left the corporate world to join Pet Food UK because she wanted to "be empowered to make a difference." Under her stewardship, the business has grown 50pc, with a presence in 30 international markets. Sarah says: "We are improving the wellbeing of dogs and that is a really important purpose for me and the team."



Laptops are given a new lease of life by Circular Computing.

## **WASTE NOT, WANT NOT FIRMS GO FULL CIRCLE**

Trailblazing entrepreneurs are carving a space in the circular economy by reducing, reusing and recycling resources, says LDC Top 50 Resident Editor Rebecca Burn-Callander.

In a 150,000sq ft remanufacturing space built by Top 50 leader Rod Neale, founder of Circular Computing, people are busy turning used laptops into remanufactured laptops that provide 97 per cent of the performance of a new machine for a fraction of the carbon footprint or cost.

Neale's ambitious vision is to give every used laptop a second, third and even fourth life. He is a pioneer in the field of circular-economy computing and he has created the capacity to produce 10,000 remanufactured computers every month, capacity that will double when his second facility is finished.

Neale's success is an example of how entrepreneurial grit and determination can help solve the pressing challenges we face today. Some corporations around the world lease their equipment for just three years, contributing to the 53.6m tonnes of e-waste produced every year.

"We use 99 per cent of all the laptops we get from the used market," he says. "Less than one per cent goes for recycling; everything is broken up for spare parts if we can't rebuild it."

The circular economy is considered the antidote to the traditional "take, make, waste" approach to global resources. In a circular model, the emphasis is on reuse, recycle and repurpose. The aim of a circular economy is to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, waste and pollution.

"Today's system is predominantly linear and it is heartening to see entrepreneurs moving their industries in the right direction, towards becoming more regenerative,"

says Joe Iles, who leads the Circular Design programme at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a charity that promotes the circular economy.

"We want to see those businesses grow and for the ambitious leaders behind them to be recognised. It is really hard to go against the grain and do things a different way." Many of this year's Top 50 leaders are disrupting their respective industries with their sustainable business models. Take BAM Bamboo Clothing managing director Ryan Shannon.

In 2018, he set the goal of making the ethical fashion brand impact-positive by 2030. It planted over 9,000 mangrove trees last year, developed 100 per cent recyclable clothing and it offsets 100 per cent of the emissions associated with running the business and the manufacture of its clothing (going so far as to offset 50 customer washes for every item of clothing).

"We have identified every business in our supply chain," says Shannon. "We're also visiting every yarn mill and bamboo forest, shining a light on every part of the process."

To help accelerate change, Shannon has shared with the world – even with his rivals – all he has learned about building a circular-economy fashion house.

"Fashion is one of the most polluting industries, contributing 350,000 tonnes to landfill each year in the UK alone," he says. "We share our findings with competitors because we want them to do the right thing as well. We want to be a catalyst for change."



**I'm so excited about growing a successful, profitable business, while also being a force for change and good."**

Ryan Shannon, Managing Director  
BAM Bamboo Clothing

A third of consumers look for brands that demonstrate strong ethical and sustainable credentials, according to 2021 research by Deloitte. Many brands may be looking to re-engineer their products in light of changing consumer tastes. "I'm so excited about growing a successful, profitable business, while also being a force for change and good," adds Shannon.

When people want to get rid of bulky, household items, waste management firm Clearabee can step in and make sure they get reused or recycled. "We use more than 200 recycling facilities for different materials each day," says Clearabee founder Daniel Long.

The Birmingham-based business has grown to 160 vehicles and 288 employees in just under a decade, and it's still growing 30 per cent a year. "We're building a brand that people can trust," adds Long.

Clearabee is now focusing its efforts on upcycling. Long is opening a new reupholstery centre in Aston, Birmingham, so that he can take away old sofas and bring them back to life. But it's not just the premises Long is building – he's also creating the technology needed to make this part of the circular economy work.

"We have software engineers building solutions so that companies like DFS can integrate us into their app and ask customers if they want us to come and take their old sofas away," Long explains. "In 10 years' time, recycling will be a dirty word. It will be all about reuse and repair."



By manufacturing its hand-made products in Britain, The Cambridge Satchel Co. is preserving skills and helping to futureproof our economy.

Almost 80 per cent of the stuff we use every day, from plastics to food and fashion, ends up as waste, says Long. "It is exciting to see so many companies embrace the concept of reuse, to see them investing in the reverse chain.

That's a significant economic opportunity. "Of course, to make the greatest impact, we need to stop waste from being created in the first place. We look forward to seeing more entrepreneurs and designers take on that creative challenge."

## **DO YOUR BIT TO BRIDGE THE SKILLS GAP**

Leaders who invest in the skills of the future not only address shortages but also keep their business relevant to the modern world.

The skills that drive the global economy today are vastly different to the skills that dominated it a decade ago – and now, skills shortages abound. Many of the Top 50 leaders are dedicated to preserving vital skills to help futureproof the UK economy.

"We've invested in British manufacturing," says The Cambridge Satchel Co. founder Julie Deane CBE. "With the impact of Brexit and the pandemic, everyone is realising how important all different kinds of jobs are – manufacturing is a huge sector and we almost lost it."

When she founded the company, Deane was astounded by how hard it was to get a satchel – that most British of bags – made in the UK.

"By making it here in the Midlands, you get to say 'Come take a look in our workshops', and when people get the bag they can be really proud of it. People are not only supporting skills and UK manufacturing – they have something that will last."

By 2030, two-thirds of the UK workforce could be lacking in basic digital skills, according to consultancy firm McKinsey. Top 50 agile software developer Scrumconnect, which creates apps and web solutions for a wide variety of clients, is doing its bit to stem the tide. The fast-growing firm hires people of all ages and gives them training to have a fulfilling career in technology.

"Our vision is to reduce the digital skills gap," says CEO and founder Praveen Karadiguddi. "We are training up apprentices and have taken part in the government's Kickstart scheme."

Through Kickstart, Scrumconnect is taking on 15 trainees who are at risk of long-term unemployment. And this is just the beginning – Karadiguddi is committed to taking on several more, and crucially, Scrumconnect isn't just creating new skills within reach of its London base: "We are helping to train new talent in Newcastle, Coventry and Manchester," Karadiguddi says. "These skills will be vital to the future regional economy."

Leaders who invest in the skills of the future are ensuring their firms stay relevant in the modern world. They are also giving people meaningful careers and ensuring workers aren't left behind as business needs evolve.



## MICHAEL KORN AND ALAN MURRELL

### FOUNDER AND CEO KWICKSCREEN

“Hospital curtains harbour germs, they’re not great for privacy or dignity, and when they are thrown away they end up in landfill,” says Michael Korn, Founder of KwickScreen. The company has created a viable alternative – a screen that can be wiped clean and printed with colourful or calming images.

Michael Korn invented the product while he completed an industrial design degree. Today, Michael and Alan are selling into hospitals across Europe and the US. “Our ultimate ambition is to replace every hospital curtain in the world. It’s a global problem and we’re uniquely positioned to solve it,” says Alan.



## DR NIK KOTECHA OBE

### FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN MORNINGSIDE PHARMACEUTICALS

During Idi Amin’s brutal dictatorship, Nik Kotecha came to the UK from Uganda as a refugee. As a result of his childhood experiences, he has dedicated his life to making quality healthcare an affordable and accessible reality throughout the world.

He founded Loughborough-based Morningside Pharmaceuticals from a home-garage in the 1990s to give people in developing countries access to quality medicines. Today, the company manufactures generic medicines and supplies twice daily to the NHS. Philanthropy is important to Nik, who established the Randal Charitable Foundation in 2017. “Our ambition is to directly save over one million lives globally,” he says.



## DANIEL LONG

### FOUNDER CLEARABEE

When Daniel Long gave up his job as an investment banker to become a “man and a van” with partner Rob Linton, everyone told him: “That’s a silly idea”. But almost a decade later, his Birmingham-based business has grown to 160 vehicles and 288 employees.

Clearabee is a waste management company with a difference: the focus is on repair and reuse. “We are opening a re-use facility that is the first of its kind. In 10 years’ time, recycling may be a dirty word when handling furniture. It will be all about reuse and repair; we’re going to be at the cutting edge,” he says.



## CHRIS MARTIN

### CEO WARACLE

"I like an adventure, and I love to see what is possible. That's what drives me." Chris Martin joined Dundee-based Waracle in 2014 after his previous company became a global IT success story. Today, the app building agency is forecasting a turnover of £25m for 2021.

"Waracle was very early into building mobile apps when I joined, but the company wasn't really able to make money doing that and I think they'd run out of energy," he says. So Chris focused Waracle on driving positive change through mobile and web technologies and now, out of 300 employees, 260 are focused on innovation.



## IAIN MCCALLISTER

### CEO MAN COMMERCIAL PROTECTION

Former boxer Iain McCallister started his career in security working on the doors of pubs and clubs. In 1993, he joined forces with his father – a retired policeman – to start a personal security business. "We looked after pop stars and bands like Paul Weller," he says.

Fast-forward to 2021, and MAN Commercial Protection works with a large variety of businesses, has 1,650 staff and turns over £51m. Iain plans to double the size of the company through acquisitions by 2026. Iain says of his success: "All my drive comes from boxing; getting up in the morning, training, repetition, and constantly trying to be the best."



## AMANDA MESLER

### FORMER CEO CASHFLOWS

"I have a passion for taking people and companies beyond what anyone thinks they can achieve," says Amanda Mesler, former CEO of Cashflows. She loves solving complex problems. Cashflows creates the technology used by thousands of business owners to get paid quickly and stay cash positive – a real game-changer in a post-crisis economy.

Amanda joined Cashflows after successfully turning cross-border payments firm Earthport into the darling of the fintech world, achieving UK tech deal of the year and selling the company to Visa. Her secret to scaling disruptive businesses? "Work at pace with high energy and keep going for growth."



## SIMON MIDWOOD

**MANAGING DIRECTOR  
TIMCO**

When Simon Midwood's father died suddenly, he left his job in London to join the family business. He was just 24 years old when he took over TIMCO, which was turning over almost £5m: "It had a fantastic reputation but the range was too small and our sourcing wasn't great," he says. "Now, we sell everything a builder needs apart from brick, block and timber, supplying independent merchants across the UK."

TIMCO's turnover has soared to £50m. Simon is humble about his achievements: "We're not doing anything revolutionary," he claims. "At a time when companies are removing their phone number from their website, we answer the phone in three rings."



## HOWARD MOSS

**CEO  
ASTONISH CLEANING PRODUCTS**

Astonish Cleaning Products is the only vegan, cruelty-free cleaning brand in the UK. Founded in 1971 by Alan Moss, his son Howard has overseen the company's extraordinary expansion since taking over in 2006.

"My father started out selling the products on trestle tables at agricultural shows," he says. "My ambition is to continue to take Astonish into major retailers and to further extend our range of products." Astonish's ethical credentials have resonated with consumers around the world; 25pc of its almost £35m revenues come from overseas. "We are about to triple the capacity of our manufacturing base to meet demand," Howard says.



## NEIL MULLER

**CEO  
DIGITAL SPACE**

Neil Muller is a tech industry figurehead with 27 years' experience of growing successful IT businesses. In 2018, he joined Digital Space, a network connectivity and transformation specialist that works with the likes of St John Ambulance: "We provide digital solutions to help them to save lives," says Neil.

He previously led Computacenter UK as Managing Director before becoming CEO of Daisy Group, the telecoms giant. He puts his success down to delivering results by enabling people. "I like talking and listening to everyone, from partners to investors, to employees and customers, helping them to address their challenges."



## LOGAN NAIDU

**CEO  
KERNEL GLOBAL**

Logan Naidu is a maverick in the executive recruitment industry. His multi-brand recruitment group, Kernel Global, focuses on a brand of recruitment that is about making a difference to the lives of those they work with, and to the growth of the businesses whose talent strategies they support, not fast cash placements.

By the end of 2021, the company will employ 200 people. Logan says: "When I started this business nine years ago, people told me that I could never catch up with the likes of Michael Page. But we're on the way there. We'll be a £500m business by 2027. I want to become the McKinsey of recruitment."



CEO of Kernel Global Logan Naidu and guest at The LDC Top 50 event.

# AHEAD OF THE COVID CURVE

The pandemic forced us to dramatically change how we do business, but The Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders have tackled the Covid challenge with remarkable reserves of imagination and innovative verve.

When lockdown hit in March 2020 and high street shops were forced to close, there were a number of in-store experiences that needed to be replicated online – and fast. For lingerie company Curvy Kate – that meant bra fittings. “We used to have one person who did virtual bra fittings, but when the pandemic happened we had to hire five more dedicated virtual bra fitters because demand was outstripping supply – and still is,” reveals managing director Rachel Jenkins.

To continue delivering on Jenkins’ mission to make women feel great about their curves, the changes embraced by the company went far beyond D-K cup sizes, as the high street struggled with store closures. Curvy Kate’s wholesale operation – once 50 per cent of the business – shrank, and the

direct-to-consumer side shot up. The consumer operation has grown by 49 per cent since January 2020, and now accounts for 70 per cent of the business.

“We had to adapt quite quickly in terms of structure and personnel – moving people from handling wholesale, which is traditionally much slower, into direct-to-customer,” explains Jenkins. Speaking directly to consumers requires a different approach and a heavy focus on social media. Jenkins says: “We’ve got a great social media team, which jumped into engaging people with wellness and education content. We grew our social channel following by 15 per cent to almost a million.”

Jenkins' experience is a familiar one. Across many sectors, businesses had to pivot to meet new demands and new ways of reaching customers. This is evident among The Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders.

Tony Hague is CEO of PP Control & Automation, a provider of strategic manufacturing outsourcing services. Hague hopes the company's success will help to change the face of manufacturing in the eyes of the next generation – encouraging more new talent into the sector. He reveals that 2020 was the only year since the last recession when his company has seen profits dip. "But we bounced back strongly," he says.

The Walsall-based firm did this by getting involved in the UK's Covid ventilator project, producing around 50,000 parts and keeping the PP factory open throughout the pandemic. And Hague predicts: "We're looking at close to 30 per cent growth this year."



Lingerie brand and bra specialist Curvy Kate has adapted perfectly to Covid conditions.



**By design we were able to have a longer-term outlook, and when brands started to spend again, because we hadn't let anyone go or stopped building the product, we were able to rebound."**

Jonathan Grubin, Founder  
SoPost

Now Covid is having far-reaching effects on the way the company does business. Hague notes that prior to the pandemic, the UK had for decades offshored a lot of manufacturing: "But Covid has made everyone rethink supply chains, and there's now a huge trend for UK reshoring." This is likely to mean bringing significant manufacturing capabilities home from places like China and result in the need for more highly automated and high-tech factories. Hague believes that these changes could be part of the solution to the low productivity that has dogged the UK for decades.

When the pandemic first hit, online sampling company SoPost, which uses data to help the likes of L'Oreal, Unilever, Neal's Yard Remedies and Clif Bar get their samples out to relevant people, ripped up its day-to-day strategy and threw it out the window.

"We had to be as reactive as possible," says founder Jonathan Grubin. "Over two weeks we saw opportunities in Finland and Switzerland – we had never looked at these markets before but we were able to get up and running there really quickly."

For a time, Grubin says sales fell off a cliff but the company was able to weather the storm without letting anyone go.

"By design we were able to have a longer-term outlook, and when brands started to spend again, because we hadn't let anyone go or stopped building the product, we were able to rebound."

Sure enough, after an initial shock, it turned out that Covid encouraged a wave of new customers to use SoPost. "The shops were closed and no one was really buying magazines," explains Grubin. "We'd had conversations with these brands before but they couldn't get their heads around it. Now they love the service – they get so much data and insight but it took the pandemic to force them to try something new."

The changes and innovations that responses to Covid have delivered will be reshaping business for years to come. In many cases this will mean more agile, robust organisations. "I think the good news is that we are much more in touch with our consumers, and overall we've enhanced our business as an operation," explains Jenkins. "Our ways of working are smarter and we're much more responsive to consumer demand – there's a lot of positives that have come out of this dire situation."

## IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

How do you give your WFH workforce a sense of community? Arrange video meet-ups to talk about hobbies? Or ensure your culture is embodied by leaders at every touchpoint?

Maintaining company culture during a pandemic has been one of the toughest challenges for businesses across the country. Working from home has in many cases created a more productive workforce. But not having the ability to see each other and take part in face-to-face activities (even if it's a pint in the pub after work) has meant teams feel disconnected and diffuse, and welcoming new team members with usual gusto is tricky.

Dundee-headquartered Waracle, one of the UK's largest mobile app and digital product developers, has doubled staffing levels to 300 and brought on more than 115 new employees since January. Its CEO, Chris Martin, says one of his top priorities has been creating an inclusive company culture. "I spend a great deal of time considering how a company like ours, which has a positive culture, can create a new culture in this hybrid environment."

Martin's answer was to create a new culture platform, where people can gather digitally and meet. "I want people to connect with each other and share videos – I might make a video about how I love campervans and surfing. We're even trying to set up a TV station at Waracle so you can tune in and catch up on what you've missed."

For Josh Gill, the founder of water company Everflow, creating a powerful culture is about choosing people who lead by example. "The best part of running the company for me is creating jobs and hearing how satisfied our teams are," Gill says. "To create a good culture, you've got to have good values. If leaders in our business aren't displaying the right values, they aren't right for us – they all have to model what it looks like to care for people and do the right thing for staff and customers."

Having experienced working for other utility providers where teams were unhappy, Gill is determined to build something different. "In utilities, people spend a lot of time on the phone and it can become repetitive. We wanted to treat people well and make it fun."



## CONNIE NAM

**FOUNDER  
ASTRID & MIYU**

Korean-born Connie Nam founded Astrid & Miyu in 2012 to breathe new life into the world of jewellery shopping. Her brand, which now has six stores, is “a playground for jewellery lovers”, she says.

“We keep nothing under glass and offer bracelet welding and piercings. Everything is about creating an experience.” Sustainability is a key focus for Connie, who uses 3D printing for prototypes to reduce waste, and is aiming to produce her entire collection from recycled materials by 2025. “I want to be a global cult brand,” she says. “Within five years, 50pc of the business will be outside the UK.”



## ROD NEALE

**FOUNDER  
CIRCULAR COMPUTING**

“I’m grabbing the tiger by the tail and delivering the first real alternative to new,” says Rod Neale, founder of Circular Computing. His company is a pioneer, which takes laptops when they reach the end of their corporate life, and remanufactures them into new, selling them back into big corporates.

Customers include the likes of Balfour Beatty, WWF and the UN, and Rod has ambitions to rival the big OEM’s. “I have no ceiling on where this company can grow,” he says. “100m laptops are bought by the enterprise sector each year, and I can remanufacture those for a second, third and fourth return.”

**WINNER  
THE GREEN DISRUPTOR AWARD**



## DR BAHMAN NEDJAT-SHOKOUHI

**CEO  
MEDEFER**

Consultant gastroenterologist, neuroscientist and molecular biologist, Dr Bahman Nedjat-Shokouhi is the CEO and founder of Medefer. His company brings together consultants from all over the UK to review cases in their downtime and reduce waiting times for patients undergoing routine tests.

“I met a lady who had waited 11 weeks for the results of her liver function tests. I decided to create the infrastructure to address issues like this, which can cause anxiety but also worsen clinical outcomes,” he says. “My ambition is to create the world’s most patient-focused and safest virtual health service, helping patients get better, faster.”



## JAMES O'LOAN

**CEO  
CHEMIST4U**

James O'Loan has no fear of failure. "I was brought up to work hard but not be afraid to give things a try," he says. When he realised in 2016 that his pharmacy business was too reliant on marketplace sales, he took the bold decision to invest heavily in NHS technology and robotics to better serve his customers.

"People thought it was a mistake, but there was limited value in the marketplace model for our business." His strategy has paid off, turnover is on track to reach £20m. The pharmacist turned entrepreneur has big dreams: "We are becoming a significant player in the digital healthcare space with real momentum".



## OWEN REES AND CARRON EDMONDS

**FOUNDERS  
THE MAVERICK GROUP**

Husband-and-wife team Owen Rees and Carron Edmonds launched their ad agency two decades ago. "We are agents of change," explains Owen. "We don't take on the smaller marketing briefs, we look for the larger projects where we have the greatest impact, like relaunching brands."

The pair have grown the business steadily, building long-term relationships with global corporations. "We want to list on the stock market in three years," says Carron. The duo credit their bond for their success: "We regularly put everything on the line," says Owen. "Having someone you trust as your partner is more valuable than anything. There's no way this business would be here without Carron."



## ANDY ROGERS AND VLAD NANU

**CO-CEOS  
AMDARIS**

Today, technology developed by Amdaris supports hundreds of thousands of students a year. The Bristol-based digital transformation specialist works with organisations of all sizes to help them tackle modern-day technological challenges.

Joint CEOs Andy Rogers and Vlad Nanu have supercharged the business since taking over in 2016, more than doubling the headcount to 380 people. "Now, we talk about how we can build a billion-pound company," says Andy. "We have big dreams and we're throwing everything we've got at this business. For us, the vision is to build a company with a compelling story and an amazing reputation around the world."



Tim Smeaton and Simon Walker, the Founders of Kubrick at The LDC Top 50 event.



## **RYAN SHANNON**

### **MANAGING DIRECTOR BAM BAMBOO CLOTHING**

Ryan Shannon wants to revolutionise the clothing industry. As the managing director of Plymouth-headquartered BAM, he's helping to lead the sector into the circular economy by selling truly recyclable activewear.

His commitment to sustainability is reaping rewards for the business, which has grown from a turnover of £8m in 2019 to just under £15m last year and is set to grow 50pc a year for the next five years. "We are champions for change in this industry," says Ryan. "We are on a journey to becoming truly impact positive and regenerative. We want to inspire our customers – and even our rivals – to be more sustainable."



## NICK COLEMAN AND UDHI SILVA

### FOUNDERS SNAFFLING PIG

“We want to be as big as Walkers and as loved as Lego,” says Nick Coleman. He and Udhi Silva are the founders of Snaffling Pig, which has completely revamped the pork scratching category with an irreverent crackling range.

The business has hit 26pc market share within five years. “We don’t want to stop with crackling,” says Udhi. “We want to be the brand that creates conversation between people at every moment in their lives.” This is why the brand has diversified into coffee, beer and even BBQ equipment. Snaffling Pig has 400 products now, and the business doubled turnover in 2021.



## TIM SMEATON AND SIMON WALKER

### FOUNDERS KUBRICK

“We respect and trust one another and that’s what’s made our business partnership successful,” says Tim Smeaton, who co-founded Kubrick with Simon Walker five years ago. This is the pair’s second business together: “We came together to address the UK’s technology skills gap. Traditional education just isn’t addressing the issue, so we created a solution to bridge the gap.”

Kubrick trains graduates with non-technical degrees to become experts in data, cloud technologies and machine learning and then deploys them as consultants into projects. The business now has almost 800 employees, and has grown at over 100pc a year, opening up in the US next year.



## MATTHEW TAYLOR

### MANAGING DIRECTOR DA LANGUAGES

“We help people to communicate in challenging situations such as interpreting on behalf of the parents of a child that is being taken into hospital.” When Matthew Taylor joined Manchester-based interpreting firm DA Languages, he found a business that deals with 450 languages at six levels of security clearance.

He quickly identified an opportunity to improve the technology capabilities of the business and in the past three years, has spearheaded a move to 90pc remote interpreting. He adds: “The way we match our 7,000 linguists to work is becoming more intelligent. We want to become the biggest interpreting business in the UK.”



Success is often about taking a chance. The co-founder of Oddbox saw a market for 'imperfect fruit'. She was right.

# PURPOSE BEYOND PROFIT BEARS FRUIT

For these companies and entrepreneurs, the key to success is not just a focus on the bottom line, but also on the good they can do in wider society.

It was the big, ugly tomatoes she found in a Portuguese food market that inspired Oddbox co-founder Emilie Vanpoperinghe to start a business with her husband Deepak Ravindran. “They were delicious but we realised they would never have made it onto supermarket shelves at home,” she explains.

Making use of some of the three million tonnes of surplus fruit and veg at risk of going to waste each year in the UK, Oddbox has delivered over two million boxes of imperfect farm produce across the UK since 2016.

The company has experienced 500 per cent growth during the pandemic and has grown 40-fold since 2018. Its drive to address the issue of food waste is resonating with customers nationwide and there are waiting lists of eager people in parts of the country to which Oddbox has yet to expand.

Oddbox is one of a growing number of companies that have found commercial success with a clear purpose beyond profit. In fact, it is something that customers are increasingly coming to expect from the brands they love.

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2020 brand-trust report, 80 per cent of people want brands that “solve society’s problems”. They’re putting their money where their mouths are, too – consumer goods giant Unilever has

reported that its purpose-led “sustainable living brands” are growing 69 per cent faster than the rest of the business and delivering 75 per cent of the company’s growth.

Purpose-led leaders in our Top 50 are proving that having a business designed to tackle society’s ills doesn’t make you any less ambitious, as the desire to make a difference is powerful fuel – especially when the cause is one that’s close to someone’s heart.

eQuality Solutions Group (eQS) supports students with disabilities in higher education with technology, training and software. Chief executive Andy Gough, both of whose children have physical and hidden disabilities, joined the business in 2018.

“I am passionate about driving the business forward because of my personal experience,” he says. “We were at £4 million revenue when I joined and in our latest financial year it was £9 million. We want to get to £30 million turnover by 2023.”

It’s an ambitious target, but Gough has a plan – he has been pursuing the acquisition of several complementary specialist and technology-leveraged brands, which will allow diversification into new markets and the launch of new products and services, as well as staff training and job creation.



**We knew we could buy other businesses to broaden the family. Our purpose is unlocking true potential and removing barriers to education, but with funding behind us we can also be more ambitious and remove barriers to employment and life.”**

Andy Gough, CEO  
eQuality Solutions Group

Personal experience is also a driving factor for the husband-and-wife team behind Yorkshire-headquartered transport solutions company 365 Response. Sarah Fatchett had a heart condition as a child and, as a result, spent a lot of time in ambulances. Her husband, Brendan, lost his father to a heart attack that could have been avoided if the ambulance had not been late to the scene.

With 365 Response, the Fatchetts are trying to transform the way patient transport is organised – from ambulances to school transport for people with disabilities. In their words, they want to “make difficult transport easy”. “With patient transport, people often don’t know who is coming for them and when,” says Brendan. “Systems aren’t integrated. We took all that complexity and put it in one system, making it easy and clear on the patient or parent end.”

The couple say they spent the first three years focusing on getting the business model right, and only then thinking about growth. They engaged councils, the NHS, parents and service users to ensure their proposals were sensible and achievable. With the right foundations in place, the business is now flourishing. “We have been growing 35 per cent a year and this year we’ll double in size,” adds Brendan.

Putting purpose at the heart of what you do may feel like it’s part of the zeitgeist, but entrepreneurs have been drawn to mission-driven businesses for a long time. Morningside Pharmaceuticals was started in the 1990s from a garage. “I was working for a big pharmaceutical company and felt there was a need for quality medication for the developing world,” explains founder Dr Nik Kotecha OBE.

Morningside develops, manufactures and supplies generic medicines to the UK and international export markets. “We have developed new ways for patients to take their medicines, designed to make their lives easier. And our branded medicine ranges save the NHS millions of pounds.”

The business exported 100 per cent of its products in the early years, winning The Queen’s Award for International Trade in 2012. However, with a burgeoning UK market, exports now account for just 15-17 per cent of the business.

Kotecha puts much of the company’s success down to its core purpose. “People come to us because of our values, which we demonstrate through our support for community causes. I do a lot of talks to students and I tell them, ‘First, find your passion; once you do that, you will find your purpose, and once you have that, you can build a successful career.’”



Connie Nam, founder of jewellery business Astrid & Miyu, aims to have her entire inventory made from recycled materials.

## FIND YOUR MATERIAL WORTH

Not all businesses start with the goal to solve huge societal challenges. But that doesn't mean they can't embrace the purpose economy and find their own ways to make a difference in the world. Many businesses in the Top 50 have looked hard at their company and found a way to drive positive change.

One example is jewellery business Astrid & Miyu, which was founded in 2012.

"We have always been committed to being sustainable in terms of how we run the business, but until two years ago, we hadn't thought about product and supply chains," says its founder, Connie Nam. "Now we have a collection made from fully recycled silver."

By the end of 2022, Nam hopes 50 per cent of her entire inventory will come from recycled materials.

Trade supplies business TIMCO also uses its products for a good cause. Thanks to its ties with Bees in Our Community, TIMCO's screws and fixings are used to create beehives. "The initiative was started by a local beekeeper who was trying to bring back a native species – the Cheshire bee," says managing director, Simon Midwood. "We provide screws and fixings, and help him to get the hives out to the local area."

Beyond bees, Midwood also personally ensures his supply chain is ethical. We buy from 160 factories around the world and I've been to every single one. The product has to be right and so does the factory."



## LAURA TENISON MBE

**FOUNDER  
JOJO MAMAN BÉBÉ**

Over the last three decades, Laura Tenison has built her early years brand JoJo Maman Bébé into a national success story through grit, determination, and an absolute focus on the customer. “We have lost numerous competitors over the years,” she says. “Yet JoJo is stronger than ever.”

She grew online sales dramatically during the pandemic – from 2,000 orders a day to nearly 10,000 at peak, and is forecasting a turnover of £75m next year. A major overhaul of JoJo’s IT systems has positioned the business for growth: “JoJo has just 1.5pc of the domestic market, so there’s a huge opportunity for growth at home and internationally.”



## NEIL TOLLEY

**FOUNDER  
FOURTEEN IP**

Neil Tolley started his voice and data provider company on the 14th April 2011: the date was the inspiration for the name, Fourteen IP. The Wigan-headquartered company helps hotel chains all around the world to give their customers exceptional service through artificial intelligence.

The pandemic accelerated take-up of Fourteen’s technology. Instead of battenning down the hatches, he expanded into Mexico, the Middle East and Canada. Neil says: “we now have 250,000 hotel rooms on our platform. Growth gets a little easier with experience but when you’re constantly innovating, you’re always breaking new ground.”



## EMILIE VANPOERINGHE

**FOUNDER  
ODDBOX**

In 2016 Emilie and husband Deepak Ravindran created Oddbox, which rescues surplus or wonky produce from farms and delivers them direct to consumers. The business has gone from delivering 20 boxes in London to over 3m from Brighton to the Midlands.

Emilie left a career in corporate finance to focus on fighting the good fight; before Oddbox, she was a director at women’s empowerment charity Girl Effect. “This year, Oddbox will increase its reach across the UK then look to expand to Europe,” says Emilie. “The ultimate goal is not only growth but to raise awareness of food waste and to change behaviour.”

**THE MOST AMBITIOUS  
BUSINESS LEADER**



## TRINNY WOODALL

**FOUNDER  
TRINNY LONDON**

Trinny Woodall's mission in life is simple: "I get a buzz out of making women feel better about themselves," she says. The former TV presenter is the founder of Trinny London, a make-up brand that she launched in 2017.

"I had to sell nearly all my clothes to keep us going in the early days," she reveals. The business now employs 179 people, ships to 180 countries and turns over £42m. Growth has come from Trinny's digital-first strategy. "Make-up is just the beginning," she says. "It's about creating a feeling, a brand that never makes anyone feel excluded, regardless of skin tone or age."

**WINNER  
THE DIGITAL DISRUPTOR AWARD**

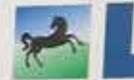


The LDC Top 50 winners with Resident Editor  
Rebecca Burn-Callander.



"We've been taking big risks, leaving behind everything to start this business with two small children. It's the only fuel that fuels the growth of our business."

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# THE LDC TOP 50 - WINNERS

There is no better time to celebrate the mid-market, and the winners of The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Leaders 2021 truly are a cut above.

Their drive and passion offer inspiration and all have excelled in several areas, from scaling up internationally to commitments to innovation and sustainability.

The judging panel this year comprised Carl Castledine, CEO of Away Resorts; Tracy Lewis, the former international CEO of Wacoal Europe; Sara Davies, founder of Crafter's Companion and investor on Dragons' Den; John Garner of LDC; and Top 50 Editor Rebecca Burn-Callander.

The accolades were given out after an intense judging session, which trimmed the 50 finalists down to these award winners over many hours of lively debate.





## EMILIE VANPOERINGHE

**FOUNDER  
ODDBOX**

Emilie founded Oddbox with her husband in 2016 to tackle global food waste and since then the company has grown to deliver more than three million boxes of surplus, unwanted or misshapen fruit and vegetables to customers across the UK. The judges commended Emilie for not only growing a business that is creating jobs and generating economic value, having grown 40-fold since 2018, but for rapidly building a brand that is committed to tackling food waste - one of the biggest contributors to climate change.

**THE MOST AMBITIOUS BUSINESS LEADER**



## ANDY GOUGH

**CEO  
EQUALITY SOLUTIONS**

Andy wowed the judges with his unwavering commitment to helping students with disabilities and learning difficulties to have a fulfilling education at university. His firm uses technology to create personalised learning solutions. The judges praised his ambition to continue to remove barriers in education, employment and life.

**THE PEOPLE FIRST AWARD**



## CHRIS BAGNALL

**FOUNDER  
TRANSMISSION**

Chris launched Transmission's first international office in San Francisco in 2019. Just three years later, the global marketing agency has 12 offices around the world, helping clients such as Microsoft and HP to sell in complex markets, such as China and India.

**THE INTERNATIONAL AMBITION AWARD**



## TRINNY WOODALL

**FOUNDER  
TRINNY LONDON**

Former TV presenter Trinny spotted an opportunity to create an inclusive make-up brand, Trinny London. The brand which has become a global e-commerce business in just four years. Trinny's army of online advocates, "the Trinny Tribe", have helped the brand to expand to 180 countries.

**THE DIGITAL DISRUPTOR AWARD**



SCOTT MAC MEEKIN,  
CIRCULAR COMPUTING

## ROD NEALE

**FOUNDER  
CIRCULAR COMPUTING**

Rod is the founder of Circular Computing, which takes unwanted laptops and turns them into new ones that offer 97 per cent of the performance of the original for a fraction of the carbon footprint. He is creating a sustainable solution to the world's growing e-waste problem and now has the capacity to make 10,000 laptops a month.

**THE GREEN DISRUPTOR AWARD**



## PRAVEEN KARADIGUDDI

**FOUNDER  
SCRUMCONNECT**

Praveen is a coder-turned-entrepreneur and his software consultancy has created a community of freelancers to learn from each other. He is hoping to employ 1,000 people within three years and has created a culture of continual improvement, which means his team always has the most relevant technical skills.

**THE INNOVATION AWARD**



## MART AND ROB DRAKE-KNIGHT

**FOUNDERS  
TEEMILL**

Mart and Rob are creating a circular economy for T-shirts. Every item is returned at the end of its life and turned into a new top. Teemill's factory also uses renewable energy and T-shirts are printed to order, meaning zero waste.

**THE SUSTAINABLE IMPACT AWARD**

# ONES TO WATCH

Meet the leaders behind tomorrow's mid-sized firms, growing businesses that are making a big impact.



## DR ERIC MAYES

**CEO  
ENDOMAG**

Dr Eric is on a mission to improve the standard of cancer care by providing patients with more accurate, convenient and less expensive solutions for diagnosis and treatment. In just three years, Cambridge-based Endomag has tripled the number of patients it provides with more precise cancer care, from 40,000 to more than 130,000.

**HIGHLY COMMENDED - ONE TO WATCH**

NAME	ROLE	BUSINESS
LEE BROOKS	CEO	PRODUCTION PARK
JOSH BUNCE	CEO & FOUNDER	INURFACE MEDIA
ROSS BURKE	MD	MIXTIO LABS
ANKIT CHADHA	CEO	IN2MED
ANTHONY CHADWICK	CVO	ALPHA VET INTERNATIONAL
MIKE EVE	MD	AUTOMOTIVE MEDIA SYSTEMS T/AS CALAS
MIKE HAMILTON	CEO	COMMANDO JOE'S
GARY HARGRAVES	CEO	SPORT:80
IAN HENDERSON	MD	BOILER PLAN
CHARLIE JARDINE	FOUNDER & CEO	EO CHARGING
GREG KIRKMAN	CEO	ENSAFE CONSULTANTS
VIJAY MAGON	MD	CCUBE SOLUTIONS

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ROLE</b>	<b>BUSINESS</b>
ANNA MAXWELL	CEO	MAXWELLIA
DR ERIC MAYES	CEO	ENDOMAG
JAMES MCVITIE	MD	VISUAL METHOD
MARCUS MOLLINGA & JACK MORRISON	CO-FOUNDERS & DIRECTORS	YOURZOOKI
SCOTT MONKS	CEO	ROCKSTEADY MUSIC SCHOOL
JOE MUNNS	MD	BAKED IN
MATT MURPHY	CEO	GENBA DIGITAL
PATRICK O'LUANAIGH	CEO	NDREAMS
ADRIAN OVERALL	CEO	CLOUDSTRATEX
SHIRLEY PALMER	CEO & FOUNDER	THE SIMPLE SERIES
TOM PARLING	CEO	OCERE
CHRIS QUICKFALL	CEO	COGNASSIST
DR MEGAN ROSSI & JON WALSH	CO-FOUNDERS	BIO&ME
DANIEL ROWSON	DIRECTOR	SO-MEDIA PRODUCTIONS
AZMAT SHERWANI	CEO	DOTTED
RUNE SOVND AHL	CO-FOUNDER	FANTASTIC SERVICES
ELLIOT STREET	CEO	INOVUS MEDICAL
GREGORY SUTCH	CEO	INTRALINK
NICK THOMPSON	CEO	DCSL GUIDESMITHS
JOHN THORPE	GROUP MD	THORPE INTERIOR GROUP
LUKE TOBIN	CEO	DIGITAL ETHOS
TEVIN TOBUN	CEO	GV GROUP (GATE VENTURES)
JAMES TUCKER	CEO	GOVNET
BEN TYSON	CEO & PARTNER	BORN SOCIAL
JULIE WADDELL	FOUNDER	MOORISH
STEVE WATMOUGH	CEO	MASON ADVISORY
MIKE WOODS	CEO	KONSENTUS
HAZEM FAYYAD	FOUNDER & CTO	TRANSFORMOLOGYXR



*The mid-market is the backbone of the UK economy, and having backed the ambitions of British businesses for more than 40 years, we know just how important it is to celebrate the individuals behind these firms. I'd like to congratulate all of the Top 50 for 2021, especially our award winners, as they show exactly what Britain's entrepreneurs and business leaders are capable of."*

**John Garner**

Managing Partner  
LDC

Visit [www ldc co uk /t502021](http://www ldc co uk /t502021) to read more about  
**The LDC Top 50 and register your interest for 2022!**

[www ldc co uk](http://www ldc co uk)

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BACKING AMBITION