



 **LDC**  
**THE**  
**TOP 50**  
**2022**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
**THE  TIMES**

**AMBITIOUS LEADERS**

Meet the leaders proving that out of adversity and uncertainty can come growth, innovation and opportunity

**HELPING THE NEXT GENERATION**

Supporting tomorrow's ambitious entrepreneurs with the advice and inspiration they need to get started today

**INCLUSIVITY MATTERS**

Nurture a diverse pipeline of talent that will continue innovating well into the future, and everyone wins

**WASTE NOT, WANT NOT**

The measures these inspirational entrepreneurs are taking to effectively drive sustainable solutions



# Ambitious leaders with fresh thinking

With resilience, strategic excellence and export success, this year's entrepreneurs have grown fighting-fit organisations, challenged industries and created jobs, innovative products and smart services

While UK businesses are showing resilience and determination in their efforts to recover after Covid, inflation and a range of other issues are increasing uncertainty for all organisations. But despite these challenges, leaders of businesses across the country are pushing for growth – finding innovative approaches to old problems, embracing sustainability, taking more care to look after their people and finding new, exciting markets in which to flourish. Nowhere is this more evident than in the LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders programme. For the fifth year running, LDC, the private equity arm of Lloyds Banking Group, is celebrating ambition. LDC has a rich heritage of supporting the ambitions of leadership teams who run fast-growth medium-sized businesses – having helped more than 650 over the past 40 years with over £5.5 billion of investment. LDC created The Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders programme back in 2018 to raise awareness and provide well deserved recognition for UK entrepreneurs and business

leaders finding success in the most challenging of times. The Top 50 reveals the real people behind the success stories and the impact they are having in important areas such as sustainability, supporting people, innovation and international expansion. This year, the list is as vibrant and exciting as ever. The LDC Top 50 illustrates that ambition is alive and well in all corners of the UK, from Edinburgh to Brighton and Bath to Norfolk. The leaders and their companies collectively employ almost 9,500 people and turn over more than £1.2 billion. "The Top 50 is a real source of inspiration," says John Garner, managing partner at LDC. "The volume and quality of submissions this year surpassed all of our expectations. We've been struck by the way business leaders have overcome challenges and adversity to run fast-growing and successful companies, proving that difficult circumstances can become a significant driver of ambition." The business leaders that feature in The Top 50 this year have delivered market-leading growth

despite all the challenges that have been thrown at them, increasing company revenues by an average of 104 per cent across the past three years.

### INSPIRED BY ADVERSITY

Take Sunny Araf, who needed to support his family, so sacrificed his dream of going to university. He worked at Burger King to put food on the table at home, before getting an opportunity to join the police force. He eventually started security and support personnel business ISA Support Services with his cousin in 2011. "For the first five or six years of the business, I was working two jobs, pretty much living off four or five hours' sleep," he says. "I'd be in the office in the day and working security at night." ISA Support Services is now a multimillion-pound business that employs more than 300 people.

Father of four Araf has tragically lost two of his children – son Ismaeel and, more recently, daughter Khadijah, both from health complications. "Khadijah changed our lives," he says. "She made us realise that there's much more to life. That's when we formed the ISA Foundation, our own charitable organisation to help those going through tough times."

Byron Dixon, who spearheads a company that makes an innovative anti-mould spray, grew up on a council estate in Leicester with four siblings. He says: "Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s was quite tough, especially on a council estate and with my mum a single parent. We didn't have a lot."

But despite the odds, chemist Dixon worked his way up at companies such as ECCO shoes, before creating his own antibacterial product, Micro-Fresh, which is now used by more than 50 retailers to help products stay fresher for longer. "I've met a lot of entrepreneurs who are from similar backgrounds to me," he says. "And we have this natural fight in us but we're also not afraid of losing because we've been through it all before as kids."

### GOING GLOBAL

The LDC Top 50 is full of business leaders bringing innovative and game-changing new products, such as Micro-Fresh, to market. This year's entrepreneurs are not afraid of going the



**'The Top 50 have shown difficulties can become a significant driver of ambition'**

John Garner, LDC

as our first export target. It was booming with trade, and tourism was going through the roof," says co-CEO Ebanks-Beni. "Our success within export was quite rapid. We had a really good blueprint to work from but we adapted and evolved very, very quickly." Prima Cheese now supplies 55 countries worldwide.

### PEOPLE-POWERED

Beyond growth, one thing many of The Top 50 agree on is the importance of looking after their people – creating nurturing environments where people feel empowered and appreciated. In a post-Covid world, with a huge increase in remote working, this issue is front and centre for our business leaders.

Emma O'Brien founded her digital transformation consultancy, Embridge Consulting, after being made redundant. She wanted a job that would give her enough work-life balance to enjoy time with her kids – this is still a priority for the entrepreneur now that she has 100 people on the team. "We're very flexible – if people want to work term-time only or spend three months a year in France, we'll see if we can make that work," she explains.

Embridge Consulting is proud to be an inclusive workplace. "We're a Disability Confident Employer," O'Brien explains. "Our youngest child is disabled, he has drug-resistant epilepsy, so obviously it is quite personal to me. We have some people in the team who have disabilities and often

those disabilities are hidden – so we look at how we can support them."

Some founders are embracing the freedom of working from anywhere. Join Talent founder Katrina Hutchinson O'Neill has created a fully remote company to give employees the flexibility she didn't have in her earlier career. "I was on maternity leave when I got headhunted by a major bank, but that came with the requirement that I had to move to Scotland," she explains. "We relocated there and left our dream house behind in Northern Ireland. It was daft. You didn't actually have to be in the office every day. At Join Talent we've been fully remote from the start."

For some leaders however, supporting teams means getting them together. Chris Roberts, CEO of technology consultancy Nimble Approach, wants to maintain a great geographical spread of offices across the UK. With offices in Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester, he's opening a Bristol branch and aims to have 10 locations eventually. "Even if people are in the offices an average of two days a week, we're creating little communities in each of those areas. It's about getting together, spending time with like-minded people, problem solving as a team, being able to read body language in a room and making sure everybody has a voice."

### FIGHTING FIT FOR THE FUTURE

Against a less than perfect economic landscape, The Top 50 have proved that not only are they innovative and growing fast – they are doing it responsibly by building people-first enterprises with an eye on the future. As each of this year's leaders illustrates, ambition comes in many forms, including from adversity, innovation and a drive to do things better.

"Once again, The Top 50 evidences the crucial role ambition plays in solving challenges our economy faces," says LDC's Garner. "While the true impact on business from major economic events remains uncertain, we can take comfort and inspiration from the confidence these leaders have shown to take advantage of new opportunities and react at great speed."

### DAIRY DREAM

Prima Cheese is a sibling success story

### GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Byron Dixon is now looking to take his company global



ALL INTERVIEWS AND PROFILES: KATE BASSETT

## THE LDC TOP 50



**RICHARD ALLCORN**  
FOUNDER  
AMICULUM

Doctors Richard Allcorn and Jenny Putin started healthcare communications agency AMICULUM in 2001 with a £15,000 equity investment and £75,000 loan raised from friends and family. "We decided to bootstrap the business. We were a classic kitchen table start-up," says Allcorn. The company, which comprises a cluster of brands specialising in areas such as oncology and rare diseases, is now one of the largest independent agencies in its sector, employing 350 people globally. "We measure success by what clients and colleagues think of us," says Allcorn. "The ambition was never to build a big agency. It was to build a good agency."

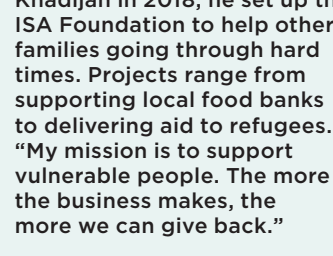
**EUAN ANDREWS**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
XDESIGN

"I started dabbling in web hosting in my teens. I hated school and couldn't wait to leave," says Scottish entrepreneur Euan Andrews. By the time he was 17, he'd sold his first business for £5,000. A year later, he started xDesign, growing it from a "scrappy start-up" into a digital development agency working with big-name clients such as FanDuel, MoneySuperMarket and Tesco Bank. "I've spent my entire adult life building xDesign and now I get the biggest buzz out of watching other people fly." Andrews' top priority is employee wellbeing and this year, xDesign earned a place on the first UK's Best Workplaces for Wellbeing list.



**SUNNY ARAF**  
FOUNDER  
ISA SUPPORT SERVICES

Instead of following his dream of studying politics at university, Sunny Araf flipped burgers and cleaned toilets to provide for his family. He worked as a police officer before starting ISA Support Services in Birmingham in 2011, building it into a multimillion-pound security and support services business. Following the death of his three-year-old daughter Khadijah in 2018, he set up the ISA Foundation to help other families going through hard times. Projects range from supporting local food banks to delivering aid to refugees. "My mission is to support vulnerable people. The more the business makes, the more we can give back."



**NAGMA EBANKS-BENI AND NIMA BENI**  
CO-CEOS  
PRIMA CHEESE

After forging their own careers in London, brother-and-sister team Nima Beni and Nagma Ebanks-Beni joined their parents' pizza-cheese processing firm, Prima Cheese, in County Durham. "We saw an opportunity to tighten up processes and scale up," says Ebanks-Beni. The pair got BRC Food Safety accreditation, developed their own superior pizza cheese recipe and started exporting. Today, Prima shreds 600 tonnes of cheese a week and supplies it to 55 countries worldwide. "Just as people say 'hoover' instead of 'vacuum cleaner', we want people to say 'Prima Cheese' instead of 'pizza cheese'," says Beni. "We want to represent the entire product category."



**DAN BERRY**  
CEO  
UNRVLD

Dan Berry joined London-based digital agency Fusionworkshop – now UNRVLD – as operations director in 2012. "I was always ambitious but got fed up working for big corporates, so I joined UNRVLD." Berry became CEO in 2020, and has supercharged the company's growth. He's completed two acquisitions, rebranded the business and opened an office in Lithuania. But he isn't finished yet. "It still feels like an unfinished journey," he says. The agency employs 200 people, with clients including Barratt Homes, Biffa and Crystal Palace. Berry is now eyeing opportunities in the US. "We want to be famous for creating unrivalled digital experiences for our clients."



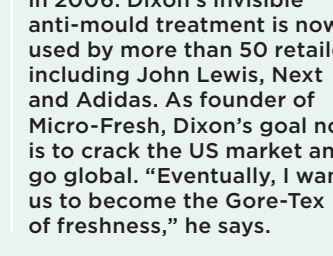
**MATTHEW BRAMLEY AND ADAM SMITH**  
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS  
TRAFALGAR SCIENTIFIC

Matthew Bramley quit his job to set up Trafalgar Scientific in 1993 – he was a salesman and had spotted huge potential in a new product, but the company he was working for didn't want to sell it, so he set up on his own. "I was a one-man band," he says. "It was a huge risk." And it was one that paid off. His Leicester-based business is now one of the biggest privately owned laboratory equipment suppliers in the UK. Director of operations Adam Smith's ambition is to inspire his children. "I want to set them an example so that they have the drive to succeed."



**BYRON DIXON**  
FOUNDER  
MICRO-FRESH

One of five siblings, chemist Byron Dixon was raised on a council estate in Leicester by his single mother, a Jamaican immigrant. "I was bored and disruptive at school but I loved chemistry. It was like magic," he says. Dixon worked for ICI Leather Finishes Division and ECCO shoes before developing the Micro-Fresh formula in 2006. Dixon's invisible anti-mould treatment is now used by more than 50 retailers, including John Lewis, Next and Adidas. As founder of Micro-Fresh, Dixon's goal now is to crack the US market and go global. "Eventually, I want us to become the Gore-Tex of freshness," he says.



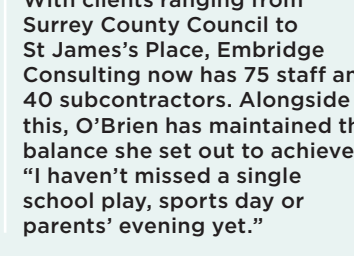
**KATRINA HUTCHINSON O'NEILL**  
FOUNDER  
JOIN TALENT

In 2018, Katrina Hutchinson O'Neill turned her back on her well-paid corporate career to start her own business. "As a mother of three and the main breadwinner, it was a risky move," she says. "But I didn't want to look back and think, 'What if?'" Join Talent now employs 263 people in 23 countries, working on talent acquisition inside companies, including scale-ups, unicorns and Fortune 500 brands. She says the company's USPs are its practitioner-led model and proprietary talent-sourcing platform called Yoke, an active directory of candidates pulled from 53 sources. "We're the only company in our space with this game-changing capability."



**EMMA O'BRIEN**  
FOUNDER  
EMBRIDGE CONSULTING

When Emma O'Brien was made redundant in 2009, she decided to start her own business. "I had two young children and didn't want to go back to a full-time role," she says. "I couldn't find a part-time senior position in the corporate world, so I launched my own digital transformation consultancy in a quest for a good work-life balance." With clients ranging from Surrey County Council to St James's Place, Embridge Consulting now has 75 staff and 40 subcontractors. Alongside this, O'Brien has maintained the balance she set out to achieve. "I haven't missed a single school play, sports day or parents' evening yet."



**CHRIS ROBERTS**  
FOUNDER  
NIMBLE APPROACH

Chris Roberts started the technology consultancy Nimble Approach in 2016, initially working as a freelancer with "pop-up squads" of contractors for clients such as the Home Office, Rentalcars.com and William Hill. Roberts started to ramp up the business in 2020, moving to a bigger HQ in Sheffield and opening offices in Leeds, Manchester and, soon, Bristol. He now employs 120 people and has launched an academy, partnering with local coding bootcamps to bring in fresh talent from diverse backgrounds. "Our culture is really precious to us," he says. "Nimble feels like a community, a family. We want to protect that as we scale the business."







**ANDREW COWEN**  
GROUP CHAIRMAN  
BIOPHARMA GROUP

Andrew Cowen has had an unconventional career. A qualified chartered surveyor and former managing director of Southampton FC, he has been group chairman of Winchester-based Biopharma Group since 2009. He says: "Biopharma Group has huge potential, and we're delivering on that." His goal was to create a diversified life-sciences service business. The company specialises in the freeze-drying stages of diagnostic and vaccine production and has grown fast thanks to the trend for biological therapeutics. "We're one of the top three freeze-drying R&D specialists in the world," Cowen says. "My ambition is to take the number one spot."



**HENRY CRAWFORD, JON TIPPPELL AND GERALDINE COLCLOUGH ALDERSON**  
DIRECTORS  
REDKITE

Henry Crawford, Jon Tippell and Geraldine Colclough Alderson are the trio behind Redkite, a consultancy that helps brands such as Diageo, M&S and The Guardian unlock value from their data. Started in 2018, it now employs more than 300 people and runs the Redkite Academy, an "ultimate accelerator" for a career in data. The co-directors are scaling fast, with plans to open offices in the US, Latin America and Australia this year. "We're ambitious and we want to grow Redkite to become the number one data consultancy globally," Tippell says. "I have a five-year-old daughter and want to be a role model to her about what you can achieve."



**MARCUS FAIRFAX FOUNTAINE AND FELIX FAVOR PARKER**  
FOUNDERS  
FAIRFAX & FAVOR

Childhood friends Marcus Fairfax Fountaine and Felix Favor Parker always wanted to work together. In 2013, they combined their middle names to start their own Norfolk-based footwear brand, Fairfax & Favor, specialising in luxury leather boots and shoes. Their range, which now includes handbags and outerwear, is stocked in 60 boutiques across the UK. They've opened up three of their own stores, and plan to expand into the US. Their aim is to hit £75 million in turnover in the next three years. "We no longer think of ourselves as a shoe company; we're a lifestyle brand," Parker says.

**SPENCER GORE**  
FOUNDER  
EMJ

Spencer Gore is the brains behind EMJ, a medical communications company. Starting the business from his spare room in Essex in 2012, the company now publishes a mix of digital journals, magazines, podcasts, webinars and learning materials, capturing the latest developments with treatments across the pharmaceutical industry. "If there is a way of educating doctors, we do it," Gore says. EMJ now employs 82 people and has 1.2 million doctors on its database. "For me, success is when the numbers are going in the right direction and the team is happy," he adds. "I want to create a billion-pound business."



**HAMISH GRIERSON AND TOM LIVESEY**  
FOUNDERS  
THRIVA

"Our mission is one of empowerment. We want to transform the way people manage their own health," says Hamish Grierson, who started Thriva in 2016 with Eliot Brooks and Tom Livesey. Their London-based health tech company boasts 134 employees and has processed more than two million at-home finger-prick blood tests, which help measure things like cholesterol and hormone levels. "I meet people who tell me that Thriva has changed their life. There's nothing more motivating than that," says Grierson. "This business has so much potential, not just in terms of the size it can become but the impact it can make," Livesey adds.

**ANDY HAGUE**  
CEO  
CYBERFORT GROUP

In 2017, Andy Hague founded Cyberfort Group after spotting a need for an end-to-end supplier of data privacy and security services. "I'm classed as neurodiverse," Hague says. "I'll look at a screen and see things in a different way to others. I mapped out the structure of the business on what is now an infamous piece of paper." He acquired The Bunker, comprising two ex-MoD nuclear shelters operating as ultra-secure data centres, and then built a range of cybersecurity services. Today Cyberfort, with its team of 150 people, turns over £20 million and clients range from the Premier League to Richer Sounds. Hague's goal is to turn over £50 million within three years.



**CHARLES HARTWELL**  
CEO  
EVILLE & JONES

After running a national law firm, Charles Hartwell planned to start his own legal practice. Then he got a call about a "leftfield" job opportunity at Eville & Jones, Britain's biggest provider of vets for abattoirs. "I had no idea that vets even worked in slaughterhouses," he says. He became the company's CEO in 2020 with the aim of diversifying the business and raising its profile. With Veterinary Export Health Certificates now required for the EU, the business has seen huge growth in export customers. "I want to make a difference," he adds. "We safeguard animal welfare within the food chain, as well as ensuring people know it's safe to consume British produce."

**BARINDER HOTHI**  
FOUNDER  
THE KNOWLEDGE ACADEMY

Barinder Hothi started training company The Knowledge Academy with her husband Dilshad in 2009, just as the global economy crashed. "Everyone thought we were mad but there was a huge pool of unemployed people who were looking to retrain and get professional certifications," Hothi says. Based in Bracknell, it's now the world's largest provider of training courses. Hothi puts her work ethic down to her Indian migrant parents: "I watched them go from entry-level catering jobs to owning their own restaurant. Hard work and perseverance run in my veins. The Knowledge Academy could be the UK's first unicorn edtech business."



**BRETT JACOBSON**  
FOUNDER  
MEDIWORKS

Brett Jacobson started Mediaworks in 2007 when he was fresh out of university. Headquartered in the North East, it's a full-service digital agency. Over the past two years, it has opened offices in Leeds, Edinburgh, Dublin and Manchester, doubling its headcount to 200. "Most enterprise UK digital agencies concentrate on the south. We saw a strategic opportunity to own the north," says Jacobson. "Our plan was to be the digital partner of choice for the largest businesses across the north, without alienating those outside of our region. We also focused on five sectors and made it our goal to be the best nationally."

**JANETTE MARTIN**  
CEO  
TALOS360

Janette Martin took the reins of talent tech firm Talos360 in 2021 after an "accidental" job interview. "I thought I was just going in for a chat with the founders. I ended up becoming CEO," says Martin, whose career spans Sage, Advanced Computer Software and Iris. In just over a year, she has rebranded the Warrington-based business, brought in her dream leadership team and nearly doubled the headcount to 122. "My biggest passions are to work with great people, have fun and support their development," she says. "At Talos360, I am doing just that, while also being a great mum and wife. I get to be me."



# A helping hand for the entrepreneurs of the future

Starting a company brings a host of challenges, and never more so than for young founders. Teaming up with The Prince's Trust, LDC aims to give tomorrow's business leaders a head start

Behind many business success stories are the driven and ambitious entrepreneurs who started them. From spearheading new and innovative products and services to creating jobs and wealth for local communities and increasing productivity, these business leaders and visionaries are the backbone of Britain. Supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs is therefore essential if the UK is to remain competitive in the global economy – giving them the confidence, the inspiration and the tools they need to turn their ambitions into reality.

LDC understands the importance of supercharging the entrepreneurs of the future and directing them to the support they need. That's why it recently expanded its partnership with The Prince's Trust, to give guidance and financial support to aspiring business owners at the start of their entrepreneurial journeys. The Prince's Trust is the UK's leading youth charity. It believes each and every young person should have a chance at success. Through its Enterprise Programme, which LDC supports, the charity equips young people with the confidence, skills and funding to launch their own businesses. It also supports a more diverse set of future business leaders, as a quarter of the young entrepreneurs in the programme identify as

non-white and more than half are female. LDC's partnership with the charity has so far helped more than 1,600 young people to start their own business and the new five-year partnership will allow LDC to help thousands more.

Kayleigh Taylor, 27, is one entrepreneur to have benefited from The Prince's Trust's support. Having been diagnosed with ADHD, she had grown up often being told at school that she was simply "naughty". She certainly hadn't imagined herself ever launching a business. But in 2020 she transformed her passion for cooking into a meal prep service called Klee's Kitchen, based in Newcastle.

"Launching a business was new to me," says Taylor, who was previously a sales manager for a software company. "No one in my family had done it before. But everyone at The Prince's Trust was really helpful and it gave me the support network I really needed at the time." Taylor was given a mentor at The Prince's

**'No one in my family had done anything like starting a business before'**

Kayleigh Taylor, Klee's Kitchen



**TASTE OF SUCCESS**  
Food entrepreneur Kayleigh Taylor collecting her Prince's Trust Enterprise Award

Trust who helped her register the company and get everything up and running. She then received ongoing support to help the business to grow; today Klee's Kitchen employs four delivery drivers, two full-time apprentices and one full-time member of staff.

She has big plans for Klee's Kitchen and hopes to launch other businesses in the future. Taylor says the support she was given through The Prince's Trust was invaluable and that schemes such as LDC's Backing Youth Ambition



**WINNING RECIPE** Thanks to The Prince's Trust's support, Kayleigh Taylor's healthy meals have become a reality

partnership provide an important service in the UK. "We need more entrepreneurs and business owners in the local community, because it creates jobs and employment," Taylor says.

"If I'm ever having a tough day, I remember there are now several people depending on me for their jobs, which feels quite rewarding. I don't think I could have got where I am today without the support I received along the way."

Starting a business can be daunting, especially if there are high costs involved because your company is developing a new product. The good news is that the UK has a highly supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Whether you need advice on funding, gaining customers or help with the administration and paperwork that goes with running a business, there will always be a programme or an individual willing to help and support you.

Taylor says having a support network was essential to getting her business off the ground and to keep it growing. Her top tips are to not be afraid of asking others for help and to accept that it may take time before your business starts to get the results you want.

"It takes ambition and drive to start a company and to keep it going," she says. "Rome wasn't built in a day and your business certainly won't be. Surround yourself with like-minded people because most of those you meet, you can learn something from."

## SOLID FOUNDATIONS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF INNOVATORS



**TAKING SHAPE** Solid Solutions is leading the way in helping businesses develop 3D prototypes

Behind some of the big tech success stories of the past few years lies a UK software company that's supporting the entrepreneurs of the future

UK entrepreneurs have a strong reputation for coming up with answers to problems facing society. Solid Solutions, which provides engineering software to businesses across the country, says UK entrepreneurs are leading the way in artificial intelligence and automation, and are using innovative technology to address challenges such as climate change, waste reduction

and space exploration. To help these entrepreneurs get their cutting-edge technologies off the ground, Leamington Spa-based company Solid Solutions runs an entrepreneur programme to support founders in the early stages of launching their businesses. This involves a year's free access to Solid Solutions' CAD package, which helps companies design sophisticated

3D prototypes, along with technical support and advice on where they may get funding.

"The companies we work with are often designing complex and sophisticated products and solutions," says Mark Tooley, who leads the Solid Solutions entrepreneur programme. "We try to support them as much as we can to fill in any gaps in their knowledge."

"Our entrepreneur programme is a key part of our mission, as it helps us find and support the next generation of businesses who will hopefully go on to be leaders in innovation."

The programme has helped around 900 companies since launching in 2016, many of which have gone on to be hugely successful. These include PlasmaTrack, which uses green energy to clean rail tracks and enable trains to run more efficiently. Tribe Tech, which is revolutionising the mining industry by enabling autonomous exploration drilling, is another company that Solid Solutions supported in its early days.

The support that Solid Solutions provides to the next generation of entrepreneurs was a key reason why LDC invested in the business in 2020. During the partnership, LDC helped the management team to grow the company. "LDC fully supported our strategy. They encouraged us to be bold with our plans, and to act quickly and efficiently for the benefit of our customers. We could not have asked for a more supportive and engaging partner," says Alan Sampson, CEO of Solid Solutions.



# Five years of ambition and beyond

Being part of The Top 50 judging panel not only offers a chance to see just how much exciting business evolution is taking place in the UK, but it can also be an invaluable learning experience

Carl Castledine has seen a lot of very impressive businesses during his five years on the judging panel for The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders programme. However, he can still point to a few standouts.

Oddbox is one. Led by founder Emilie Vanpoperinghe, who was named The Most Ambitious Business Leader of 2021, the company “rescues” and delivers wonky fruit and veg in an effort to reduce food waste. It has delivered four million boxes since it was launched, saving 32,000 tonnes of food waste in the process.

“Emilie’s amazing. What was great about Oddbox was that it isn’t just taking food waste, it is also helping farmers optimise their crops and getting veg to people in different ways,” Castledine explains.

He rolls off several more memorable alumni that he still follows, including three from his first year of judging in 2018: Julian Hearn,

whose meal-replacement business Huel recently hit £100 million in revenue, rising from £40 million three years ago; construction recruitment specialist VGC, whose COO, Ciara Pryce, is on a mission to create diversity and stop modern slavery in the industry; and Saurav Chopra, CEO of Perkbox, whose employee rewards and benefits platform is helping companies to retain staff at a time of “the great resignation”.

“Judging is an amazing experience,” says Castledine, who is chair of this year’s panel. “You get to spend time with just the most incredibly talented, thoughtful, driven, passionate, self-aware, strategic people. I admire the way they actually get stuff done.”

“What they all have in common is that they aren’t just chasing numbers. Each has a vision, a passion or a change they want to make. Each thinks big about how to get there and is relentless in making it happen.” For Castledine, this is what makes a leader truly ambitious: “It’s tenacity, all day long. Tenacity in the face of a stream of ‘no’s and ‘not quite there’s.”

He learnt that lesson building his own business, Away Resorts, which you could describe as a 21st-century reimagining of the world of caravanning. Launched in 2008, Away Resorts now has 27 sites across the UK – from Perthshire to Cornwall. LDC played its role in his journey, investing in 2015 to enable the company to make three acquisitions in three years.

“Success”, he says, “is often down to a mix of good old-fashioned grit and determination – and a bit of luck. You keep pushing and pushing and then suddenly, after many years of hard work, it looks like you’ve been an overnight success,” he laughs.

Fellow judge Jan Steele, who joined the panel this year, also has plenty of experience of the ups and downs of growing businesses. She left a career in big pharma in 2007 to start healthcare consultancy Lucid Group, also backed by LDC. After a successful exit, she recently set up Only the Brave Health, which supports new drug launches. “I think my ambition comes from the satisfaction of building something that truly is magnificent,” she says. “But also something that reflects my values. I love people-focused



◀ **WONKY IDEAS**  
Oddbox was started by Emilie Vanpoperinghe, named The Most Ambitious Business Leader in 2021

▶ **TEAM VALUES**  
New judge Jan Steele of Only The Brave Health believes in the power of people

▼ **'AMAZING EXPERIENCE'** Carl Castledine is chair of this year's judging panel



Carl Castledine

**‘You get to spend time with the most incredibly talented, thoughtful, self-aware, passionate, driven, strategic people’**

businesses – I’m only as good as my team.”

As for what she’s looking for from this year’s cohort of leaders: “Absolute clarity on goals. It’s super important to be clear on where you’re heading and what success looks like. You can convince people relatively easily of your strategy and goals, but then you have to execute.”

With the same spirit of challenge, Steele expects to see commitments around the area of sustainability, but wants to know the nitty-gritty. What measures are businesses actually taking? How are leaders engaging stakeholders? If they talk about building diverse and inclusive organisations because that yields greater creativity, what does that look like in practice? “I’m interested in how they are using their diversity and bringing people together to be more creative, by which I mean building good solutions that meet a need,” she explains.

Castledine adds that he’s on the lookout for companies that put Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) into the heart of what they do, rather than bolting it on, in particular those that operate in the circular economy. More broadly, he’s interested in people who can see opportunities where others can’t. “There’s this belief that entrepreneurs need to find a new market niche to create great value, but sometimes the greater impact comes from when people go into an existing sector and make a difference there.”

Even after all of Castledine and Steele’s success, they see the judging process itself as a learning experience.

“I’m really excited not just to understand their businesses but also to feel the energy people give off when they’re really ambitious and successful,” says Steele.



WORDS: ADAM GALE

## THE LDC TOP 50



**CHRIS MAY**  
FOUNDER  
MAYDEN

Chris May set up Bath-based health tech firm Mayden in 2000 in the aftermath of the dotcom crash. “The NHS was terrified of digitising patient data, but I could see the potential of technology to transform the way we manage healthcare,” he says. Today, Mayden has grown to 120 employees. Its digital-care record systems predominantly support the UK’s psychological therapy services, but May’s ambition is to harness data to improve patient outcomes. He wants to expand into new clinical areas, such as diabetes and autism. Mayden also runs IO Academy, training people who have no coding experience to be industry-ready developers in just 16 weeks.

**POLLY MCMASTER**  
FOUNDER  
THE FOLD

Starting her career in the corporate world, Polly McMaster struggled to find beautiful, modern outfits to wear for work. “I wanted to feel confident and polished but I found that the sartorial options for women were lacklustre, frumpy and masculine,” she says. So in 2012, McMaster launched a fashion label of her own. The Fold is headquartered in London, with a flagship store in Chelsea. Over the next year, McMaster has ambitions to open new stores in the UK and US – The Fold’s biggest market – and launch a clothing rental service. “We want to be the global go-to luxury workwear brand for ambitious women,” she says.



**BEN MIDDLETON**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
ALCHEMMY

Ben Middleton joined the management consultancy Alchemmy in 2020 with one major ambition: to shake things up. “Traditional consultancy can slow down what it should be speeding up. We’re the complete opposite,” he says. Alchemmy is a challenger brand and Middleton is using its best assets – people and technology – to guarantee change and help clients grow. “Our people are passionate about what they do and we know that if we do a great job for clients, they’ll want us back.” It’s Middleton’s goal to ensure every person at Alchemmy has a part to play in the growth of the business.

**SUZIE OWEN AND JIM CREGAN**  
FOUNDERS  
JIMMY’S ICED COFFEE

Jim Cregan became obsessed with iced coffee while he was travelling around Australia, so he vowed to start his own brand. When he returned to the UK, he pitched the idea to his sister, Suzie Owen, and the pair launched Jimmy’s Iced Coffee in Dorset in 2010. Sold online and in stores from Selfridges to Sainsbury’s, it’s now the fastest-growing ready-to-drink iced coffee brand in the UK, with one bottle sold every four seconds. “We want to see Jimmy’s Iced Coffee in every great fridge around the world,” says Cregan. “When I spot us in a tapas bar down a side alley in Spain, I’ll know we’ve made it.”



**DALE PARMENTER**  
CEO  
DRPG

As a teenager, Dale Parmenter had one ambition: to run his own business. He dabbled in horticulture and DJing before identifying a gap in the market for corporate films. He started Worcestershire-based DRPG from his garden shed in 1980 after being refused a loan. It’s now one of the largest private creative agencies in the UK, with clients such as Jaguar Land Rover, BT and Sainsbury’s. Earlier this year, DRPG snapped up screen content agency A-Vision – its sixth acquisition – and opened an office in the US. “Our ambition is to be across the globe – an organisation on which the sun never sets,” says Parmenter.

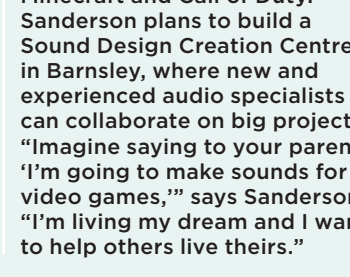
**DIPTESH PATEL**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
UBDS

By the age of 14, Diptesh Patel had built his own computer, using the savings from his paper round to buy all the components. He registered UBDS (his family’s initials) while he was at university and then worked as a consultant for BT and several large government departments. In 2019, he decided to start building the business; three years on, his digital consultancy employs 100 people and has offices in London, MediaCityUK in Salford, and Dubai. He personally meets every new recruit and offers all employees unlimited training. “Being an entrepreneur is a rollercoaster ride,” he says. “The thing that really drives me is finding and developing talent.”



**JOHN SANDERSON**  
FOUNDER  
PITSTOP PRODUCTIONS

John Sanderson worked as a music teacher and head of entertainment at Granada Studios before starting his own company in 1997. PitStop Productions – named after a musical he wrote for his students – provides voice production, music creation and sound design for the video games sector, including hit titles such as Minecraft and Call of Duty. Sanderson plans to build a Sound Design Creation Centre in Barnsley, where new and experienced audio specialists can collaborate on big projects. “Imagine saying to your parents, ‘I’m going to make sounds for video games,’” says Sanderson. “I’m living my dream and I want to help others live theirs.”



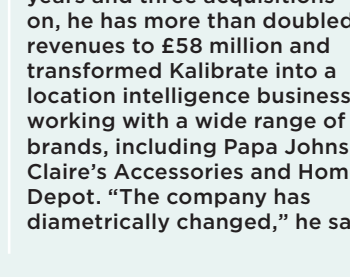
**GUS SARGENT**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
TECKNUOVO

Gus Sargent set out to build a “deliberately different” technology consultancy and shake up the industry. “We have a zero dependency model,” explains Sargent, who started Tecknuovo in 2015. “Our success is defined by our customers’ ownership of solutions and independence from us at the end of a project.” The London-based company employs 40 people and draws on a network of 6,000 highly skilled associates to deliver projects for clients such as HMRC and Thames Water. “I’m honest about my mistakes and I own my vulnerabilities. I think that’s how you motivate a team to come on the journey with you.”



**OLIVER SHAW**  
CEO  
KALIBRATE

When Oliver Shaw took over Manchester-based Kalibrate as CEO in 2019, it was a technology firm operating in a niche market – providing petrol-pricing software to fuel retailers. “I’m agnostic about failure – if we try something and it doesn’t work, that’s OK. As long as we learn to do something else,” he says. Three years and three acquisitions on, he has more than doubled revenues to £58 million and transformed Kalibrate into a location intelligence business, working with a wide range of brands, including Papa Johns, Claire’s Accessories and Home Depot. “The company has diametrically changed,” he says.



**ROBIN SKIDMORE**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
JOURNEY FURTHER

“I grew up on a council estate and my dad had three jobs to make ends meet,” says Robin Skidmore. “I didn’t want that life. I thought, ‘When I grow up, I want to be like Richard Branson.’” He started Epiphany Search when he was 25 and sold it a decade later. After travelling the world with his family, Skidmore set up performance marketing agency Journey Further in 2017. The company now has 170 employees and has expanded into the US. “I’d like to set up a digital skills academy for underprivileged kids from the same kind of background as me. I want to leave a legacy,” he says.







**ADAM STROUD**  
GROUP CEO  
PAXTON

Straight out of university, Adam Stroud took on a temp job in the factory of Paxton, a Brighton-based technology firm that designs and manufactures security solutions for buildings. In 2012, he became CEO and has overseen the company's expansion into international markets and new products, such as video surveillance systems. The company now exports to more than 60 countries and is working with Brighton and Hove City Council to create a private technology park in the region. "It was a small company when I joined and I made it my business to learn everything," he says. "Our goal is to become one of the world's great technology companies."

**KASIA BROMLEY**  
FOUNDER  
ACAI OUTDOORWEAR

Polish designer Kasia Bromley wants to revolutionise women's outdoor apparel. After studying at the Edinburgh College of Art, and working at the McQueen fashion house and cycling brand Endura, she spotted a gap in the market for a women's outdoorwear label that combined fashion and function. Bromley launched ACAI with her husband, Joe, in 2016. She is passionate about getting more women to go outside through her "outdoorsing" campaign. "I suffered from severe postnatal depression after my son was born. Going for runs and walks saved me. My mission is to inspire more women to enjoy nature for their mental and physical health."



**SOPHIE COSTELLO**  
FOUNDER  
COSTELLO MEDICAL

Sophie Costello started her medical consultancy in 2008 after her younger brother suffered a life-changing brain injury. "I'd always wanted to start my own business but I wasn't brave enough," says Costello, who holds a master's in Bioscience Enterprise from the University of Cambridge. "That traumatic event forced me to reassess my own situation. Life's too short to do something you don't enjoy." Costello Medical - headquartered in Cambridge with international offices in Boston, Singapore and Shanghai - now employs 300 people and became a B Corp this year. "We are a company that tries to be a force for good."

**RAOUL FRASER**  
FOUNDER  
LOVAT PARKS

Raoul Fraser spotted a gap in the UK market for sustainable and premium holiday cabins to rent or own. "Modular homes could be part of the answer to the UK housing crisis," he says. He founded Lovat Parks in 2017, and his business now operates eight holiday parks across southern England and has a turnover of £25 million. It is the world's first holiday park operator to become a B Corp, with eco initiatives including free water refill stations, toy exchanges and locally sourced produce at its cafés. "Money isn't the driving factor for me," Fraser says. "I want to be remembered for doing the right thing."



**MARK PEPPER**  
CEO  
CARLTON FOREST GROUP

Mark Pepper wants to revolutionise tyre recycling and contribute to the net zero agenda. By divesting profits from Carlton Forest Group, his third-party logistics business in Nottinghamshire, Pepper has built the UK's first continuous pyrolysis plant for end of life tyres (ELTs). The plant converts ELTs into oil, which can be refined into biofuel or chemicals. Over the next year, he expects to recover four million litres of eco-pyrolysis oil from 8,000 tonnes of tyre shred. "The world's biggest tyre graveyard is in Kuwait. You can see it from space," he says. "One of my goals is to help tackle this environmental challenge."

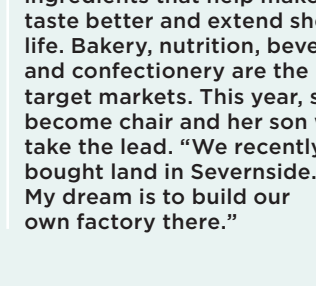
**MARTIN RAE**  
FOUNDER  
CLOUD NINE

Cloud Nine is a Yorkshire-based haircare brand founded by Martin Rae, his brother and his stepdad, Robert Powls, the founder of ghd. "We'd all been at ghd since the start and knew that business inside out," says Rae. "We saw a gap in the market for a range of premium, temperature-controlled irons that are kinder to hair but still deliver great results." Cloud Nine turns over £36 million and sells its products worldwide. "I want to build the biggest electrical haircare brand in the world," says Rae, "but I want to do it our way." Rae recently launched a recycling service with the aim of saving millions of hair tools from landfill.



**JANIS SINTON**  
FOUNDER  
TASTETECH

The death of her husband and business partner forced Janis Sinton to take over TasteTech, the business they established together in Bristol. "I went from company secretary and general manager to managing director overnight," she says. Sinton has quadrupled the size of TasteTech, which develops and manufactures encapsulated food flavourings and functional ingredients that help make food taste better and extend shelf life. Bakery, nutrition, beverage and confectionery are the main target markets. This year, she'll become chair and her son will take the lead. "We recently bought land in Severnside. My dream is to build our own factory there."



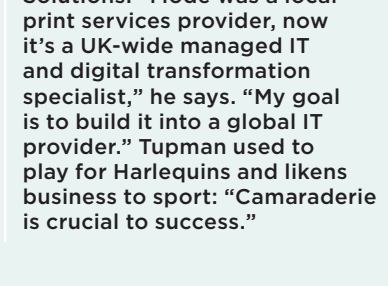
**NICK THOMPSON**  
CEO  
ONE BEYOND

"When I was ten, my dad bought me a Sinclair ZX Spectrum computer and I taught myself how to program it. I was a proper geek," says Nick Thompson. He joined software development firm One Beyond - formerly known as DCSL - when he was 17, worked his way up and became CEO in 2013. In nine years, Thompson has increased revenues from £1 million to £30 million, and today employs more than 350 people. He is creating a values-driven culture that focuses on quality, communication, collaboration and pragmatism. "There's no limit to my ambition," he says. "I'd like to employ a further 1,000 people in the next few years."



**ALEX TUPMAN**  
CEO  
ESPRIA

Alex Tupman started his tech business AT Communications from his house with "a few hundred quid" in 1999 and floated it on AIM six years later. He then became CEO of a managed services provider, where he tripled the firm's turnover and quadrupled profits. Now he's "reigniting the fire" at Hertfordshire-based Espria, formerly Mode Solutions. "Mode was a local print services provider, now it's a UK-wide managed IT and digital transformation specialist," he says. "My goal is to build it into a global IT provider." Tupman used to play for Harlequins and likens business to sport: "Camaraderie is crucial to success."



**CRAIG WADDINGTON**  
FOUNDER  
EASY BATHROOMS

Craig Waddington launched Easy Bathrooms in 2013. Starting with one showroom in Leeds, he has built an empire of 120 stores spread across the UK. "We're opening a new store every ten days and want to be the number one retail destination for tiles and bathrooms," he says. The business employs 700 people and is moving to a new 330,000 sq ft headquarters and distribution hub in Wakefield, paving the way for another 200 jobs in the next few years. "I still source all the products, design the stores and pick new locations," he says.



# Create an ideal environment

In the midst of a climate crisis, many leaders want to have a positive impact on the world. Meet the entrepreneurs who have grown successful businesses - with an emphasis on sustainability

**D**oubling down on measures that support the environment is a fruitful tactic among sustainability-minded leaders. Successfully executing such a strategy has the double benefit of contributing to the protection of the planet and, frequently, improving business performance. According to 2021 research by EY, sustainable organisations consistently beat their industry rivals on profitability metrics. This opportunity certainly hasn't been lost on The Top 50. One business leader who has combined a strong focus on sustainability with business success is Martin Rae. He set up the premium hair styling products business Cloud Nine after leaving ghd in 2008 and has grown its annual revenue to £36 million. Cloud Nine's products all come with a three-year guarantee, but wanting to do more to reduce the enormous volume of electrical appliances going into landfill every year, Rae launched his industry's first recycling scheme. "In this industry, there's a lot of 'pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap', and I wonder where it's all going," says Rae. "People are buying cheap products and throwing them away after 12 months because they're broken and not worth repairing." Under Rae's programme, Cloud Nine offers to recycle any brand of electrical hair product. The products come into the company's warehouse - through a free postage offer to customers - and are collected and recycled. So far, the scheme

has recycled well over 100,000 products: "I would ultimately love to be the biggest electrical haircare brand in the world, but by doing it our way," says Rae. While some leaders are creating easier pathways for customers to recycle and reuse, others are pioneering new technologies or developing their own innovative solutions to waste. Take Mark Pepper - by transforming used tyres into a type of oil that can be refined into biofuel or chemicals, he's helping to reduce the number of tyres being burned in power stations in countries such as India. "I started looking at energy from waste about ten years ago," says Pepper, who owns Carlton Forest Group, a Worksop-based business specialising in logistics, renewable energy and property. "I settled on tyres: instead of mass burning them, how do you recover the oil to give it a second life?" The process, known as pyrolysis, produces a chemical reaction that extracts the oil from shredded tyres, which is then sent to a midstream oil company or chemicals business. After visiting processing facilities in a number of countries around the world, Pepper has built the UK's first continuous pyrolysis plant for end of life tyres. He expects to produce four million litres of eco-pyrolysis oil a year from about 8,000 tonnes of tyre shred. For ACAI Outdoorwear co-founder Kasia Bromley, the sustainability focus is on the materials used in her women-focused



**'I'd love to be the biggest electrical haircare brand, but by doing it our way'**

Martin Rae, Cloud Nine

performance wear, such as base layers made from recycled coffee charcoal beans. Headquartered in North Wales, the business has doubled in size year on year since its launch in 2017 - providing quality outdoorwear with a good story. "We're extremely passionate about the fabrics that we use," says Bromley. "The performance of them, where they come from, how they're produced. What's really important to us is that we've provided quality and function for our customers, as well as considered the environmental impact." Bromley's career in fashion started at Alexander McQueen - which she says inspired her to create clothes that had greater function in women's lives. "We are aspiring to produce a product that has the longest lifespan possible - so that you can enjoy that one pair of trousers

**▲ READY FOR TAKE-OFF**  
Cloud Nine makes hair styling products with an environmental emphasis

for a long time. We tend to use materials that involve recycled bottles as opposed to recycled yarns, because that can affect the longevity of the product." Raw materials are also hugely important for Janis Sinton, founder of TasteTech, a Bristol-based business that develops food flavourings and ingredients that help to make food taste better and extend shelf life. Having recently appointed a sustainability manager, the company has taken a close look at the sustainability of its supply chain, especially with regards to palm oil. TasteTech is certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, an international not-for-profit organisation that unites stakeholders from across the industry to develop and implement global standards for sustainable palm oil.

## GET ONE STEP AHEAD WITH B CORP STATUS

Getting certified didn't just help business leaders to tackle environmental issues, many also saw their growth rate shoot up by 14 per cent - which shows it pays to be ethical

"Our core ethos is that business can be a force for good, and I 100 per cent believe that to be true, if done the right way," says Raoul Fraser, whose company, Lovat Parks, became the first holiday park operator in the world to achieve B Corp certification back in 2020. It took Fraser and his team 18 months to secure B Corp status, which involves a rigorous application process that many companies fail to complete. As a major part of Fraser's focus is on sustainability, Lovat Parks has rolled out a number of initiatives in recent years, including a free hire scheme for wooden boogie boards in an attempt to reduce plastic boards, and the transition of all the firm's vehicles to electric. "I'm super proud of the fact that we were the first holiday park operator in the world to become B Corp certified," Fraser says. "Together, a combination of smaller actions can make a real impact."



**▲ GUILT-FREE TRAVEL** Lovat Parks achieved B Corp status in 2020

And there are sound business reasons for working to become a B Corp. Those based in the UK reported an average growth rate of 14 per cent in 2018, 28 times higher than the national average of 0.5 per cent, according to research from PwC. "It was something we'd talked about a lot: wanting to be a business for good," says Sophie Costello, founder of Costello Medical, which works closely with pharmaceutical companies to publish their trial data and educate doctors about new drugs.

"The work we do helps people as all of our projects are focused on ensuring enhanced access to medications - we believe all of our projects have a really positive impact and we are all committed to improving healthcare." The company became a B Corp in May 2022. "It provides us with that external validation and a framework to be continually improving," says Costello. "We want to act responsibly as a company, to have a positive impact on our employees, our clients, the local community and the environment."



# Powering the workforce of the future

Gender, ethnic and cultural diversity is increasingly recognised as being crucial to a business's success. These inspirational leaders demonstrate the benefits of such an inclusive ethos

Creating and supporting the diverse workforce of tomorrow is a big theme for businesses everywhere and it is no different for The LDC Top 50. Many leaders are driven by a desire to improve diversity in their industry – and with good reason. According to research by consultancy firm McKinsey, the most gender diverse companies will outperform the least gender diverse by 48 per cent. And those in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity outperform those in the fourth for profitability by 36 per cent. Diverse teams are essential. For Vicky Critchley, this mission began while she was sitting in a café in Svalbard, the isolated archipelago between mainland Norway and the North Pole. On holiday with her husband, they made the radical decision to buy out the accountancy firm they worked at and focus it on technology: “We’ve designed a service for small and medium sized businesses to get the same tech that a big company would use but without all the expense and complication.” As well as enabling smaller companies, Critchley realised she could use her position

to inspire women to join the tech field. Since she took over, two thirds of new hires at the resulting company, Bam Boom Cloud, have been women, as are a third of the leadership team. Critchley encourages and nurtures this by meeting monthly with her female leaders, who she calls the Superwomen, to discuss inspirations and challenges. She also offers unlimited holidays to employees so parents can balance work with parenting. “I want to inspire them to be the best they can, to be a mum and succeed at work,” she says. “I feel I’ve not done my job if I can’t empower other women to learn things, be technical, and get promoted.” Maintaining a healthy and diverse pipeline of talent is important for many leaders. According to PwC’s 25th Annual Global CEO Survey, a skills shortage is one of the top three concerns, so an eye on the next generation is key. In The Top 50 you’ll find examples of companies engaging graduates from all walks of life. Young people are at the core of Geoff Smith’s work. His Manchester-based management consultancy, Grayce, hires between 20 and 40 graduates every month, currently employs



more than 700 people, and is hoping that figure will pass 1,500 in the next two years. Smith says building the capacity to tackle the country’s underutilisation of graduate talent is what spurs him to grow the company. “Everybody loves to talk about the digital skills gap, but it’s really simple,” he says. “You just have to train these individuals, give them the guardrails, and they’ll learn faster than an AI bot could. Invest in our individuals young and early. Our future as a digital economic power really depends on it.” Smith talks proudly of the company’s diversity and inclusion: the company is 42 per cent female, a third are Black, Asian or from ethnic minorities, and 8 per cent identify as LGBTQ+. “We have to empower young people who know more about this stuff than a middle-aged white guy like me,” he says.

▲ **SCREEN DREAMS**  
Leeds-based company The Data Shed is breaking down barriers

WORDS: DAVE WALLER

Others are taking innovative steps to ensure this happens. Over at digital marketing agency Incubeta, Sally Laycock is focused on nurturing talent from within. “You have to get the right people in the right roles playing their A-game,” she says. “One of my strengths is being able to identify rising stars and putting them in the best positions.” Diversity is a big part of this. Incubeta has been partnering with Brixton Finishing School to support minorities in the digital space. Laycock has also introduced a recruitment platform designed to remove unconscious bias. “To ensure we don’t hire carbon copies of each other, we have rules like you can’t look a candidate up online, or see their CV,” she says. “You don’t even see people’s names. The interviews are standardised, and very much about the ability to do the job. It’s been quite a shake-up.”

For Anna Sutton, co-founder and CEO of The Data Shed, the idea of breaking down barriers lies at the very core of the company. She too wants to ensure the right people are being brought to the table, for the benefit of the greater good. “In tech and data, you’re building things for people,” she says. “And if your people aren’t representative of the world out there, you end up with the wrong people building the wrong things.” Sutton launched an academy in March, working with a number of boot camps in and around Leeds – such as Code First Girls and Northcoders – to provide opportunities to people who haven’t taken the university route. Next year, the academy is looking to extend this to ex-servicemen and women. “As one of the few women in tech, I’m getting into rooms that I wouldn’t if I was a man,” she says. “We need to make sure we’re laying the pathway for the people coming behind us. The more diversity we can attract, the better our outcomes are going to be.”

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY

Philanthropy features heavily in The Top 50, with leaders keen to help vulnerable members of society and ‘distribute wealth to the people who really need it’

As well as driving diversity within their organisations and industries, many of The LDC Top 50 business leaders have been setting up foundations, making meaningful donations and significant contributions to society. Nuraz Zamal says he founded iMS Technologies to “build a business that generates enough revenue to distribute wealth to the people who really need it”. He set up the iMS Foundation in 2019 to receive 10 per cent of the company’s earnings every year. It recently funded a well in a remote village in Uganda and now has planning permission to build a school there. “We want to give a better chance to the next generation,” says Zamal. Gush Mundae, founder of Bulletproof, says philanthropic principles were drummed into him at a young age. “I’m Sikh, so I was always taught about the concept of *sewa*,” he says, “which is the selfless service of others

unconditionally – without seeking any reward or recognition.” Bulletproof gives all its pitch fees to charities. Donations last year totalled £113,000. A portion also goes to Saavan’s Trust, a project set up to build schools in impoverished areas and rural regions around the world, as well as work with various charities, many of which focus on the support of children. Meanwhile, CEO of technology-enabled care company Appello, Tim Barclay, is driven by a desire to support the most vulnerable in our society. His company installs smart living solutions that harness digital technology to improve the lives of older people who need extra support. “I’m driven by

the fact that the elderly and vulnerable have not been well served by technology, because there’s a preconception that they can’t use it,” says Barclay. “Actually, if you build things well, and you make it value-added enough for them, then absolutely elderly people will engage with them.” A recent survey of residents using Appello’s systems found that 90 per cent felt safer and more than half felt their wellbeing had improved. “It’s inspiring for us as an organisation because you know you’re not just doing me-too work,” he says. “You are actually changing the game for the way people feel about themselves and the world.”



▲ **TALENT IN SPADES** Bulletproof’s Gush Mundae (far right) digs deep for charities

## THE LDC TOP 50



**TIM BARCLAY**  
CEO  
APPELLO

“It’s genuinely motivating to wake up every morning knowing that we’re making a difference to the quality of people’s lives,” says Tim Barclay, CEO of Hampshire-based Appello, which designs and develops technology-enabled care solutions for the elderly and vulnerable. A former BT senior executive, Barclay joined Appello in 2017, spotting the potential to grow the business. “We surveyed about 1,000 residents living in supported, sheltered and retirement housing where we’d installed our smart living solutions; 90 per cent said it made them feel safer and more than half said their wellbeing had improved. That’s massively inspiring,” he says.



**VICKY CRITCHLEY**  
CEO  
BAM BOOM CLOUD

Last year, husband-and-wife team Brett and Vicky Critchley completed a management buyout of Derby-headquartered Cooper Parry IT. “We had a great lifestyle and big salaries,” says Vicky. “We risked it all to become masters of our own destiny.” Their business, called Bam Boom Cloud, helps companies such as Belvoir Farm drinks and Haas F1 Team to scale up using Microsoft cloud technology, and was crowned a 2022 Microsoft Partner of the Year. It has 126 employees across the UK, Germany, Canada and the US, and 63 per cent of new hires are women. “I want to inspire the next generation of female leaders in tech,” says Vicky.



**SALLY LAYCOCK**  
CEO  
INCUBETA

Sally Laycock grew up in South Africa and was inspired by the headmistress at her all-girls school. “She encouraged us to excel in business and not let our gender hold us back,” she says. Laycock moved to London and qualified as a chartered accountant before joining digital marketing agency Incubeta. She became UK CEO in 2021, spearheading the company’s international expansion into countries such as the US and Ireland, before recently being promoted to EMEA CEO. “The stereotype of a CEO used to be brash and aggressive. I want to show that you can be kind and polite at the top. It doesn’t make you weaker.”

**GUSH MUNDAE**  
FOUNDER  
BULLETPROOF

Gush Mundae moved with his family from Delhi to Southall when he was five. “I couldn’t speak English and experienced a lot of racial abuse. I felt like I didn’t belong,” Mundae says. He found his place in the hip hop and graffiti scene, which led to a career in graphic design. He subsequently started his own London-based agency Bulletproof in 1998 and now employs 309 people across six offices globally. The company donates all its pitch fees to charities, including Saavan’s Trust. “I’m a Sikh and was always taught about *sewa*: selfless service of others without reward,” says Mundae.



**GEOFF SMITH**  
CEO  
GRAYCE

“We’ve got a serious issue with youth unemployment in this country,” says Geoff Smith, CEO of Manchester-based consultancy Grayce. Smith left his corporate career in 2020 to take over the helm of Grayce. “I knew the business had huge potential. There are so many more talented young people we could help,” he says. Grayce aims to be the best fast-track developer of top graduates, and works with clients including AstraZeneca, Royal Mail and investment manager M&G. Under Smith’s leadership, turnover has increased from £10 million and will be more than £40 million this year. “We genuinely want to empower – and learn from – the next generation,” he adds.

**ANNA SUTTON**  
FOUNDER  
THE DATA SHED

“I worked in marketing and it drove me bananas that I couldn’t get my hands on the data and insights to do my job properly,” says Anna Sutton. She started Leeds-based The Data Shed with her husband Ed in 2013 – when she was eight months pregnant. The pair have since built a successful data consultancy with 65 employees, allowing them to self-fund the development of The Data Refinery, an all-in-one data platform launched this year. “I’m a badge-wearing feminist,” says Sutton. “We need to encourage more women into tech. If we don’t have diversity in the sector, we’ve got the wrong people building the wrong things.”



**STEVE WATMOUGH**  
CEO  
MASON ADVISORY

Steve Watmough grew up in Blackpool and has lived most of his life in the north of England. Today, he runs Mason Advisory, a digital and technology advisory firm in Manchester, with clients ranging from Pets at Home to the Department of Health and Social Care. “We set out not to match the bigger players, but to be better than them,” he says. “We also wanted to provide great opportunities for staff.” Outside his day job, Watmough is a non-executive director for Triathlon England, a trustee of Child Poverty Action Group and on the government’s SME Advisory Panel.

**DUNCAN WORDSWORTH**  
FOUNDER  
BOSS CABINS

In 2010 Duncan Wordsworth founded Boss Cabins, designing and manufacturing welfare cabins for the construction industry. His aim: to disrupt a stale market. “I’d come across a business making welfare cabins: they controlled 70 per cent of the market and they’d become complacent. So I launched Boss Cabins and went up against them. They didn’t see us coming,” he says. Boss Cabins’ turnover spiked to £39 million in 2020. Anticipating a change in the market, Wordsworth has repurposed the entire company. “We’ve designed the world’s most sustainable range of welfare cabins. We’re making diesel cabins obsolete for the good of the environment.”



**GRAHAM WYLIE**  
FOUNDER AND  
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN  
MEDICAL RESEARCH  
NETWORK

Graham Wylie trained as a doctor before starting his career in pharmaceutical R&D with Pfizer. He joined Healthcare at Home in 2005 to set up its clinical trials division and bought the business a year later to create Medical Research Network. Based in Milton Keynes, the company conducts clinical trials in patients’ homes or other “off-site” locations across 50 countries, and has done more than 80,000 home visits to date. “We’re making healthcare more accessible for patients, clinical trials less burdensome for families and helping to bring new medicines to people faster,” says Wylie.

**NURAZ ZAMAL**  
FOUNDER  
IMS TECHNOLOGIES

Nuraz Zamal was a professional footballer with Sheffield United until an injury forced him to pivot his career. He worked on digital transformation projects within the NHS before starting his own consultancy in 2016. iMS Technologies now employs 62 people working remotely around the UK and Bangladesh, and has developed a digital dashboard to transform the way business and compliance are managed, audited and regulated. Zamal donates 10 per cent of earnings to the iMS Foundation, which recently funded a well for a remote village in Uganda. “My aim is to build a successful business so I can distribute wealth to those who really need it.”





# THE ONES TO WATCH 2022

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

**FLAVIA ARAUJO-RANKIN**  
CO-FOUNDER AND CO-CEO  
LONDON MEDICAL LABORATORY

**EDDIE AUSTIN**  
CEO  
OPERAM EDUCATION GROUP

**BEN BOOTH**  
CEO  
MAXCONTACT

**BEN BRADFORD**  
CEO  
BB7

**GERRY BRENNAN**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
CLOUDBOOKING

**MARC BROUGH**  
CEO  
CUBO

**KELLY CARTWRIGHT**  
COMPANY OWNER  
CORE RECRUITER

**JAMES CUNNINGHAM**  
CO-FOUNDER AND CEO  
CORE TO CLOUD

**PHIL DAVIES**  
CO-FOUNDER AND CEO  
FLYFORM

**MARK DAVISON**  
CEO  
GRANT INSTRUMENTS

**RYAN DEAN**  
COMPANY DIRECTOR  
RD CONTENT

**KEVIN DONAGHY AND SUSAN FITZSIMMONS**  
CEO AND CCO  
AUDITCOMPLY

**WARREN EDMONDSON**  
CEO  
SAFEGROUP

**PJ FARR**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
UK CONNECT

**CHRIS GARNER**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
AVENSURE

**NEIL HART**  
GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR  
BRADLEY HALL

**ANDREW JEFFERIES**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
DOCK & BAY

**ZAK JOHNSON**  
FOUNDER  
REBORN

**CHRIS KEMP**  
CEO  
INGENUITY

**DAN KITCHEN**  
CEO  
RAZORBLUE

**JAKE MADDERS AND JON LUCAS**  
DIRECTORS  
HYVE HOSTING

**JACK MALIN**  
CEO  
MEMBR.COM

**STEVE MAMELOK**  
DIRECTOR  
UNIFII

**IAN MCGOWAN**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
BARRIER NETWORKS

**SARAH MINTEY**  
CEO  
DEVELOPING EXPERTS

**PAUL MOORBY**  
CEO  
CHIPSIDE

**JOHN MOSS**  
CEO  
KFP TOTAL IT SOLUTIONS

**RUSSELL PARKER**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
AVC ONE

**ANDY PEDDAR**  
CO-FOUNDER AND CEO  
DEAZY

**ANDREW PINNINGTON AND MICHAEL RIBAUDO**  
CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER AND CEO  
CYBERIAM HOLDINGS

**RUTH POOLE**  
CEO  
PREVENTX

**NEIL PURCELL**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
TALENT WORKS

**LEIGH PURNELL**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
PETALITE

**ANAND PUTHRAN**  
CEO  
MCMENON ENGINEERING SERVICES

**NATALIE QUAIL**  
CEO  
SMILETIME

**TIBA RAO**  
CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION  
SOAR BEYOND

**GARY ROBSON**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
SURE PURITY

**SCOTT RUDD AND EMMA TAPPER**  
CO-FOUNDERS  
THE FRIENDLY CHEMICAL CO

**JENNIFER SCHIVAS**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
67 BRICKS

**JASON STOKES**  
CEO  
EASTSIDE CO.

**KERRY-ANN TAYLOR**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
CB SOLUTIONS

**DANIEL TEACHER**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
T-TECH

**BOBBY THANDI**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
XR GAMES

**RIMI THAPAR AND MANAV THAPAR**  
CO-FOUNDERS  
LOVERAW

**EMMA TINSLEY**  
CEO  
WEATHERDEN

**ANDREW VICKERY**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
THIRSTY WORK

**PHILIP WHITE**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
AUDACIA

**LEN WILBY**  
CEO  
LAWMED

**ADAM WOODLEY**  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
SINEWAVE



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

THE  TIMES

**On Thursday, October 13, the individual award winners from The LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders will be announced in The Times**

**#LDCTop50**

