



Growth with the support of private equity: what we learned - Peter Reid, CEO, MSQ

MSQ is one of the world's fastest growing marketing groups. The next generation creative and technology company boasts a roster of blue chip clients, including Unilever, Vodafone, The AA, Vitality, Coca-Cola and Zalando.

During a four-year partnership with LDC, MSQ made five acquisitions and grew organically to increase EBITDA from £6m to in excess of £20m. Revenues increased from around **£50m to £125m**, and headcount more than doubled from **550 to 1,200**.

Below, MSQ CEO Pete Reid outlines how they did it – the four key principles that powered their growth through private equity:

1. Prioritise cultural fit

“When we started the search for a private equity partner over four years ago, we saw an opportunity to invest in the business and move to a market leading position. What was crucial for us was that we didn't want to dilute our culture to do so. We wanted to find a partner who would get what we're about, what makes MSQ so special.

We met lots of private equity houses, but for me it's always been about more than just numbers. I'd heard of LDC – they'd always had a very good reputation. But from moment one, I just knew that there was a good cultural fit. From the first conversations it was clear that they bought into our plans and how we wanted to do things. That was critical for me.”

2. Seize strategic opportunities

“A core pillar of our growth strategy was buy and build – acquiring complementary businesses to grow quickly and broaden our offering. LDC recognised the potential from day one, and really encouraged us to jump on acquisition opportunities when they arose.

Perhaps the biggest illustration of this was the acquisition of the Be Heard Partnership. At the beginning of March 2020, we found ourselves with a possible deal on the table. We knew it would be transformational if we pulled it off, but there were two major hurdles.

The first was that Be Heard were a listed company, so any acquisition would be public to private, which is far from straightforward. The second was the timing – the whole world was starting to change, thanks to the pandemic.

While other private equity houses were saying they couldn't deploy any more money and were going to wait six months, LDC saw what a huge moment this was for us. They pulled out all the stops to help us seize the opportunity, and worked tirelessly to navigate through a complicated acquisition process. The £20.6 million deal completed in September 2020, and was a big turning point for the business.”

3. Seek out expert advice

“Our management team have been a vital part of our growth story. But we knew we’d need all the advice we could get, as we took the next step on our journey.

Shortly after our partnership with LDC was announced, we appointed industry heavyweight, Charles Courtier as Non-Executive Chairman. Soon after that we added former Dentsu Executive Director Kate Howe to the board. Both have been invaluable sounding boards as we executed our growth strategy.”

4. Invest in your beliefs

“We’ve always been very passionate about being a force for good – with a strong belief that people and the planet are equally important as profit. But it’s important to put your money where your mouth is, to not just talk but act.

Which is why we’ve invested in making a real ESG impact across the business. We became one of the first marketing groups to be Carbon Negative in 2020, with further approved science-based targets in place for 2030. We also recently achieved B Corp certification across the entire group – particularly impressive for a business with offices spread across the world.

It’s really important to us that MSQ invests in its beliefs – and LDC were right with us all the way.”

Pete points to trust as the key cornerstone of MSQ and LDC’s successful partnership. “It was a really open relationship from the beginning – LDC’s fundamental instinct is to support you. For us to be able to triple in size over four years, including through COVID, is a pretty impressive achievement. But it’s one we absolutely could not have done without LDC.”

LDC exited its initial investment in MSQ in June 2023, but reinvested as a minority partner alongside One Equity Partners to support the next phase of the company’s growth.

[Watch CEO Pete Reid explain how MSQ became one of the world’s fastest growing marketing groups.](#)



For a discussion about how LDC could support your growth, [contact John Clarke from LDC.](#)