



# The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders 2023

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[ldc.co.uk/top50](https://ldc.co.uk/top50)



# Ambition.

**It is the ingredient that underpins the greatest business success stories. It is the difference between stop and scale, between fight and flight, between boom and bust.**

- ◀ Some of The LDC Top 50 award winners in 2022 (l-r): Gush Mundae of Bulletproof, Emma O'Brien of Embridge Consulting, Nick Thompson of One Beyond and Tim Barclay of Apello.

At LDC, we believe in championing ambition; through our investments and beyond.

Every year, through The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders, we shine a spotlight on the individuals who are making the UK a more vibrant, diverse and exciting place to do business.

Those who find innovative approaches to old problems, embrace sustainability, take more care than ever to look after their people, and find new and exciting markets in which to flourish.

We're proud to share their success stories. And with 500 business leaders in The Top 50 network, LDC has highlighted some of the most ambitious and innovative business leaders in recent memory.

Take Julian Hearn of powdered food brand Huel. Julian won the inaugural Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leader Award in 2018. In just three years he turned a newly launched product into a global sensation, selling 22 million meals in 80 countries. Or Margot Cooper of Limbs & Things, The Innovation Award winner in 2020. Her family business is revolutionising medical training with life-like anatomical models that help nurses and doctors to save lives.

We recognise that no two business leaders are the same and their goals extend well beyond revenue growth. They support communities, bolster sustainable practices, and bring a more multicultural and connected vision to UK and international business.

Top 50 business leaders like Sunny Araf of ISA Support Services embody these purpose-led values. Sunny won The Purpose-Led Award in 2022 after spearheading a multi-million-pound company that employs 200 people in the UK and gives back through the ISA Foundation.

This year The LDC Top 50 continues to be as inspiring as ever, showcasing the creativity and expertise of these leaders, illustrating ambition and innovation across the UK, from Gateshead to St Albans, and sectors from healthcare to industrials to tech. Together, they employ over 6,700 people, turning over a combined £1.2 billion, with pre-tax profits of £121 million.

## **Meet the entrepreneurs reshaping the way business is done to address the needs of a rapidly changing world: **The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders of 2023.****





# Saluting the brave and bold

**Amid huge economic challenges, these resilient entrepreneurs defy the odds to forge sustainable businesses, foster innovation and drive growth while creating jobs and cracking new markets.**

◀ **Bella & Duke** - This raw pet food producer sells more than a million tubs a month.



## Tom Baldock

Managing Director, Synertec

When Tom Baldock became managing director of document management consultancy Synertec in 2020, it employed 180 people. In three years, headcount has grown to 300. “We now work with 75 per cent of the NHS trusts in the UK,” he says. Synertec was the company chosen to manage the NHS Covid-19 vaccination communications. “If you got a text or a blue letter, that was from us,” he explains. His ambition is to expand geographically, build Synertec’s client base and teams and target new markets. “I’m confident we can triple the size of this business,” he says. “We’d like to be a £100 million business within two years.”



## Ally Maughan

Founder, People Puzzles

Ally Maughan is a proud part-timer. She started People Puzzles in 2010 as a lone HR consultant. Now she has a national team of 80 experienced HR directors working on a part-time, portfolio basis for mid-sized companies who don’t need or can’t afford a full-time resource. “Helping businesses and people to thrive is one of our most important goals. We want people to have a good work-life balance and a rewarding career – but on their own flexible terms.” Maughan wants to grow People Puzzles by 20 per cent a year and expand across the UK. She leads the business two days a week and also runs a vineyard with her husband in Bath.



## Adam Ward & Josh Graham

Founders, Airtime Rewards

Having worked together on Orange Wednesdays, the iconic cinema-ticket loyalty scheme, Adam Ward and Josh Graham decided to go it alone. “We saw potential in the power of rewarding consumer loyalty with something people really want: money off their mobile phone bill,” says Graham. The duo began developing Airtime Rewards in 2015, they worked with the UK’s biggest mobile networks and partnered with Visa and Mastercard to turn debit cards into instant loyalty cards. They have since signed up over 300 retailers to the Airtime Rewards app and it boasts three million members, who have collectively saved £26 million on their mobile bills. The pair are now eyeing opportunities in central Europe.





## Dr Raoul-Gabriel Urma

Founder, Cambridge Spark

“When I was six, my parents gave me a book on HTML. I started building websites to teach other kids how to play games like *Age of Empire*,” says Dr Raoul-Gabriel Urma. After completing a PhD in code analysis at the University of Cambridge, he launched Cambridge Spark to improve tech education. The company offers digital skills bootcamps, apprenticeships and corporate training courses delivered by tutors through a proprietary AI-powered online learning platform. Urma plans to launch accredited Masters and MBA programmes in data, AI and digital transformation. “AI is the most transformative technology of the decade. I want us to be at the forefront, upskilling the workforce and helping organisations to succeed.”



## Darran Garnham

Founder, Toikido

Darran Garnham wore a giant chicken suit to a meeting with the creators of hit video game *Gang Beasts*. “We’d created a range of *Gang Beasts* toys so I decided to dress up as one of the characters and hand-deliver the first batch,” says Garnham. “I love seeing a client’s face when we put toys in their hands. It’s a buzz to take something from screen to sketch to shelf.” Garnham started entertainment company Toikido in 2020, working with the likes of Netflix to bring brands to life through toys and merchandise. “Our special sauce is that we move very quickly in an industry that has been doing it the same way for so many years,” he says.



## Tony Cleary

Group CEO, Lanchester Group

When Tony Cleary MBE started Lanchester Wines with his wife, Veronica, back in 1980, the UK wine offering was basic: “It was all Blue Nun and Lambrusco.” He believed the industry would explode over the coming decade. He was right. Today, the company has expanded to become the Lanchester Group; five businesses encompassing wine importing and wholesaler, wine bottling, hampers, chocolates and a brewery. In the early days, he set himself the goal of employing 500 local people. Cleary has now surpassed his goal, he says: “Now I’m focused on making this business as strong as possible; it’ll be my legacy.”



## Harriet Hastings

**Founder, Biscuiteers**

Harriet Hastings launched her hand-iced biscuit gifting company, Biscuiteers, in 2007, offering a personalised and stylish alternative to flowers. Alongside selling direct to consumers online, the brand has a corporate gifting business, two icing cafes in London and a wholesale division supplying the likes of Harrods and Selfridges. It makes three million biscuits a year from its bespoke factory in Wimbledon and is growing into the US market. “We’ve shown that people really value things that are handmade for them. My ambition is to take a business that is built on artisanal manufacturing methods and scale it worldwide.”



## Jared Owen

**Managing Director, Redbrain**

When Jared Owen took over global shopping engine Redbrain a year ago, he had a singular vision for the business: “I wanted to achieve hockey-stick growth over the next couple of years.” With a winning combination of cutting-edge automation and a renewed focus on the core business, he has succeeded. “We’ll do £100 million by 2026,” he says. Redbrain spends more than £100,000 a day buying Google shopping traffic on behalf of its retail clients to help match shoppers with the right products. “We work for big brands but our ambitions are to empower every retailer to thrive in e-commerce.”



## Paul Pugh

**CEO, Mason Advisory**

When Paul Pugh joined technology consultancy Mason Advisory he was impressed by the team’s talent and commitment to delivering great outcomes for clients, but there remained a real opportunity for growth. He subtly changed the firm’s focus to provide clients with multi-disciplined resources: “I wanted to empower others and instil confidence that our approach was unique, and our skills were extremely relevant to the market,” he says. Pugh led from the front. He has taken revenues from £3 million in 2017 to £24 million today. He gave up a successful career in professional services to embrace entrepreneurship: “Our ambition is to double in size over the next four to five years.”



**Alex Wright & Jack Scott**  
Founders, DASH Water

“People thought we were mad.” Alex Wright, who founded DASH Water with Jack Scott in 2017, has proven his detractors wrong: “This year we will sell 26 million cans,” he says. The pair have created a seltzer – sparkling water – infused with natural flavours with no added sugar or sweetener. “We are the first brand of our kind in Europe,” says Scott. They are on a mission to fight food waste – by using only “wonky” fruit in their drinks – and reduce people’s sugar intake. Scott says: “The larger we get, the greater the impact we will make. There’s no limit to our ambition.”



**Mark Scott & Tony Ottley**  
Founders, Bella & Duke

When Mark Scott’s dog was diagnosed with cancer, he looked at the ingredients in pet food and decided to create a healthier alternative using only natural, unprocessed raw ingredients from carefully vetted suppliers. In 2017, he teamed up with friend and food expert Tony Ottley to launch Fife-based pet food brand Bella & Duke. “We’re the pet-food equivalent of a Michelin-starred restaurant,” says Scott. “We want to raise standards across the whole industry.” Their team of 140 now manufactures and sells over one million tubs of raw dog and cat food a month, with revenues set to top £30 million this year.



**Dr Bippon Vinayak**  
Founder, Square Health

As NHS waiting lists hit record highs, Dr Bippon Vinayak is poised to reinvent the delivery of UK healthcare. Vinayak, a consultant surgeon, started his first company, Doctors Chambers, in 1994, and his second, Bodycare Clinics, in 2007. Both became market leaders. Now, he uses his unique mix of clinical expertise, entrepreneurship and knowledge of UK healthcare to run Windsor-based Square Health, the UK’s largest digital healthcare business providing virtual GP appointments for more than 4,000 corporate clients, insurers, the NHS and private patients. “We want to take the UK healthcare system forward,” says Vinayak. “That’s the legacy we’d like to leave.”





# Sustainable at heart

**Forward-thinking innovators are driving an eco-conscious revolution, harnessing technology to reshape industries and accelerating growth as they pave the way to a promising future. Many are also creating sought-after products using more eco-friendly methods and materials.**

◀ **ASPIGA** - Lucy Macnamara - wearing the brand's Izzie dress - only partners with ethical suppliers.



## Lee Hackett

Group CEO, Bluprintx

After playing professional football for Wigan Athletic FC, Lee Hackett joined builders' merchant Travis Perkins and became its youngest ever manager. "Coming from the football world, I was used to discipline. I progressed quickly in business because I was coachable," says Hackett. In 2016, he collaborated with the University of Liverpool to launch technology consultancy Bluprintx. Four acquisitions later, he now employs 110 people worldwide with clients including Uber and Bank of New York. He also runs an academy to recruit and train talented graduates from local universities. "My personal goal is to grow Bluprintx to 1,000 people," he says.



## Stuart Houghton

CEO, BrightBox

Stuart Houghton founded fintech Planix with colleague Neville Roberts in 2011 before taking over a spin-out called BrightBox, which provides clients with temporary, specialised workers from its network of tech professionals across the UK, Poland, Tunisia, Lithuania and Romania. "During the pandemic, recruitment went from being location-led to skills-led and we saw a huge spike in demand," says Houghton. His remote-first company employs 18 people and turnover has skyrocketed from £3.6 million to £15 million in the past three years. "I want to continue evolving the company and think AI will transform the entire industry. We are ready to pivot."



## Adam Jacobs

Founder, Bloom Procurement Services

"Is it outrageous to say that Bloom should be the global standard for procurement? Because it's going to happen. We'll be ubiquitous in the UK and then we'll go global." Adam Jacobs founded Bloom to disrupt the way that public sector organisations buy services. The Gateshead-based marketplace takes care of the complexity, allowing small businesses to win work while saving the taxpayer millions. Jacobs believes that Bloom is having a significant social impact. "I believe that everyone has a part to play in making a better society," he says. "Our platform has been used for everything from repairing roads to affordable housing and school refurbishments."



## Bal Sandher

Founder, Nutra Direct

When an injury left Bal Sandher bedridden for six months in 2008, the 22-year-old biomedical science graduate decided to fulfil a lifelong ambition of starting a business: “I had nothing but time, so I taught myself everything, from building a website to marketing,” he says. He sourced a popular hangover cure from Ireland and began selling it online. One product swiftly became 50 and then Sandher pivoted the business to become a contract manufacturer of sports supplements and nutrition. Nutra Direct is now a £20 million turnover business, manufacturing a wide range of supplements, with gummies, plant-based meat, and international expansion coming this year. “My ambition to grow is relentless,” he says.



## Lucy Macnamara

Founder, Aspiga

Inspired by a pair of beautiful sandals she bought on holiday, Lucy Macnamara worked with a supplier in Kenya to design a capsule collection of sandals and belts. She launched sustainable fashion brand Aspiga at a London trade show in 2005, where she signed up 40 stockists – including department store Fenwick on Bond Street. It became a B-Corp last year and now has 12 stores and sales topping £10 million. Macnamara has ADHD and says it’s one of her greatest strengths as an entrepreneur. “Eventually I’d like to start a charity that helps schools and prisons to better support people with ADHD,” Macnamara says.



## Tom Lawson

CEO, Opencast

Since Tom Lawson became CEO of software consultancy Opencast in October 2020, the business has achieved a compound annual growth rate of 100 per cent, taking it to 500 people and £55 million in revenue. How? “Social impact lies at the heart of this business, both in the work that we do and the way we support our people,” he explains. Opencast takes on large projects for government and the NHS, creating technology to improve people’s lives. “That’s what excites me about this business, and it’s why I push so hard,” he says. “We want to reach a £125 million turnover by 2026.”





## **Phil Brooke & Phil Lawson**

**Founders, InVentry**

Phil Brooke's lightbulb moment struck while he was working as a network manager at a school in Yorkshire. "There was a pile of books on the reception desk for staff, contractors, pupils and visitors to sign in and out. It was inefficient." He started designing a slicker sign-in system in 2010, then joined forces with Phil Lawson to launch InVentry. Fuelled by regulatory changes in safeguarding, the Leeds-based company now provides visitor management solutions to 10,000 schools UK-wide and is expanding globally. "We're identifying solutions to real-world problems. We're making lives easier and safer. That's what gets me out of bed every morning," says Brooke.



## **Nicolas Gillanders**

**CEO, South Coast Insulation Services**

One of Nicolas Gillanders' first jobs was working as a cavity wall and loft insulation installer for South Coast Insulation Services. He left the company in 2014 but, when it was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy four years later, he swept back in and bought it. Today the Southampton-based business has profits of nearly £9 million and employs 220 people, working to improve energy efficiency in social housing and private properties across the UK. Gillanders is currently designing and developing two eco-friendly, affordable homes in Hampshire. "I want to fly the flag for sustainable housing and show that new homes shouldn't cost the earth."



## **David Lorenz**

**Founder, Lunaz**

David Lorenz founded Lunaz in 2018 with a vision to sustainably accelerate the global move to clean-air vehicles by unlocking the power of upcycling to transition diesel vehicles to electric. "When I was expecting my first child, I started thinking about how industry can improve outcomes for the next generation." From this, one of the UK's fastest growing clean-tech companies was born. His Silverstone factory can convert 1,100 vehicles a year but he wants to take the service global. He says: "I want to do something impactful and I've gone full throttle into this industry. There are 2 billion vehicles on the planet and my ambition is to make upcycling the norm."



## David MacDonald

**CEO, Cullen Eco-Friendly Packaging**

“Climate change and the growing challenge of single-use plastic waste are intrinsically linked,” says serial entrepreneur David MacDonald. “But there are solutions to the problem.” He’s leading global business Cullen, who can replace most single-use plastic packaging with a moulded fibre alternative within a month, has been supplying over one billion products to the NHS, major supermarkets, high street coffee shops chains and the world’s biggest retailers since 2020. MacDonald, who is passionate about reducing the global reliance on plastic, has created the world’s first Fibre Bottle. “Plastic is being found inside new-born babies’ hearts,” he says. “Sustainability is my whole focus and reason for being.”



## Laura Rudoe

**Founder, Evolve Organic Beauty**

When Laura Rudoe graduated from Harvard Business School, she had a dream of creating a company that had goodness built into the business model, as well as developing products in line with her organic lifestyle to solve her skin problems. In 2009, after building an ethical skincare brand for rock star Bono, her own brand Evolve Organic Beauty was born. “It stayed really small for years,” she admits. In 2015, she relaunched as an apothecary-style brand, doing small runs with handprinted labels – and sales soared. Today, Rudoe’s ethical brand sells into 47 countries. “Our mission is to become a regenerative beauty company that contributes more to the planet than we take out.”



## Jitha Singh

**Managing Director, CBS Packaging Group**

When Jitha Singh and his four brothers started CBS Packaging Group in 1996, they had zero industry experience. “Some of our rivals laughed at us, and they said we wouldn’t survive,” he says. Last year, the business turned over £40 million. CBS has outgrown many of its peers – and is even acquiring them. “We will double in size over the next five years.” Singh learned persistence and dedication from his father, who was also an entrepreneur. “He came to the UK with nothing and built his fortune,” he says. “We are uneducated people, without a single O-Level between us, but we have discipline and perseverance.”



## Shiny, happy workforces

**From shorter weeks to inclusive environments, these people-centric companies are shaking up the nine to five routine and prioritising employee wellbeing to foster a culture of productivity and creativity. Philanthropic entrepreneurs are channelling success into social change by offering better health outcomes, education and opportunities to all.**

◀ **Staffscanner** - Founders Reza and Omid Najafian believe in investing in their employees.





## Andre Azevedo

CEO, Ancoris

Since taking the reins of London-based cloud services provider Ancoris in 2021, Andre Azevedo has nearly doubled revenues to £30 million, tripled headcount to 110 and built a new management team. “I love the thrill of building things and making positive changes,” says Azevedo, whose career spans Dell, Oracle, SAP and Cloudreach. Azevedo has also brought in policies around parental leave and flexible working, and introduced a 24-week training programme designed to kickstart careers in cloud computing. “What really motivates me is giving people the opportunity to start and accelerate their careers in a fast-growth tech company,” says Azevedo.



## Simon Chappell

Founder, Assured Data Protection

Simon Chappell launched Assured Data Protection in 2016, helping customers in countries around the globe to back up critical data and get them up and running again when cyber-attacks cripple their systems. This is his third business in this sector: “I’ve started many businesses but I know that this is my last venture. When you admit something like that to yourself, it’s liberating. You know you have to give it everything you’ve got.” From hiring workers out of retirement to creating an environment that attracts women into tech, Chappell does things differently, and is seeing extraordinary results: “We grew 40 per cent last year and will do the same in 2023.”



## Hilary Leam

CEO, Starpowa

After working for retail heavyweights Boots, Morrisons and Holland & Barrett, Hilary Leam took the helm of vitamin gummy company Starpowa. “I’ve gone from managing huge teams to leading a tight-knit crew,” she says. “I love getting stuck in. There’s no corporate cushion.” Last year, the company invested £2 million into the country’s first high-volume gummy machine in Lincolnshire, powered by 100 per cent renewable energy. Starpowa sells around 60,000 gummies a day and its ‘meno balance’ range has become the UK’s best-selling menopause supplement. “I always wanted to do something that genuinely made people’s lives easier. I think we’ve changed the way women supplement.”



## Reza & Omid Najafian

Founders, Staffscanner

Reza Najafian always knew he'd work in the care sector: "My parents owned a care home. As a kid, I spent a lot of time there." After training as a lawyer, he opened Silverburn Care Home in Glasgow but soon experienced recruitment challenges. Together with his brother Omid, he launched Staffscanner in 2019 to connect carers and nurses to local shifts. There are now over 38,000 healthcare professionals and over 2,000 care providers on the app delivering more than 17,000 hours of care a week. Staffscanner employs 65 people directly and is opening two more offices. "We're big believers in investing in people and we don't do anything for short-term gain," says Omid.



## Sean Reddington

CEO, Thrive

Sean Reddington loves a challenge. After selling his last training business, he founded Thrive in 2018, an all-in-one learning platform that works with household names like Volvo, Ted Baker and Sky. "We're a small company looking to replace incumbents with multi-billion-dollar market caps." In just five years, he has taken the business into 50 countries, and his intuitive Instagram-style software is disrupting the industry: "We're the fastest growing company in our sector," he says. The secret to his success? "I've employed friends and family – exactly what people tell you not to do," he says.



## Philip Ross & Martin Izod

Founders, Safehinge Primera

When product design engineers Philip Ross and Martin Izod met at Glasgow Art School, they both had the same ambition. "We knew we wanted to design products that improved people's lives," says Izod. They started Safehinge Primera in 2009 and their first product was a 'no-gap' door hinge for schools to prevent children trapping their fingers. Five years later, they pivoted into the mental health sector, designing specialist anti-ligature doors and alarms to reduce suicides. Their products are used by more than 80 per cent of NHS care providers in the UK, as well as customers in the US and Australia.



## Kuntal & Mark Fisher

Founders, FIECON

Mark and Kuntal Fisher have a bold ambition: “By 2030, we want to grow our business to £100 million turnover and give £10 million back to society,” says Kuntal. The husband-and-wife team started health economics consultancy FIECON in 2015, working with global pharmaceutical and biotech companies to bring new, life-changing medicines to patients. They employ over 100 staff on a 4.5-day working week and have raised nearly £1 million for charity so far. Last year, FIECON received a Diamond Award from the Charities Trust for its outstanding contribution to good causes. “We want to do something that’s bigger than ourselves and leave the world in a better place than we found it,” says Mark.



## Rob Darby

CEO, 200 Degrees Coffee

Rob Darby struggled to find great coffee to serve in his bistros, so he decided to start roasting his own. He set up a roastery in 2012 with co-founder Tom Vincent and 200 Degrees Coffee was born. Now employing more than 300 people, with 20 shops and seven barista schools across the UK, the business sells coffee beans online and to wholesale clients such as Manchester Metropolitan University and The Alchemist. But for Darby it’s about more than just growth: “From sponsoring an all-female cycling team to teaching barista skills to prison inmates, we want to do our bit to address some of the imbalances in society.”



## Gregg Scott

CEO, Realise

When Gregg Scott took over the ailing apprenticeship and adult education arm of an outsourcing giant in 2019, it was losing £300,000 a month. “It lacked focus and was lost within the parent company.” Within a year, he had stemmed the losses – and then the pandemic struck. “That slowed our recovery but gave me the opportunity to do a management buyout,” he says. “We had to do it all virtually, but that’s how we created Realise.” Today, Scott’s business helps thousands of learners to develop rewarding careers in sectors such as early years, social care and bus driving. “We change 10,000 lives every year and that’s a big driver for me.”





## **Anthony Young & Scott Nicholson**

**Co-CEOs, Bridewell**

“I grew up in a working-class family and had no exposure to career opportunities. I was suspended from school multiple times and failed all my GCSEs. Now it’s my mission to inspire the next generation of cyber talent and bring more diversity into the industry,” says Scott Nicholson, who heads up cyber security firm Bridewell alongside co-CEO Anthony Young. Their Reading-based business employs 240 people and specialises in protecting critical national-infrastructure organisations such as Manchester Airport and Northern Gas Networks. “Through our academy and work with underprivileged schools and colleges, we want to promote cybersecurity as a viable career path for people from all backgrounds,” adds Young.



## **Anna Brailsford**

**CEO, Code First Girls**

“I joined Code First Girls in 2019 and rebuilt the business from the ground up,” says Anna Brailsford, former commercial director of LinkedIn. “When we relaunched, we grew ten times in terms of both revenue and userbase in the first year.” Code First Girls, which started life as an educational campaign, is now a major force for talent creation, offering free training to women and funneling them into roles at 130 employers worldwide. “96 per cent of our learners from the CFGDegree go straight into employment,” she says. “Our ambition is to help one million women enter the technology industry over the next five years, adding £1 billion to the UK economy.”



## **Desmond Stockdale**

**CEO, Phi Partners International**

Abandoned by his parents when he was three, Desmond Stockdale was taken into child protection and then raised by his great aunt in an impoverished part of Bedfordshire. “I started washing cars to earn money,” he says. “By the time I was 10, I was paying for school uniforms and holidays.” Stockdale self-funded his way through university and started his first financial technology consultancy when he was 23. He’s now running Phi Partners International, employing 500 people worldwide. “I love what I do but it’s a means to an end,” he says. “My wife and I have five kids and our dream is to open an orphanage.”



# Excellence without limits

**Armed with compelling ideas, execution prowess and a global reach, business leaders are thinking as big as it gets, pushing the boundaries and forging ahead with endless possibilities.**

◀ **Superior Wellness** - Making waves in the US and beyond.





## **Rob Carlin**

**Founder, Superior Wellness**

When he was 17, Rob Carlin started importing electronics from China and selling them on eBay. A few years later, he switched to hot tubs. “No-one else was importing hot tubs and selling them online at affordable prices,” he says. “As a kid with zero experience, everyone assumed I’d fail.” He’s proved them wrong. His Chesterfield-based business Superior Wellness sells around 20,000 hot tubs a year through a network of 250 distribution partners worldwide, and Carlin plans to open a second HQ in the US next year. “I’m not happy sitting still,” he says. “I want us to become the biggest hot tub brand in the world.”



## **Mark Copley**

**CEO, Copley Scientific**

After getting his pilot’s licence, Mark Copley considered a career in aviation, but his father convinced him to join Copley Scientific, the family business founded in 1946 and now the world’s leading manufacturer of inhaler test equipment. He started out as a technical sales manager then rose up the ranks to become CEO. Under his watch, the business has pivoted from retailing low-margin laboratory products in the UK to producing niche inhaler testing equipment for pharmas in 100 countries. “It isn’t money that motivates me, it’s developing pioneering products that help improve people’s lives. If something has our family name on it, I want to be proud of it,” Copley says.



## **James Hacking & Majid Bahi**

**Founder and CEO, Socially Powerful**

James Hacking’s entrepreneurial journey started when he was just 16. He suffered an injury that meant he couldn’t play contact sports for 12 months, “I started teaching myself ball tricks to pass the time and put them on YouTube.” Within a couple of years, he was starring in ads from Nike and Adidas, and body doubling for superstar players. Now 34, he is the founder of Socially Powerful, a marketing agency with real social clout. “We cut our teeth creating viral campaigns,” he says. Hacking runs the company with CEO Majid Bahi and together they have created a £13 million turnover business that employs 80 people across the UK, US, Qatar and Macedonia.





## Nick Imlah

**Founder, Unitech Industries**

Nick Imlah began his metal-bashing career in 1991 when he and his wife started making stainless steel tables for butchers' shops. His ambition has seen his company grow from these small beginnings to a £60 million-turnover business. Today, Unitech Industries is a stainless steel and mild steel specialist, creating everything from supermarket trolleys, counters, conveyors; and spray booths for painting UK missiles. "We started with nothing," he says. "Initially, it was all about providing for the family but we have done that, and the driver is now to create a name that is respected worldwide. With Unitech, I have created something worthwhile."



## Martin Smith

**CEO, The HEX Group**

From the age of 11, Martin Smith spent his summers helping out in the factory at The HEX Group, the Staffordshire-based automotive engineering and manufacturing firm founded by his parents. After getting a degree in international management, he joined the family business and cut his teeth in every department. The company employs 530 people, 25 per cent of whom are current or former apprentices, and specialises in converting lightweight commercial vehicles, sheet metal manufacturing and powder-coat painting. "The thing that makes me most proud is that we make stuff in England," says Smith. "Manufacturing really matters to the UK economy."



## Caroline Pomford

**Managing Director, PalTank**

Caroline Pomford began working at PalTank as a teenager and took over the family business in 2019, during a difficult trading period when it had a negative balance sheet. Under her stewardship, PalTank, which transports bourbon, gin, whisky and wine around the world in ISO tanks, broke even the following year and now boasts profits of £8.5 million. "I couldn't watch the business my father had built over two decades just disintegrate," she says. Caroline safeguarded 32 jobs during this process and the Covid-19 pandemic. She now plans to expand the business into the cased and palletised sector of the drinks industry, along with brokerage and customs.



## Barney Kent

CEO, Touch Medical Media

As an award-winning sales director in the medical industry, Barney Kent, with his two co-founders, Tim Sheldrick and Matt Goodwin, spotted an opportunity to create an open medical education network that leveraged digitalisation to serve high-quality and free content to meet the ever-changing learning habits of healthcare professionals around the globe. Disrupting the sector, they launched Touch Medical Media in 2012, its websites now attracting two million learners a year with revenues forecast to hit £22 million by 2025. “With ambitious growth plans, we are now going head-to-head with the market leader and our next generation approach to delivering content is a game changer,” Kent says.



## Adam Pye

Managing Director, John Pye & Sons

By his late-teens, Adam Pye was already an adept auctioneer, helping his father to sell antiques from their Nottingham base. When he took over the business in 1996 there were 25 people; today John Pye & Sons employs 700 across 21 locations in the UK and Spain selling everything from mobile phones to cars. His company sells products on behalf of mega brands like Amazon and government departments like the DVLA. “I still write my parents an old-fashioned shareholders report every month,” Pye says. “They are 83 and 93 now but they are energised by the success of the business. It’s been so rewarding to make them proud.”



## Mo Hussain & Alan Rock

Co-CEOs, Moasure

Alan Rock came up with the idea for Moasure, the world’s first motion-based measuring tool, back in 2002. A qualified electronic engineer, he built a working prototype but then had to wait over a decade before launching the business due to the extortionate cost of complex sensors in the device. Based at the University of Warwick Science Park’s Innovation Centre, the company now ships to more than 150 countries. “We’re proof that you don’t have to be in London or Silicon Valley to build a global tech company,” says co-CEO Mo Hussain. The company’s vision? “To revolutionise the way people measure and eventually make the tape measure and spirit level obsolete,” says Rock.



# Homegrown Success

**Amid their ambitious goals, certain entrepreneurs are concentrating on nurturing critical skills within the UK, safeguarding the nation's expertise and potential.**

◀ **Bio & Me's** - Nutritionist Dr Megan Rossi's recipe for a healthy gut.





## Jon Walsh & Dr Megan Rossi

**Founders, Bio&Me**

Former Nestlé executive Jon Walsh and Dr Megan Rossi - also known as The Gut Health Doctor - met up at a food industry event to plan out their new gut health food brand. They launched Bio&Me in 2019 and their range of granolas, porridges, mueslis and live yoghurts is now stocked in major UK grocery stores including Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose. Based in Chester, the business employs 13 staff and counts England captain Harry Kane as an investor. "Seeing our products on the shelves is just magic but there's still so much more we can do," says Walsh. "The fear of failure absolutely drives me."



## Luke Consiglio

**Managing Director, The Pantry**

Aged 21, Luke Consiglio bought a small sandwich shop in Hayes. Today, The Pantry is a £17 million turnover contract caterer with 550 staff, which feeds 35,000 children a day across 140 schools. Now 39, Consiglio is a passionate entrepreneur, balancing growth with a desire to do good. From The Pantry's Soil Association accreditation to its food donations to homeless shelters and its work with families to promote healthy living, "we never compromise on our values", he says. Consiglio has a waiting list of schools - here and abroad - desperate for his meals. "Working with food and giving kids healthy meals - this job is a dream come true."



## Mark Davison

**CEO, Grant Instruments**

When Mark Davison took the helm at Grant Instruments in 2020, he wanted to future-proof the 72-year-old maker of precision instruments. This meant a renewed focus on the US and ensuring the culture at the Royston-based firm is second to none. "We foster a culture of ambition and excellence. We operate a four-day work week, which is revolutionary for a manufacturing company," he says. Innovation is also key to growth and adding to the current portfolio of instruments, Davison is expanding cryopreservation for the burgeoning field of cell storage. "We do what the customer wants within the industries that are growing," Davison says.



## Kieran Fisher

**Founder, KBF Enterprises**

“I make the best-selling Warrior Protein Bars and my mission is to help normal people on average salaries to eat well and live healthier lives,” says Kieran Fisher, founder of KBF Enterprises. Fisher launched his business in 2008, pivoting to become a manufacturer in 2012. “I sold my Lamborghini and my Ferrari, mortgaged my house, and built a factory,” he says. Later this year, Fisher will move into an even bigger site, which will increase output by 400 per cent, producing innovative products like energy shots and protein cookies. “I’m driven by a combination of fear and ambition,” he says.



## Glenn Scaife

**Managing Director, Claritas Solutions**

Glenn Scaife left a successful career at BT before co-founding Claritas Solutions, an IT consultancy, in 1996. After 12 years, he took full ownership of the business and began chasing more ambitious contracts. “That’s when we started doubling in size every two years,” he says. Scaife is an avid supporter of the UK having its own sovereign cloud, and Claritas has invested millions in developing its own version, which is used by the police and government. Money is not a motivator for Scaife. “I know that if people like me don’t invest and keep protecting our data and skills, we’ll be left behind. IT is the driving force in the world right now.”

# Ones to Watch

**Whether they are advancing medical research, improving data-sharing between airports or educating tomorrow's tech pioneers, these entrepreneurs are on course for great things.**

From the founder of an optician group bringing better vision to the south coast to the new CEO of an integrated drug discovery business that is helping the UK's scientific community to find tomorrow's medicines, this year's Ones to Watch are already making great strides and driving growth. However, with their passion, vision and ambition, these inspiring business leaders and entrepreneurs all continue to display so much more potential; we can't wait to see where they go next.

**Meet the Ones to Watch of 2023.**





**Bryan Adams**  
Ph.Creative

**Mission:** “Empowering modern businesses with transformative employer branding through our pioneering ‘Give & Get’ method and HappyDance, a cutting-edge careers site platform fostering superior candidate experiences.”



**Lewis Reeves**  
Walr

**Proudest achievement:** “I’m extremely proud of the start we’ve made at Walr, we’ve truly created the foundations to kick on and build a business that will change and industry and leave a legacy.”



**Manny Athwal**  
School of Coding

**Mission:** “We exist to educate children and adults to help them build a better future so that they can find solutions to the world’s biggest problems through code.”



**Tom Craig & Aaron Dicks**  
Impression

**Mission:** “We’re delighted that Impression has been recognised for delivering on its purpose of being the best place for digital talent to transform their careers.”



**Bob Dearsley**  
Huble Digital Group

**Ambition:** “To build an international technology services business, full of amazing people from all over the world, who love going to work and amazing their customers with what they can achieve for them.”



**Cheryl Luzet & Nick Silverstone**  
Wagada Digital

**Ambition:** “We want Wagada Digital to be recognised as both a national and international marketing agency working with ambitious clients to propel their brands.”



**Dan Drogman**  
Smart Spaces

**Ambition:** “Our ambition is to be the world’s leading smart building operating system for commercial real estate. We make the management of offices more efficient whilst significantly enhancing the end-user experience.”



**Lee Durham & Richard Lane**  
durhamlane

**Ambition:** “Our ambition is to be the leading B2B revenue acceleration partner for enterprise brands, amplifying sales and marketing performance for success on a global scale.”



**Jason Foster**  
Cynozure

**Mission:** “Our purpose is ‘data, for a better tomorrow’. We believe in the power of data to create a better, more open, more inclusive future.”



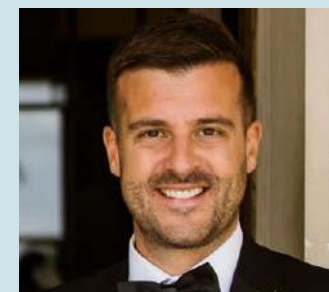
**Stephen Henesy**  
Helphemove

**Mission:** “To deliver tech-led solutions built on a foundation of industry experience, innovation and valuable partnerships to make property management effortless.”



**Gareth Humphreys**  
Solution Performance Group

**Proudest achievement:** “Managing to take the business from an idea on a flipchart page to reality through the global pandemic – and to still be here.”



**Nick Hutchinson**  
Glider Technology

**Proudest achievement:** “Securing a global, multi-year contract to deliver our gliderbim® software and services to the UK Ministry of Defence.”



**Mo Isap**  
IN4 Group

**Mission:** “IN4 Group unlocks the potential of highly skilled local talent through technology by delivering sustainable prosperity to communities, ensuring fair access to technology futures for all.”



**Craig Letton & Ben Walker**  
MRM Global

**Mission:** “To enable our customers to increase sales and reduce wastage.”



**Nick Lindsay**  
Elemental CoSec

**Proudest achievement:** “I am most proud of our people and the difference we make to our clients. Our growth flows from this, rather than the other way around.”



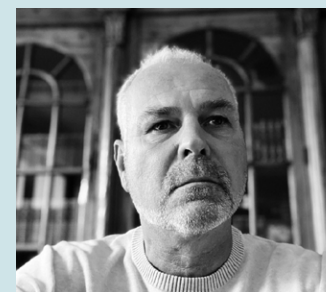
**Sean Dickinson**  
Unicard

**Mission:** “In a more sustainably focused world, Unicard is dedicated to making public transport more accessible by designing, building, and delivering market leading innovation for transport providers.”



**Rebecca Marks**  
Scarlett Entertainment & Management

**Mission:** “To bring the best entertainment available to hire globally to our clients.”



**Stuart Mitchell**  
Live and Breathe

**Mission:** “To run a business that allows everyone who joins us to have the opportunity to develop and to achieve their own personal goals.”





**Andy Morgan**  
SCT

**Ambition:** “To build high performing teams with a culture of continuous improvement with the goal of driving exceptional customer experiences.”



**Abid Naser & Mo Naser**  
SmartSurvey

**Proudest achievement:** “Transforming SmartSurvey from a mere concept to a trusted Survey platform, helping over 500,000 users answer over one billion questions to date.”



**Daniel Owen**  
ArmstrongB2B®

**Ambition:** “My ambition is for ArmstrongB2B® to become the world’s leading B2B marketing agency for manufacturing and industrial brands.”



**Toby Parkins**  
Headforwards

**Ambition:** “Success for me is Headforwards as a force for good, offering high quality jobs and training and contributing to the future of the tech sector.”



**Lee Patterson**  
Charnwood Discovery

**Ambition:** “I want to help Charnwood Discovery realise its potential as one of the most impactful outsourced drug discovery partners in the world.”



**Zabir Ali**  
Wessex Optical

**Ambition:** “To combine premium, service-led retail with everyday and specialist healthcare services, meeting the needs of communities and accessible on the high street.”



## George Richardson

AeroCloud

**Mission:** “To be the largest global Airport Operating System. Our purpose is to connect all airport stakeholders to create a simple and effective exchange of information for airports to make real-time decisions.”



## Paul Starr

SEP2

**Mission:** “Our purpose is to work with our customers interests at heart to increase their cyber security protections in the best way possible, leveraging our core values of ‘Tech Driven. People Powered’.”



## Chris Tomlinson

Muuto Consulting

**Proudest achievement:** “Every time we get an extension or call to come back to a client and they say that they trust us and they know we are the right partner for them. I think that is what makes me proudest.”



## Jenny Tsai

WeArisma

**Proudest achievement:** “To have the opportunity to work with some of the most innovative and iconic brands in the world along with a great team.”



## Oliver Yonchev

Flight Story

**Mission:** “To keep brands at the forefront of what’s possible and take advantage of the opportunities that an ever-changing world creates.”



## Joe Zielinski

Zinc Systems

**Ambition:** “To push technical boundaries and become a global leader in the world of incident and crisis management.”



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**Ambition is the driving force that propels innovation, growth and ultimately success.”**

◀ **John Garner** - Managing Partner, LDC.



At LDC, we have always championed ambition. We back management teams who are striving for growth, providing them with the investment and support they need to achieve their commercial goals and make a positive contribution to society and the environment.

The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders was born out of our own ambition to shed light on the remarkable stories of medium-sized businesses, the unsung heroes of the British economy.

Since the programme's inception six years ago, we've received more than 3,000 nominations and celebrated the achievements of more than 500 business leaders through The LDC Top 50 and Ones to Watch.

They run companies that collectively turn over £7.5 billion and provide employment for more than 50,000 people. They are the backbone of the UK economy.

Looking at this year's Top 50, it's clear the competition has never been fiercer. These leaders hail from every region of the UK and span every sector of our economy, and their stories of growth are testament to the unyielding spirit of ambition that the UK business community is famous for.

The LDC Top 50 for 2023 is a celebration of creativity, expertise and determination. I hope you will join me in congratulating everyone profiled this year on their achievements.

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

**The LDC Top 50  
Most Ambitious Business Leaders  
2024**

**Open for early entries: [ldc.co.uk/2024top50](https://ldc.co.uk/2024top50)**