

E-BOOK

## Ambition in Action

*Putting yours to work  
building your business*

With a foreword by Peter Jones



# Foreword by Peter Jones



Dear Business Builder,

If you know me, you know that I have a passion for enterprise and empowering business owners to grow their businesses beyond their wildest dreams. Ambition is the commonality we all share as entrepreneurs. It's in everyone's DNA and is different for us all. When it comes to being an Entrepreneur it's what drives decisions and strategy, and it is prevalent in the goals you set for your business. It resonates in my day-to-day activities now, and it resonated with me when I first started. It's what I'm looking for when I challenge the business owners I work with to answer that one key question: How far do you want to go?

I'm thrilled to have joined Sage as its newly-appointed Ambition Ambassador, a role that gives me great pride because of what I can do with Sage to support British businesses in order to unlock their biggest potential, both in the UK and abroad.

For me, joining or becoming an ambassador for Sage was an easy decision. I know we are a nation of business builders who fuel the UK's economy. The UK is at a crossroads as we embrace a post-Brexit reality, and the winners will be those businesses that embrace change and nurture homegrown talent. We all have a responsibility to give those with ambition the best technology, advice, and legislative framework to reach their potential.

I started my first business at age 16 and have been using Sage since the early days of my business journey. Its applications have grown with me, and I still rely on Sage Business Cloud now to reduce the administrative burden across my own businesses.

This guide, *Ambition in Action*, is part of that effort. It's filled with practical advice and experience from business owners which I believe will help you harness your own ambition for growth. These business owners are in the trenches of scaling a business and sharing their experiences in all aspects from hiring and partnerships to growth and differentiation.

Ambition is defined differently for everyone. People think they are on the right track when they're thinking outside of the box. I've never had a box. I've never put myself in a box because it never made sense to me. Why put yourself in a box to try and get out of?

Ambition, to me, is a journey across stepping stones. Each success is a stepping stone that elevates you to a bigger vision. Ambition is how far you want to go in your business and the height that you want to see your business ascend to. Everyone has different levels, and we're only limited by how far we want to go.

I believe if business builders are completely enabled to embrace ambition, success will follow. If we rethink how we look at failure and treat it as nothing more than feedback on how to get it right, we can create a new generation of business builders, because they're clear that no obstacle is bigger than their vision.

I hope you read this and see yourself in these stories of challenge and triumph. My personal ambition is to help everyone in business understand how to channel ambition to reach new accomplishments and even bigger dreams.

Here's to your success!

Best wishes,

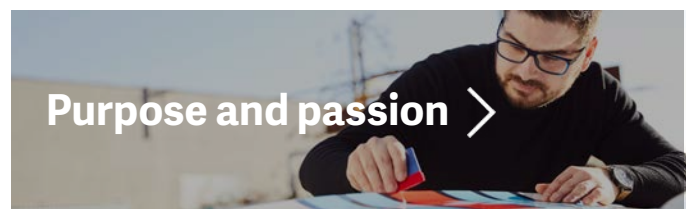
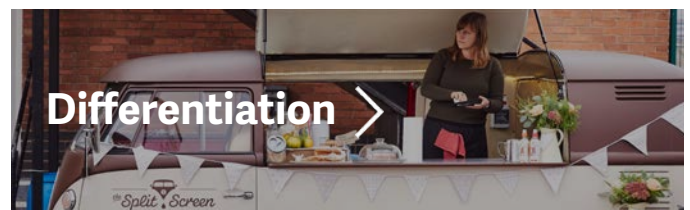
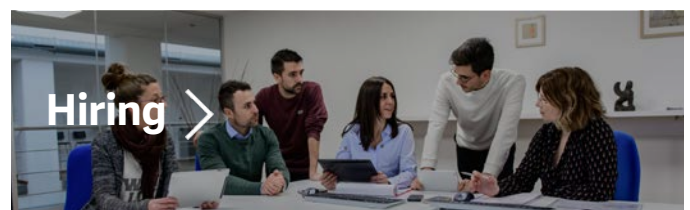
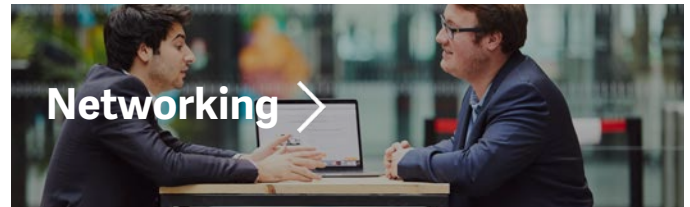
A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Jones".

**Peter Jones CBE**

# Contents

This book is a compilation of advice from business owners just like you facing the challenges of growing a business. They've used their business ambition to find solutions to those challenges and scale their enterprises.

Each contributing business owner shares in detail the role ambition has played in six business aspects necessary for scale: networking, partnerships, expansion, hiring, differentiation, and purpose and passion.



# Networking

Growing a business is an immersive experience. You've set targets, strategised, and are head down in the execution phase. It can be easy—maybe even natural—to forge ahead and deal with challenges and obstacles among yourself and your staff, but don't. Use your ambition as fuel to try new ways of learning from others through networking.



Joining an entrepreneur network can lead you to tools that grow your business and keep you tracking toward your business targets. You might bump into an accountant during a networking session who can save you time managing your accounts, or you might find a reference for accounting software to help you keep your cash flow in check.

Philip Salter, Director of The Entrepreneurs Network, says: "Being an entrepreneur can be lonely. It's hard to speak openly to your employees about the challenges of running your business, and sometimes you need a break from your co-founders. Networking groups allow entrepreneurs to share challenges and learn from their peers."

**“I have friends who have been running their own small businesses and they understand the ups and downs of running a business—a big help through hard times.”**

Jen Walker, Split Screen Coffee Company  
10 years in business

Take Jen Walker’s Split Screen Coffee Company, for example. Jen attributes the success of her growing business in part to initiatives that support small businesses, such as Small Business Saturday. Jen is looking to expand her award-winning mobile café into a social enterprise that employs adults with learning disabilities.

She says: “There are so many talented, creative, and unique local businesses out there, and they not only supply me with coffee beans, cakes, flowers, and logos, but they also inspire me with their stories and journeys and have become people I can call friends.

“Local resources are important, and that includes the other growing businesses around you. I have friends who have been running their own small businesses, and they understand the ups and downs of running a business—a big help through hard times. I’m also part of a local networking group called Aspiring Business Women, where I’ve been able to meet other women in business, attend courses, and collaborate.”



# “Even if you think you know everything about business, you can still learn something.”

Lauren Aston, Lauren Aston Designs  
3 years in business



Lauren Aston recognised the importance of a like-minded support group early on when she started Lauren Aston Designs, a super-chunky knitwear business creating unique merino wool designs. Lauren has been featured in many national newspapers and interior design magazines and can be accredited, in part, with starting a revival in knitting in the UK. She has seen her business grow from just herself and her dad to several employees.

She says: “Even if you think you know everything about business, you can still learn something. I turned to a creative network, based in Devon. I went along with a bunch of lovely ladies from local and small businesses. It’s good to meet a group of people in a similar boat. It’s always better to have some sort of network whether it’s online or offline. I think the more information you can learn, the better. You can also learn from other people’s mistakes, rather than making them yourself.”

There are many resources available, from government-led growth hubs to free events. Join a local entrepreneur network, or register with an online business community that’s specific to your industry, product, or business.

# Partnerships

Forming a business partnership is an ambitious way to manage two work streams at once, sharing the efforts to promote, market, and grow your business and doubling the effort put into your product offering. It takes a combination of intuition, strategy, and self-awareness to find the right business partner. The reward can be a successful enterprise with a partnership that brings streamlined solutions to the challenges sole-proprietors experience on their own.

“It’s great to share the workload, spark ideas off one another and challenge each other to make what we do even more impactful.”

Jenny Garrett, Rocking Ur Teens  
4 years in business

Jenny Garrett, Geoffrey Williams, and Sandy Parris partnered to found Rocking Ur Teens, a social enterprise formed to address self-esteem issues, the happiness gap between boys and girls, and the increase of mental health problems among UK teenagers. Rocking Ur Teens has reached more than 850 teens through its annual conferences. They’ve also formed a panel of award-winning speakers including mental health campaigner Jonny Benjamin MBE, CEO of social enterprise Stemettes Anne-Marie Imafidon MBE, and women in football ambassador Annie Z.

Jenny explains: “We all have a passion for making a difference in the lives of young people and would have benefited from Rocking Ur Teens’ style of inspirational events when we were in our teens. In addition, we all have different skill sets that are very complementary.

“It’s great to share the workload, spark ideas off one another, and challenge each other to make what we do even more impactful. Geoffrey brings a strategic and corporate lens as well as creativity. Sandy manages the numbers and is a fantastic event manager. I bring motivation, connections from my network, and resources in terms of my staff.

“Together, we have grown the business through word of mouth from schools, parents, and students, social and print media, and us sharing our mission with as many people who will listen.

“We all own the challenge and come up with different solutions, from speaking to our connections to fundraising personally or approaching corporates.”

“We all own the challenge and come up with different solutions.”

Jenny Garrett, Rocking Ur Teens  
4 years in business





Joanna Booth didn't have to search far for an ideal business partner. She and her mother Nancy formed Social Media Makes Sense (SMMS), a social media consultancy and PR firm that offers training, strategy, and management services primarily within the TV and film industry. With clients ranging from ITV's Victoria and BBC's Poldark, to Channel 4's Young, Gifted & Broke, and Channel 5's Elf: The Musical, SMMS specialises in creating immersive, innovative, and imaginative social media campaigns.

"It's unusual, we know," says Joanna. "Normally, a child comes into a family business and works their way up. With us, we started this venture together from the beginning. We are 50/50 directors, so we are true partners in this.

"With Nancy's PR experience and my social media knowledge, it just seemed like a good fit. We didn't really think about it. It just happened.

"We know each other, love each other, and want to make the business a success. Having a business partner can be a blessing because you share the stresses, but also incredibly hard because you need to fully trust their decisions.

"Working with my mum means I know I can trust her. I know what she's thinking and why she suggests things. We bounce ideas off each other and keep each other focused, too.

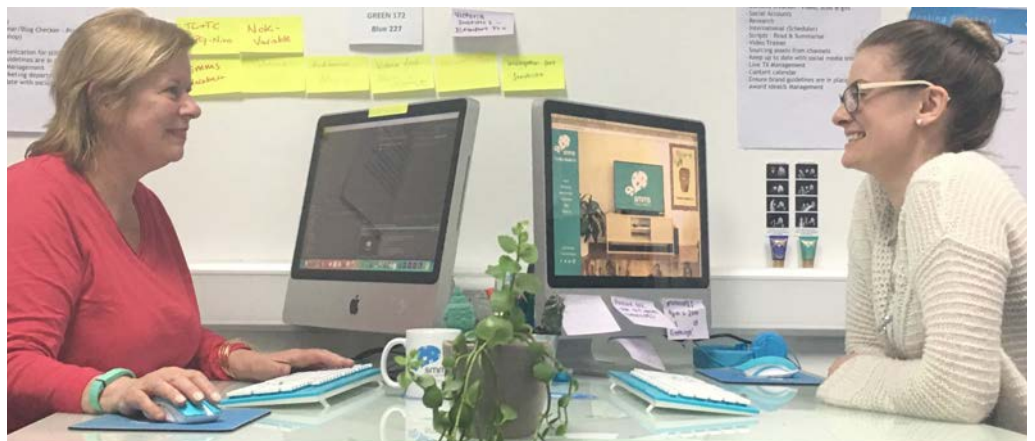
"Nancy takes care of everything operational (accounts, HR, etc) and I take care of the clients (meetings, strategy decisions, etc), but we both love thinking of ideas and strategising how to take the business to the next level.

"Nancy has so much experience, it's like working with a mentor every day. On the other hand, she knows very little about social media and I'm an expert. It's a nice balance.

"We started in 2015 in our spare bedroom at home and we now employ four staff and have a wonderful portfolio of clients. It's not been easy, but we've always tried to pool our expertise and energy to make sure we keep growing."

**"It's not been easy, but we've always tried to pool our expertise and energy to make sure we keep growing."**

Joanna Booth, Social Media Makes Sense  
3 years in business



# Expansion

A big component of scaling up is evaluating where to prioritise resources and identifying inefficiencies. Growing businesses today have a massive advantage because of easy access to tools and technology to collect and convert data into powerful insights. To reap the full benefits, businesses must be ambitious in adopting new technology.

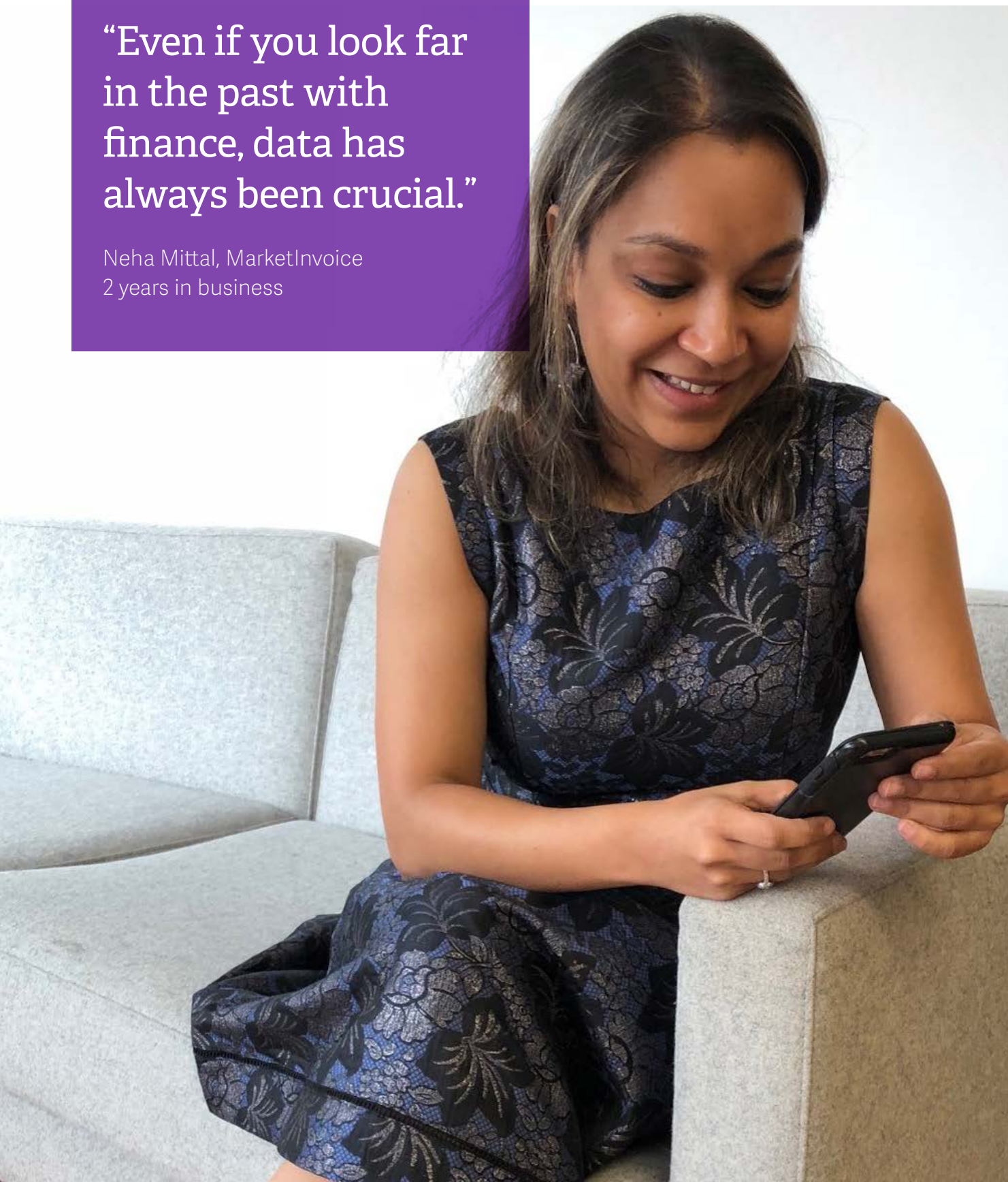
Neha Mittal, the VP of Finance and Strategy at MarketInvoice, knows this well. She works with a company that offers business loans and invoice financing to small businesses, syncing their financial data with the MarketInvoice platform, and using that information to offer business finance solutions to help businesses grow.

Previously she had been a strategy consultant working to develop the MarketInvoice product suite, helping the sales and growth strategies. Now she is also the company's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the first female fintech CFO of a firm in the UK. She combines her passions for technology and finance to help real businesses with real-world problems.



“Even if you look far  
in the past with  
finance, data has  
always been crucial.”

Neha Mittal, MarketInvoice  
2 years in business





“Fintech is exciting because it’s helping real businesses. When I was at Deutsche Bank, I could see the financial crisis unfold and how many businesses were operating in an old-fashioned way, with indecision. With fintech, your business can improve things, make things more efficient, and use data to understand risk better,” says Neha.

“Even if you look far in the past with finance, data has always been crucial. Finance is all about risk versus reward and to understand risk properly, you need data. It’s happening now in all industries—you have a lot more access to data, which you can use to make better decisions.

“I’ve seen a wide range of technology used for analytics and reporting. From small businesses using Excel to the big banks that use ERPs, where everything is integrated. It depends on the size of the business.

**“Financial reporting used to be simply about reporting and attention to detail. Now you use big data and KPIs to make big business decisions.”**

Neha Mittal, MarketInvoice  
2 years in business

“We’re also heavily into machine learning, using the information we’ve gleaned from the businesses who have worked with us to make better decisions when it comes to risk underwriting with new customers that come to us for funding.

“And remember, technology—like the cloud, AI, and machine learning—isn’t specific to fintech. There’s a need to rethink how things get done in the workplace and reduce the admin burden with new techniques so you can focus on more important tasks that directly support business growth.”

# Hiring



As your business begins to scale, you may need to add staff to help balance your workload. Or you may need new people to bring in skills you don't have. For example, taking on a salesperson might be the ideal way of getting more customers while freeing you to cope with other aspects of the business. Finding the right person with the right skill set can catapult your business, but it takes a certain drive and focus to pinpoint the required characteristics to hire.



Professional web developer David Lockie hired his first employee when he wasn't looking for one. He hit a long-term crisis in his business and hired someone he met through a developer meet-up who turned out to be the skill set and dependability he needed. He's since grown his business to more than 50 employees in six years.

**“If you think you're busy as a freelancer, you have no idea just how effective and efficient you have to become when you have a team to manage.”**

David Lockie, Pragmatic  
6 years in business

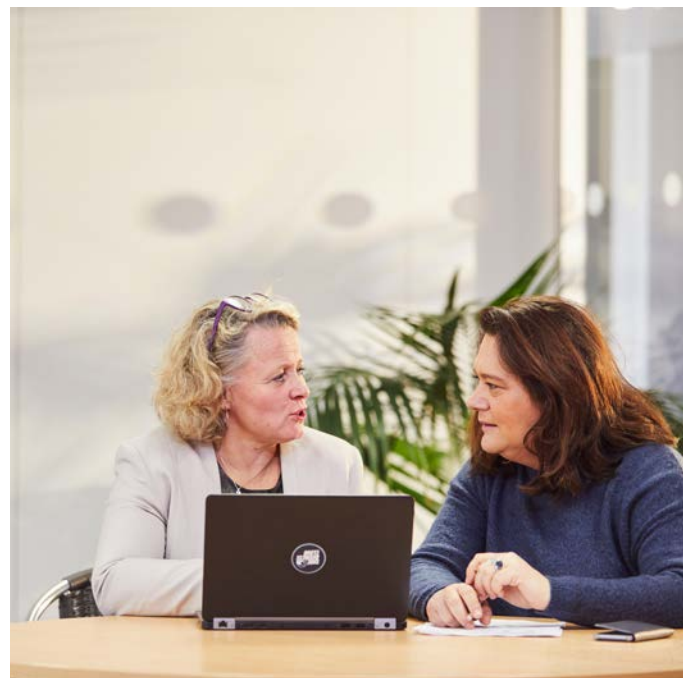
He says: “I got in touch with the first employee and he helped for a few days to fix this crisis. But that turned into weeks and then months as I seemed to have a never-ending list of work that needed doing, and that he could do to help me out. I wanted someone I could rely on, who would be there every day and whom I could depend on to achieve what I needed doing.

“Believe me, if you think you're busy and dealing with a lot as a freelancer, you have no idea just how effective and efficient you have to become when you have a team to manage.”



Technology advances are revolutionising the way business gets done within the global community, but talent and recruitment agencies are experiencing more disruption than most, with recruitment processes struggling to keep up. Consider how digital has breathed life into mobile working culture and the impact this has had on candidate sourcing. The ability to log on and operate from almost any location has expanded the talent pool to planetary proportions. Worker expectations have altered in kind, with 85% of millennials now preferring flexible working on a full-time basis.

Recruiting methods have also diversified, with searches now delving into professional and social network sites in a bid to find the right person for the job.



# Differentiation

Why do your customers or clients choose you? What value do they get from your business that they don't find from your competitors? Find ambitious and creative ways to highlight what sets your brand apart. This is key for brand awareness and loyalty.

Jen Walker's Split Screen Coffee Company is unique in that it's a mobile café. Jen plans to expand on her customer experience by building on her online offerings and having her camper van, May, front and centre.

"You don't have to follow an obvious path for growth. There are some really interesting models out there that grow businesses in creative and exciting ways."

"May will continue to attend events, weddings, and festivals, and will be essential to my business for as long as she—and I—are in one piece. We're also in the early stages of planning to bring the love of coffee to an online audience in the form of e-books and internet films with May as a backdrop."





COMPANY

“You don’t have to follow an obvious path for growth. There are some really interesting models that grow businesses in creative and exciting ways.”

Jen Walker, Split Screen Coffee Company  
10 years in business



Lauren Aston relies on authenticity, and lots of really big yarn, to keep her product in demand in a highly saturated market.

She says: "With regards to stockists, I focus on smaller boutiques and independent retailers, as it suits my brand more and the fact that I hand knit everything, is part of its charm so I wouldn't want to lose that by outsourcing."



"We are always looking for new opportunities to continue to challenge the status quo."

Stacy Schuettler, LBMC Technology Solutions  
22 years in business



Stacy Schuettler, president of LBMC Technology Solutions, LLC is passionate about business growth for SMEs and using technology to become disruptive. LBMC was founded in Tennessee in 1996. Under Stacy's leadership, LBMC Technology Solutions has grown significantly and is continually recognised on a national level as being a top-performing IT consulting company, due to its depth and breadth of technical expertise, customer satisfaction, and retention levels in the SME space. In 2017, Stacy was acknowledged for her great work as a recipient of the Sage Intacct Jered Cady Award.

She says: "We are a single-source technology provider for our clients. This has always been our competitive advantage and our differentiator. I believe that holds true more today than it ever has.

"We are always looking for new opportunities to continue to challenge the status quo to ensure that we're providing exceptional services to our clients and that we're continuing to evolve our portfolio of services and products and technology solutions and staying relevant to our client base."

# Purpose and passion



Growing a business is about the daily tasks of execution fuelled by purpose and passion. As you continue to grow and the excitement of success builds, don't lose focus on the reason behind your decision to start a business and what made you ambitious to do so. Your purpose and passion behind your business should be a factor as you decide how to expand and grow.



**“It wasn’t until I evaluated the purpose behind what I was doing that I learned my business was already delivering everything I felt I was searching for.”**

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David Lockie, Pragmatic  
6 years in business

David Locke says: “Building a business takes effort. When you employ someone, you feel very responsible for them, wanting to ensure you have sufficient business to cover the two salaries you now have to meet.

“Around the same time that I made my first hire, I’d also started another business analysing websites and advising on how to improve their speed, and show which plugins worked with which themes, and so on.

“I’d received some angel funding for this new start-up, so I was running two businesses: my digital agency, Pragmatic, and this new start-up.

“I wanted both to be successful, so I was spending six hours a day on each business. I ran really hard like this for about 18 months.

“But it wasn’t until I evaluated the purpose behind what I was doing and examined my motivations that I learned that Pragmatic was already delivering everything I felt I was searching for in the new start-up.

“It was already sustaining the lifestyle I wanted and was giving me purpose, allowing me to be in a business that helped others by creating value for their businesses. It already had everything I wanted from my work.”

“Devoting my time and attention back to Pragmatic allowed me to be more focused and to put more energy into my work.”

Stacy Schuettler uses her love for business building as her daily reminder of her purpose and the basis for her business decisions.

She says: “I was an accounting major in college that landed a co-op position at IBM, and they put me in the sales bullpen, and it was like a scene out of a movie. The lights went off, music started playing, and I’m like, ‘Wow, I am with my people.’ I immediately went back to school and picked up marketing as a second major, and I think, ultimately, I do what I do because I just love the art and science of capitalism—and expanding on that, even helping not-for-profits. I just love helping businesses we are organisations run more efficiently, and technology just happens to be the paintbrush of my palette.”



Ambition goes beyond starting a business. It's the fuel that should drive a business to grow in every way. Don't think about stepping outside the box. There is no box. The path to the level of success you want is where your creativity, drive, and business strategy meet. There are no limits to what your business can do when you are equipped with those tools in place.



# sage

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