REAL TALK 2020

WISDOM of OUR CROWD

Inc.'s favorite entrepreneurs offer the best of REAL TALK, their smartest advice on succeeding in the coming year.

SPONSORED BY THE INC. 5000 HONOREES WHOSE PROFILES APPEAR IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

When you speak to as many founders as Inc. does, you get expert insights into just about every issue crucial to building a breakout business. The most successful of those folks can be found in Real Talk interviews, a showcase for hard-won wisdom from people who have faced the punishing challenges of entrepreneurship and prevailed to become household names. ● In the pages that follow, you'll find their insights distilled into memorable quotes chosen by our editors. You'll also find profiles of a few of our 2020 Inc. 5000 honorees, each one just a step away from that same kind of success. In fact, don't be surprised if you see one or two of them in these pages next year. ● Until then, it's with their support that we've collected the best of this year's Real Talk and present it to you here. We hope you enjoy it—and that it offers just what you need to continue on the journey to your own seat at the Real Talk table.



GETTY (3)

Inc.'s Real Talk video series features entrepreneurial luminaries weighing in with advice and insights on everything from pitching investors to leading during a crisis. Watch them all at inc.com/real-talk.

REAL TALK 2020

Leadership

The hardest necessary skill to learn



"YOU CAN HAVE INFLUENCES AND PEOPLE WHO ARE CLOSE TO YOU TO HELP GUIDE YOU TO THE RIGHT DECISION, BUT ULTIMATELY YOU DRIVE YOUR CAREER."

MARIA SHARAPOVA

In October, Sharapova, winner of five Grand Slam singles tennis titles and co-founder of high-end candy company **Sugarpova**, spoke with Inc. about balancing the guidance of the team around you with your own instincts and judgment.

"A great mentor is the one who pushes back, who says, 'No, I disagree. I don't think that's going to work.' Then you have to prove it."



TARIQ FARID

Founder of fresh fruit gift basket franchise **Edible Arrangements**, Farid noted in June that while many mentors will help you navigate career questions, a mentor who also challenges your ideas and sends you back to the drawing board will help you learn about yourself.



"IF OUR VALUES DON'T MATCH, THERE'S NO LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT THAT WILL CHANGE THAT."

TRISTAN WALKER

During a Real Talk conversation in August, Walker, founder and CEO of **Walker & Company Brands**, said that he wanted to have a framework of objectivity to guide his decision-making, so he came up with six personal values to use as a foundation: courage, inspiration, respect, judgment, wellness, and loyalty.



Get Jason Fried's tips on maintaining efficiency and preserving company culture while running your company remotely, at inc.com/real-talk.

"Your culture is not the Ping-Pong table. Your culture is not the happy hour on Fridays. Your culture is actually always happening."



MATT MULLENWEG

Co-founder of website-building platform **WordPress** and **Automattic**, its parent company, Mullenweg explained in a July Real Talk conversation how to maintain a strong company culture even without a physical office.



"You can communicate around 'mission' without it sounding too sappy."

RANDY GOLDBERG

Goldberg revealed in a September Real Talk conversation two things that helped his sock company, **Bombas**, reach profitability in only two years: sticking to the mission, and being willing to say no.

JASON FRIED

Co-founder and CEO of software company **Basecamp**, Fried is also author of several books, including *Remote: Office Not Required*. During a Real Talk conversation in May, he shared some of the lessons he's learned from managing the Basecamp team remotely for 21 years.

"The fundamental underpinning of being a great manager is just about giving people the time and trust they need to do great work."



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FROM LEFT: GETTY; REDUX; ROG & BEE WALKER; JAMES CHORORDS; COURTESY SUBJECT; SHAVAN A SCHARNIA

The Business Elevating the Ramen Game

With Taiwanese roots and a steadfast belief in its product, A-Sha Foods is building an American brand



A-Sha Foods is poised for future growth, creating meals with sustainable ingredients and plant based protein

2020 Ranking
392

$5.9 million
2019 Sales

7
Employees

1182%
3-Year Growth

Ramen noodles used to mean college kid food—an inexpensive meal hack for people on a budget. A-Sha Foods' ramen noodles are different. They're tasty, certainly, but they are also made with sustainable, premium ingredients and air-dried, not deep-fried like other brands.

With a 1,182 percent three-year growth rate, A-Sha Foods ranks no. 392 on the Inc. 5000. CEO Young Chang says they are poised for even more explosive growth and on a mission to become a well-known American brand. He credits success to the quality of the product, perseverance, and a strong leadership team.

A "NEW" BUSINESS WITH A LONG HISTORY

Chang officially launched the company in 2015, but the noodles originate from a noodle factory in Tainan, Taiwan, that started in 1977 using a 100-year-old Taiwanese recipe. Chang's business partner, Henry Liao, CEO of Breeze Group, the largest shopping mall chain in Taiwan, acquired the factory in 2011. Liao had "zero experience in the food industry," but he was struck by the quality of the product. Chang, who grew up in the U.S., was also impressed. "I think everyone knows ramen [traditionally] has a lot of MSG and sodium and is a food we eat out of necessity. This was so different from anything I've had in the States," he says.

Liao asked Chang if he wanted to partner and bring Taiwanese ramen to the rest of the world. Chang saw the potential, and they both knew they would do things the industry had never seen.

READY TO RIDE THE RAMEN WAVE

Chang led A-Sha's foray into the Western market while working his 9-5 job. It wasn't easy to convince the U.S. to spend more for a premium ramen product, but Chang did not waiver. He began selling online, then graduated to specialty stores, and, one year later, his first grocery store, Safeway. In 2015, Chang left his job at Warner Bros. to officially launch A-Sha Foods U.S.A. Some people thought he was crazy, but his mentors supported him. Their support was really helpful. So was the support of Liao, who provided Chang guidance at every turn and invested in safe-food certifications at the factory level. "When the opportunity comes to work with a Costco or a Walmart, we are ready," Chang says.

The next few years were a blur. Ramen noodle shops began to take off nationwide, and A-Sha was ready to ride the ramen wave. "Success is the convergence of opportunity and preparedness," Chang says. "We focused on being the best at what we do, and when people were ready to accept a premium ramen noodle, we were ready, too."

National distribution deals with mainstream retailers, partnerships with Asian markets in all 50 states, and a growing presence in Canada contribute to A-Sha's growth. But Chang is most focused on building the brand in the States. "We want people to see A-Sha and know, instantly, "They stand for best-tasting, premium, ramen. We strive to elevate the ramen experience."

ASHADRYNOODLE.COM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 101



"The only way forward, if you're an entrepreneur who wants to build something better, is to get on the side of change, not to fight against change."

SETH GODIN

Author of 19 books, Godin is a marketing expert, the founder of online leadership workshop **altMBA**, and the host of the *Akimbo* podcast. In a May Real Talk, he discussed his definition of good marketing, common traps that can sink a business, and how brands can best reach their audiences.

"There's a huge difference between leading innovation and leading innovatively."



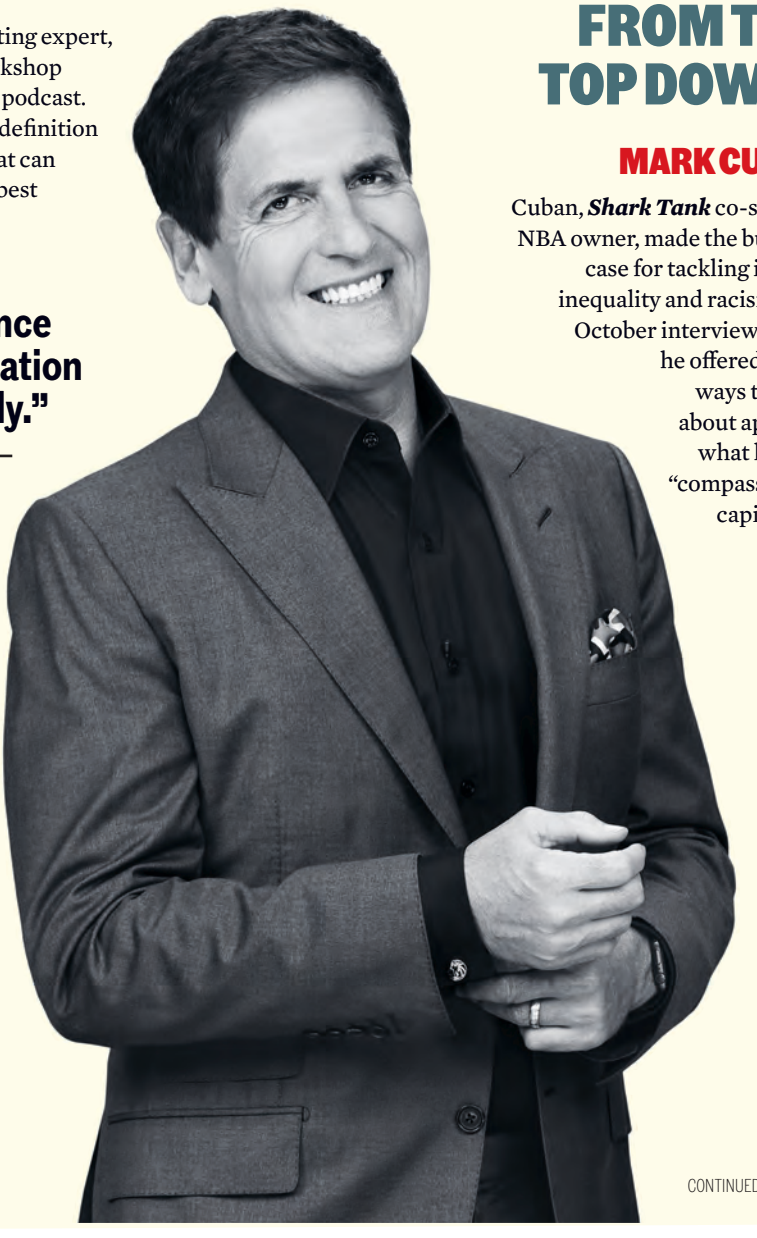
JESSICA NORDLANDER

Ex-Google executive and former chief digital officer for global travel group STS Education, Nordlander is the chief operations officer at community intelligence software company **Thoughtexchange**. In September, she told Inc. that it's important not to confuse innovators with innovative leaders.

"WE HAVE TO START SUPPORTING PEOPLE FROM THE BOTTOM UP, NOT FROM THE TOP DOWN."

MARK CUBAN

Cuban, ***Shark Tank*** co-star and NBA owner, made the business case for tackling income inequality and racism in an October interview. There, he offered useful ways to think about applying what he calls "compassionate capitalism."



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FROM LEFT: JILL GREENBERG; COURTESY SUBJECT; GETTY

Ending the Status Quo in Health Care

Most health insurance plans don't have high customer satisfaction scores, but Sedera's medical cost-sharing model offers an alternative

The free-market system has produced some of the most innovative products and services the world has seen in almost every corner of the economy. How is it that aspects of the American health care system remain such a glaring exception to this phenomenon?

That question nagged at Tony Dale, a former physician from Great Britain, after a disquieting encounter with the American health care system following surgery in the mid-1990s. It spurred him to create Sedera, an Austin, Texas-based medical cost-sharing community that has grown by more than 2,000 percent over the past three years.

Medical cost-sharing is often misconstrued as a type of health insurance, but it's not. Medical cost-sharing organizations, like Sedera, offer an innovative approach to managing large health care costs through direct member-to-member sharing.

"Sedera is not an insurer or in the business of insurance, and this is intentional," says CEO Jamie Lagarde. "Our health care system is overcomplicated, with skyrocketing costs, a lack of pricing transparency, and few options." Citing a Harvard study that found more than two-thirds of personal bankruptcies are tied to medical issues, he adds that "it is clear that coverage does not equal care."

LEVERAGING THE SHARING ECONOMY

Sedera's platform allows members to share medical costs. Uniting like-minded people in a shared sense of purpose powers Sedera's business model, Lagarde explains. Sedera is at the forefront of this new frontier, building a health care sharing economy that uses technology to allow health care consumers to find affordable, quality, and meaningful care. "The first generation of the sharing economy was about sharing assets like cars, homes, and other consumables. Sedera is proving that the next generation is about people coming together to share their bills," he says.

Sedera's model brings together engaged consumers unified by shared, ethically based principles and values rather than religious tenets. "To fulfill our vision of creating a new normal in health care, we focus on what unites our members: a commitment to transparency, education, community-mindedness, and a desire to help one another," Lagarde says.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

When it launched in 2014, Sedera was a new startup in a little-known industry that sits adjacent to a highly political and regulated space. The company consistently bumped up against barriers when it came to education and misconceptions about its model. In response, Sedera embraced transparency, service diversification, and a commitment to industry best practices.

Looking to the future, Sedera teamed up this year with an FDIC-insured fintech partner to establish a platform that creates secure, individualized medical cost-sharing accounts. "This relieves members from handling complex medical calculations and frees them up to focus on their health needs," Lagarde says. "Upending the status quo is no easy task."

SEDERA.COM



Founder, Tony Dale and CEO, Jamie Lagarde

2020 Ranking **193**

2183% 3-Year Growth

27K+ Total Members

1083 Business Members

Sedera

REAL TALK 2020

Adversity

The thing that makes you stronger

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 103

"TAKE IN THE DISAPPOINTMENTS. THEY WILL COME. THEY ARE IMPORTANT. THEY ARE PART OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLARIFY WHAT YOU WANT TO DO."

TRACEE ELLIS ROSS

Actor, producer, and activist Ross couldn't just add "founder" to her résumé—she had to prove herself as an entrepreneur first. Now the CEO of hair care line **Pattern**, she shared with Inc. in November that after some early rejection left her in tears, she ultimately learned how the feedback could help her grow.



How heavily should data weigh in your strategy decisions? Julia Cheek has some advice at inc.com/real-talk.

"You're in business to satisfy customers, and if you can't do that, you're going to fail."

JOHN MACKEY



Mackey, co-founder of **Whole Foods Market**, learned early in his career that being successful requires compromise. In September, he explained that after a slow start with a vegetarian natural foods store, being more pragmatic about the kinds of products he was willing to sell helped him "meet the marketplace."

"I worry like a mom about every one of our team members and how they're feeling and how they're doing and how we can make their day better."



JULIA CHEEK

In a Real Talk conversation in June, Cheek emphasized the importance of continually checking on the mental health of the staff at her at-home lab testing company **Everlywell**—and being prepared to tell them to disconnect from Zoom.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 109

CLOCKWISE FROM ROSS: GETTY; COURTESY SUBJECT; GETTY

Focus on the Human Factor

Collaboration and a relentless focus on understanding the human experience give THRIVE the insight it needs



Close collaboration and rapid iteration translate our creative vision into reality

Radiation detection company Mirion Technologies wanted to produce a personal radiation device (PRD) for first responders to detect and ensure public safety against radiological threats. So, they turned to THRIVE Consulting to create a first-generation product and development strategy. The team went into the field with emergency responders and law enforcement officers across the U.S. to observe and understand the environments and contexts in which they'd be using the devices. These insights informed not only design and development, but also the branding, packaging, and even training.

The type of end-to-end project exemplifies THRIVE's rigorous and collaborative approach to new product development and innovation strategy and research. CEO Jonathan Dalton and Chief Creative Officer Trent Kahute, were formerly with Philips Electronics and co-founded the company in December 2009. With a client list that includes Medtronic, Becton Dickinson, McDonalds, AT&T, and Honeywell, to name a few, the firm concentrates on the health care, food and beverage, consumer lifestyle, and professional products spaces.

FIRST, BUILD TRUST

Nearly all of THRIVE's conversions from prospect to client partner have happened after an in-person meeting. "Jon and I worked hard to build that trust up front, so that clients allow us to demonstrate the value we can deliver," Kahute says.

2020 Ranking
3940

$6.2 million
2019 Revenue

89%
2020 Growth Rate

24
Employees in 2019

Dalton adds that he and Kahute also approached their prospecting with humility, focusing less on touting their accomplishments and more on understanding the solutions clients need. They also were mindful of the heightened sense of risk leaders feel when choosing a consultant.

By centering on personal contact and building trust, the company has achieved an impressive retention rate. "In 10 years, there have only been one or two clients who have not returned and reengaged us for further projects," Dalton says.

'HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH'

Once THRIVE has a client on board, the company's 'human-centered' approach, as Dalton puts it, continues throughout its work. The team creates products for its clients by interweaving business strategy, design, and insights from contextual research to guide how it develops products, services, and experiences for people. "We want to understand them first as people in the context of their daily lives, rather than as a fictional, faceless consumer," Dalton says.

"Co-creation" is another term the pair likes to use to describe how they work with both the businesses that hire them and the people who purchase and use the products they design. They are always iterating ideas and continuously incorporating feedback from end-users by rapidly creating and testing prototypes.

Building a company culture that is highly collaborative and encourages input from all employees with a wide range of backgrounds and viewpoints is another crucial ingredient in THRIVE's success formula. The main constant is a dual devotion to creativity and people-centered problem-solving. "A lot of consultants organize around a skill set," Dalton says. "We're a mindset company that can execute, focused on designing growth for some of the world's most innovative brands."

thrive

THRIVETHINKING.COM

On a Mission to "Break the System"

Quontic Bank is at the forefront of digital adoption and on a mission to provide niche lending and deposit products for people other banks overlook

Part bank, part fintech company, Quontic Bank is leading the way in customer-centric lending and deposit solutions. While its products have evolved since its launch in December 2009, the heart of its mission remains the same: Quontic serves underbanked populations, including low-income households, immigrants, entrepreneurs, and gig economy workers. Over the past 11 years, Quontic has transformed from a traditional community bank to a national adaptive digital bank with more than $500 million in assets.

Quontic's roots shaped its future. The bank is now headquartered in Manhattan, but CEO and Founder Steve Schnall originally located the bank in Astoria, Queens—"arguably one of the most diverse places in the country"—to reach varied customer groups, including people used to hearing banks say "no." First, it focused on helping borrowers access mortgages. In 2015, Quontic became a certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), a designation granted by the U.S. Department of Treasury to financial institutions dedicated to helping low-income borrowers and disadvantaged communities.

EVOLVING INTO A DIGITAL BANK

Quontic's latest growth phase is driven, in part, by digital transformation. In 2018, Schnall hired Chief Innovation Officer Patrick Sells, a serial entrepreneur and digital marketing expert, to develop an online deposit gathering strategy. Being a digital bank with a CDFI designation is reflected in its updated mission to "break the system for financial empowerment." The bank offers adaptive lending solutions designed to fit consumers' unique circumstances, and innovative deposit products with niche benefits. Products in development include a sustainable checking product that reduces customers' carbon footprints to zero, a checking account that rewards consumers in Bitcoin, and a wearable debit card ring, among others.



Quontic Bank CEO and Founder Steve Schnall

2020 Ranking
4248

226%
Increase in Core Deposits Since 2018

1.2 billion
in Assets

25%
Increase in Average Pay for Employees

Sells says culture is as integral to their success as product. The team abides by core values, including "progress not perfection." They embrace new ideas quickly, but with a set result in mind, and they always measure outcomes. They also make work fun, as encapsulated by their "Say Cheese" value. "When a photographer says, 'say cheese,' both the subject and the photographer smile," Sells explains. "We are trying to create an environment where everyone is bringing that type of positivity." And the bank takes care of employees: Since 2018, Quontic's average employee salary has increased by 25 percent.

READY FOR THE FUTURE

COVID-19 has tested and strengthened the business. The company also hired a chief people officer and rolled out employee performance metrics to create more transparent compensation. To continue to support underserved businesses during the crisis, Quontic purchased $800 million in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans.

While many banks struggle to embrace fintech and wonder what to make of the emerging crypto space, Quontic is ahead of the curve. Schnall and Sells believe they have the approach, the technology, and the team in place to shape the future of banking.

QUONTIC
ADAPTIVE DIGITAL BANK

QUONTICBANK.COM

Optimizing Client Ad Spending

Converze Media Group is positioned to capture a larger share of the traditional and streaming ad market with its advanced attribution tool

2020 Ranking
4805

$62 million
2019 Revenue

61%
3-Year Growth

30
Employees

With 90 percent of consumers now watching streaming video content, according to advisory firm PwC, people continue to "cut the cord." Consequently, advertising dollars are moving to where the action is. "With ad budgets shifting from traditional media toward streaming and digital outlets," says Tedd Barr, managing partner at Converze Media Group, "Converze is uniquely positioned to capture that business."

Converze is one of the fastest-growing direct response TV (DRTV) and over-the-top (OTT) media buyers, while also being one of the largest Sirius XM, terrestrial radio, and podcast buyers in the country. It has relationships with more than 20,000 TV and radio stations, providing the ability to negotiate rates for clients that are as much as 80 percent less than traditional rates.

However, at the end of the day, clients are primarily concerned with their return on ad spend (ROAS). They want to know which media outlets/stations are providing the best return.

To better answer that question, Converze invested more than seven figures in developing AIM Analytics, a sophisticated, proprietary, in-house attribution platform. It tracks website visits and calls from a traditional TV/OTT or radio commercial down the consumer path to a sale.

REAL-TIME ROI REPORTING

Through the use of AIM Analytics, the media buying agency can accurately and quickly report on how many consumers take action after watching or listening to a specific digital or broadcast ad. This data has always been a major challenge with traditional TV or radio advertising, Barr says.

"Most attribution tools can report on directional or overall lift of an ad campaign," says Barr, though that information isn't available in real time. That's useful to know for future planning but not very helpful for optimizing a campaign quickly. The result is that advertisers spend more money than they need on campaigns that may not be generating great results.



In contrast, AIM Analytics reports on what traffic a particular ad on a particular channel is driving in real time. It can provide a daily measure of cost per website visitor (CPV), cost per call (CPC), or an overall cost per response (CPR). "Getting results in real time was unheard of until now," Barr says. "We can make adjustments and optimize campaigns much more quickly."

UNPARALLELED DATA GRANULARITY

Reputation Defender was an early adopter of Converze's AIM Analytics and a witness to the power of real-time adjustments. "I'm a big data guy, so I've seen quite a few attribution platforms over the years," says John "Taz" Hammond, vice president of marketing.

"The granularity of [AIM Analytics'] minute-by-minute, real-time attribution has helped us increase the ROI on our radio and TV buys by more than 35 percent. It's definitely a game changer."

In addition to Reputation Defender, Converze has worked with clients from startups, including Optima Tax Relief—one of the fastest growing companies in the country—to Fortune 1000 stars, such as Paychex, and everywhere in between.

CONVERZEMEDIA.COM

CONVERZE media group

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"If you mess up, admit it. People are more willing to forgive if you're honest."



REBECCA MINKOFF

When 70 percent of its business evaporated in the pandemic, Minkoff's fashion company quickly pivoted to direct-to-consumer e-commerce. In a May Real Talk, Minkoff offered advice on making the shift: Get real with customers about the trial-and-error phase of your pivot, and listen more closely than ever to their needs.

"Be prepared to get a lot of rejection. Be just as enthusiastic, no matter how many people say no."



JOHN PAUL DEJORIA

Co-founder of hair care product line **John Paul Mitchell Systems**, DeJoria was homeless—twice—before he hit it big. In an April Real Talk, he shared his secret: No matter what, focus on the future.



"ANYTIME YOU'RE OPERATING A BUSINESS AND YOU'RE IN IT FOR LONG ENOUGH, YOU'RE CONSTANTLY MAKING MISTAKES. WE HAD TO LEARN THE HARD WAY."

ALLI WEBB

The founder of blowout-only salon **Drybar**, Webb noted during an August Real Talk conversation that her desire for control sometimes got in the way of her company's success. Eventually, she accepted that her approach wasn't sustainable. Today, Webb is running her second business, the on-demand massage service **Squeeze**, with a looser grip.

You don't need a brand-new idea to build a great business. Alli Webb explains why, at inc.com/real-talk.

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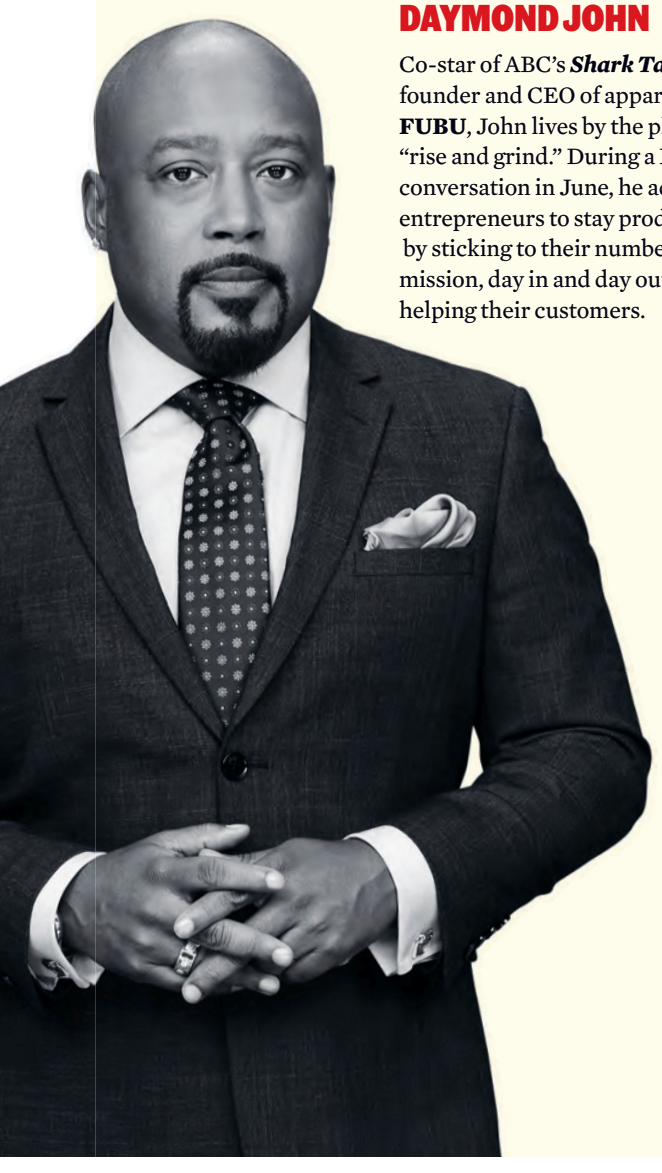
REAL TALK 2020

Productivity

The outcome, not the amount, of time spent

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"A TRUE ENTREPRENEUR DOES THE BEST THEY CAN DO FOR THE CUSTOMER TODAY AND WAKES UP TOMORROW AND DOES THE BEST THING THEY CAN DO FOR THEIR CUSTOMER TOMORROW."



DAYMOND JOHN

Co-star of ABC's ***Shark Tank*** and founder and CEO of apparel line **FUBU**, John lives by the phrase "rise and grind." During a Real Talk conversation in June, he advised entrepreneurs to stay productive by sticking to their number one mission, day in and day out: helping their customers.

"When I work remotely, I don't feel busy. I feel efficient. I feel like I'm spending my time wisely."



JASON FRIED

Co-founder and CEO of software company **Basecamp**, from a May Inc. interview

CAREY SMITH

Founder of fan-and-light-maker **Big Ass Fans** and investment firm **Unorthodox Ventures**, Smith often rejects conventional wisdom. During a Real Talk in June, he urged avoiding the herd mentality, as he did during the 2008 recession, when he reduced salaries—including his own—rather than laying off employees.

"When the herd is going into the woods, that's probably the time to get out on the plains."



CONTINUED ON PAGE 115

FROM LEFT: GETTY (2); SHAYAN ASGHARNIA

How Disruptive Industrial Design Benefits Clients

Bringing a whole new way of thinking to bear, Jackson Hedden makes contemporary design more accessible

A growing number of industries have faced the prospect of radical disruption over the past few years. Now industrial design has joined the list, thanks to Jackson Hedden, founder of an eponymously named New York City-based industrial design firm. While he has studied at the Savannah College of Art and Design and honed his skills with world-famous industrial designers and firms, including Karim Rashid and RKS Design, Hedden brings a whole new way of looking at things to the industry.

During his time working for other firms, Hedden realized that a tremendous marketplace need for contemporary design was going unmet because the industry's status quo made it inaccessible to many. He saw the time was ripe for an edgy new industrial design firm that, unencumbered by hidebound beliefs and constructs, could break through and knock down barriers.

"The traditional industrial design process is time-consuming and expensive," he says. "I knew that scaling the process down and making it more affordable would enable clients to get more valuable products out to the market."

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO REDUCE TURNAROUND TIME

Hedden teamed up with PTC and Fusion 360, two firms renowned for their software in the industrial design and manufacturing space, to create a methodology that virtualizes much of the design and tolerance-testing processes. "It allows us to get to a robust product very quickly rather than through the hundreds of iterations the traditional approach requires, which massively reduces turnaround time on all our projects," he says.


Jackson Hedden

While that efficiency in achieving structural integrity is a big competitive advantage, it's not what sells a product. "Being beautiful is what sells a product," Hedden says. "People don't buy ugly things. What we do amazingly well is make beautiful objects that are designed to stand the test of time both structurally and aesthetically. We do it for companies from established luxury brands like Lamborghini to disruptive startups like Komuso Design and everything in between."

MAKING DREAMS REALITY

Hedden's design ethos centers on making clients' dreams a reality. This often involves an educational process to coax clients out of their comfort zone and help them see possibilities they never thought feasible.

"We walk them through from the germ of an idea all the way to manufacturing, but we do it in a highly transparent, understandable way," he says.

This approach has helped the firm grow its client roster rapidly, with many becoming repeat clients who expand their contracts significantly with each subsequent engagement. "Repeat clients account for the bulk of our revenue, and they become big spenders because they develop trust in our design process," Hedden says.

Hedden always wants his designs to disrupt complacency. "We design to push things to the next level, never the status quo," he says. "Whether it's love or hate, we want to incite strong reactions in people. If we do that, we've won."

JACKSONHEDDEN.COM

2020 Ranking
251

$1.5 billion
Generated in Client Revenue

1776%
3-Year Growth

7 million
Products Shipped Yearly

Jackson Hedden

From FinTech Pioneer to Leader

Focusing on helping smaller community banks innovate and stay relevant has helped Urban FT generate triple-digit growth


Urban FT CEO, Richard Steggall

2020 Ranking **905**

18 billion Annual Processing Volume

515% 3-Year Growth

500+ Banking Customers

Starting a new business by entering the banking and payments market with zero years of industry experience turned out to be an advantage for Urban FT. "We came in with a fresh perspective; we were able to understand the problems that needed to be addressed; and we weren't hindered by any historical bias," says CEO Richard Steggall.

But perhaps more importantly, Urban FT came into the market with an in-depth understanding of technology, user trends, consumer behavior, and the digital economy, which proved essential as the company began to home in on where in the financial market it needed to focus its attention. Its analysis suggested that community banks, with $2 billion in assets or less, were "more focused on what the customer wanted and therefore had a more 'customer-centric' business model," Steggall says. Whereas the big banks "seemed to have a shareholder-centric business model focused on delivering their customers only the essential needs." Urban FT's vision of future success was therefore more in line with the community banks, so that is the direction their journey took.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

"We knew that the smaller regional and community banks and credit unions were at a disadvantage compared to their bigger counterparts. And the 'too-big-to-fail' institutions historically had the advantage of more branches and massive technology budgets," Steggall says. So Urban FT set out to tip the playing field back in favor of the "smaller guy" by delivering a competitive advantage when it came to the digital relationship they would have with their customers. It is paying off. As "the reliance on in-branch banking declines, and the insatiable appetite of people to do everything they can digitally reaches boiling point, bigger institutions are now rapidly losing their advantage," says Steggall.

Urban FT's first product, its digital banking platform, was only launched in 2015. Just five years later, and now as the industry's first ever FinTech Core, more than 500 financial institutions are using its technology. Those clients include banks, credit unions, and neo banks, among others.

"We've focused on delivering comprehensive, wholly customized solutions, with turnkey simplicity," says Steggall. Urban FT's FinTech Core delivers Next-Gen digital banking tools, money movement capabilities, account opening and identity verification options, card portfolio processing, fintech adapters, and behavioral insights—all of which have been designed to enhance overall user engagement.

The company boasts well-known client names, as well as some that are not so well-known—yet. Clients include Chime, Costal Heritage Bank, TwinStar Credit Union, Drake Bank, and Navy Federal Credit Union, to name just a few.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT POWERHOUSE

Most importantly though, Urban FT employs teams of people focused on continuous R&D. "This is our commitment to our customers—that we, and therefore they, will always be on the bleeding edge of innovation," Steggall says.

So, what's next for Urban FT? According to Steggall, the company's continued success will be driven by its employees' "relentless pursuit to drive innovation for the underdogs in this industry, and in turn, empower the communities they serve."

URBAN FT FINANCIAL TECHNOLOGY

URBANFT.COM

Technology and Personal Touch Bring Reassurance to Debt Relief Clients

Liberty Debt Relief's automation removes bottlenecks to resolve customers' financial distress and bring greater peace of mind

The debt relief industry is labor intensive and ripe for automation. Customers must provide income and debt documents, while associates evaluate their claims through a comprehensive underwriting process. Some are referred for debt settlement, others for bankruptcy, debt consolidation, consumer credit counseling, or loans. The process needs to cycle quickly for consumer peace of mind, but also because the company only gets paid if they reach a resolution.

With backgrounds in debt settlement and mortgage processing, Omar Chouche and Sam Aresheh founded Liberty Debt Relief in 2015 to optimize those processes with digital automation. "We looked at the industry and saw an opportunity for us to help solve debt resolution more productively," says Chouche, Liberty Debt Relief's CEO.

The process currently requires a human underwriter to review and assess the documents, to determine the best resolution. That can be embarrassing for some. Liberty Debt Relief devised a way for customers to upload the information, with machine learning handling the underwriting process, Chouche says.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Chouche is proud that their innovative online dashboard gives clients transparency into all aspects of their settlement information, including the deposit account and payment scheduling. "It helps the user experience in not having to call in to ask for an update on their account," he says.



After determining the best way for clients to handle their debt, underwriters refer them to a partner company to manage their unique situation. Clients work directly with the partner but still have dashboard access and a contact at Liberty. "This is why our customer service has such stellar ratings online," he says. Liberty follows up with customers after they are on the path to financial recovery, sometimes referring them to credit repair companies as well.

MAINTAINING MORALE

The associates field many phone calls while completing their work under tight time constraints. It is a fast-paced business environment, with files to review, partners to consult, and communications with the client. "That can be stressful, so we invest in our employees as much as possible," Chouche says.

Before COVID-19, they brought in massage therapists and lunches, provided car washes, and celebrated birthdays at the Orange, California, headquarters. "We try to create a work environment where people love where they work, so they're as efficient and effective as possible when working with clients." They plan on providing access to a psychotherapist to meet with associates virtually, along with sending incentive gifts to employee homes.

With a satisfied workforce, the associates can better focus on the clients. "We're proud that we're able to provide tools for reducing stress at work during a time when our associates are experiencing sustained uncertainty in many aspects of their lives," Chouche says.

LIBERTYDEBTRELIEF.COM

2020 Ranking
1118

$12.5 million
2019 Revenue

63
Employees in 2019

404%
2020 Growth Rate

Liberty DEBT RELIEF

From a Regional Powerhouse to a Committed and Passionate National Player

How Brunet-García harnesses inclusivity and public service to fuel its success

2020 Ranking
1798

238%
3-Year Growth

14
Telly Awards

40+
Employees

BRUNET-GARCÍA

It's a rare but serendipitous occurrence when a business ends up doing well by doing good, but that's just what happened to Jacksonville, Florida-based advertising agency Brunet-García on its journey from bootstrapped startup to Inc. 5000 recognition.

Lacking promotional dollars to build awareness in its early days, the agency focused on pro bono campaigns for regional arts and social services organizations. That largesse heightened its visibility and led to high-profile national advertising and design awards. Doing good in its community is a Brunet-García hallmark that remains pivotal to its culture today.

Jorge and Diane Brunet-García, ad industry vets with 30 years of major brand experience under their belts, launched the agency in 2003 with just $25,000 and two small accounts generating about $125,000 in revenue. They focused on outreach to Hispanics, capitalizing on their own cultural insights and past experience to create a multicultural agency with ready access to markets across Florida and the Southeast.

LEMONS INTO LEMONADE

Early on, a modest bilingual outreach campaign for the Florida Department of Transportation urging young Latinos to "buckle up" led to a larger account with the Florida Department of Health. The project's goals were to boost awareness of the FDOH's nascent statewide immunization information system among physicians and get them to enroll. A hiccup in that engagement turned into the agency's first big break.

"When a key subcontractor bailed on us, we assumed their part of the contract, and that quickly became our first million-dollar account," Jorge recalls. "It also provided a valuable lesson on how to stretch, no matter what."

The agency subsequently applied to the



SBA for 8(a) Small Disadvantaged Business designation to expand its business with the federal government. Today, it has more than 40 employees and a client roster that includes dozens of state and federal government agencies and nonprofit arts, education, and health organizations. But its growth has never taken a backseat to culture.

REGIONAL POWERHOUSE TO NATIONAL PLAYER

"Culture and ethos were very important to us from the day we started Brunet-García," Diane says. She and Jorge were intent on avoiding the traditional culture of the advertising industry, and, instead, focus on parity, inclusivity, and gender equality. The agency has a 75 percent female leadership team, a predominantly female creative team, and a diverse workforce representing seven countries.

Rapid but sustainable growth makes it possible for Brunet-García to nurture a strong culture and give back generously to both the community and its talent. It promotes from within and embraces a tribal culture that is key to its success, Diane says. "By bringing personal cultural insights and out-of-the-box thinking to some of the most complex and pressing issues, we have elevated our agency from a regional powerhouse to a committed and passionate national player."

BRUNETGARCIA.COM

REAL TALK 2020

Inspiration

The fuel that moves you forward

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 110

"IN TENNIS, I BELIEVE IN ONE WINNER. THAT'S THE GREAT THING ABOUT BUSINESS. THERE ISN'T JUST ONE WINNER. THERE'S ROOM FOR EVERYONE TO WIN. I LOVE THAT."



VENUS WILLIAMS

Founder of athleisure brand **EleVen by Venus Williams**, the tennis great made plenty of rookie mistakes when starting her business. Williams stressed to Inc. the importance of putting your entire team—rather than just yourself—in a position to win.

"There should be no convincing your staff of anything. It's not about convincing. It's about inspiring. It's about showing up at work and being very, very honest."



SIMON SINEK

A business coach and best-selling author, Sinek calls crisis "the great revealer." In a June Real Talk, he said that crises create a moment for leaders to reaffirm why they do what they do, and—just as important—to demonstrate courage.

"The biggest problems present the biggest opportunities."



ANKUR JAIN

Jain explained in August why his investment firm, **Kairos**, funded training for health services providers for elderly patients: "Solve a big problem and build a great business out of it."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 116

GETTY (3)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 115

"The idea is not to look at change as a huge mountain. It's more like, what is a small step that I can take that helps catalyze change?"

ARLAN HAMILTON



Founder of **Backstage Capital**, a venture fund that invests in founders of color and women and LGBTQ founders, Hamilton knows meaningful change takes time. In a January interview, she advised entrepreneurs to focus on incremental progress, not just long-term goals.

"I try to look for optimism in all things."



MATT MULLENWEG

Co-founder of **Wordpress** and **Automattic**, from an Inc. interview in July

"SOME PEOPLE JUST HAVE THE ABILITY TO TURN ON A DIME AND BE RIDICULOUSLY OPTIMISTIC, WHICH I'M BEGINNING TO THINK IS HALF OF EVERYBODY'S SUCCESS."

BARBARA CORCORAN

The ***Shark Tank*** co-star and founder of real estate firm **Corcoran Group** called the leaders of all 78 of her portfolio companies when the pandemic hit. In a September interview, Corcoran noted that her best-performing businesses were already adapting and, equally vital, staying positive.



What does it take to make your meetings great? Matt Mullenweg offers a useful recipe, at inc.com/real-talk.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 121

FROM LEFT: COURTESY SUBJECTS (2); GETTY

Cleaning up the Timeshare Industry

Once a timeshare sales rep, Wesley Financial Group's founder now targets deceptive industry sales practices


Chuck McDowell, founder and CEO

Chuck McDowell had an "aha" moment when trying to make amends to his timeshare sales clients in 2009. He called his previous customers, telling them he didn't realize that his sales tactics used to sell them timeshares were deceptive and gave them advice on how to cancel their purchases. One customer told another, and soon timeshare purchasers were begging McDowell to help them too. "That's when I knew I had a business," he says.

Since McDowell founded Wesley Financial Group, LLC in 2011, the CEO and his company successfully helped reverse more than 15,000 timeshare purchases. The firm doesn't accept clients who just want out of their purchase. Instead, they focus on people who feel they were misled during the sales process. Employees screen and vet prospective customers' stories. "We know what each location says to sell their product," and Wesley Financial Group employees track what the sales reps say, looking for patterns, he says.

A HAPPY ACCIDENT

Early in his career, McDowell owned an insurance and mortgage business. After a two-year hiatus from work following the unexpected death of his wife, he began a career selling timeshares to support himself and his two young sons. Less than a year in, though, he was disillusioned with the sales practices, resigning without having another job lined up. What began as McDowell calling former customers to give advice on getting out of their timeshares, turned into his next business. His former employer sued him, alleging that he had shared trade secrets. The lawsuit was resolved in his favor, and his business continued.

Wesley Financial Group takes its name and philosophy from Methodist founder and minister John Wesley, who urged followers to do all the good they can. "When our clients have gone through our process at Wesley Financial Group and we've cancelled their timeshare, if that client says they got great customer service, then our business can't fail," he says. One client was so happy with her results that she asked to work for the company, spreading their message and supporting clients who feel embarrassed about their timeshare situation.

There's no shortage of potential customers. With an estimated nearly 10 million timeshare owners in the U.S., McDowell believes that roughly 8 percent have been sold timeshares with inaccurate information. Building off advice from marketing expert Jay Abraham, Wesley Financial Group tripled their Facebook ad spend, and ran TV and radio advertisements. "He convinced me to build a brand, not simply market a service," McDowell says.

BUCKING THE PANDEMIC TRENDS

During the pandemic, companies in the travel realm are getting pummeled, but Wesley Financial Group is growing, increasing staff this year from 330 to 383. "On March 10, I told employees in our Tennessee office, 'you'll see companies cut marketing expenses and start laying people off.'" Wesley Financial Group did the opposite. They added $100,000 a week to their marketing budget and began a hiring spree.

While this was not what McDowell envisioned as a career, it's rewarding. "I would prefer to not be in the timeshare cancellation business. It's not fun. I'm at war with massive multi-billion-dollar companies," he says. "But I'm a businessman who also has the need to help people."

WESLEYFINANCIALGROUP.COM

2020 Ranking
203

$63 million
2019 Revenue

298
Employees in 2019

2114%
2020 Growth Rate

WESLEY
FINANCIAL GROUP, LLC

Payment Processing Made Easy: How One Company Tweaked the Model

WOW Payments realized that customers may be willing to pay credit card processing fees if they're transparent

Businesses can have a hard time paying rent, salaries, and product costs. Adding in credit card processing fees can impact profits. That's one reason WOW Payments' CEO Eugene Gold finds his business so meaningful. Gold wants to make it simple for merchants: with a flat $49.99 monthly membership, they can process unlimited credit card transactions and choose to participate in the cash discount or surcharge program.

While they have some competitors offering a cheaper rate, "you get what you pay for. We pride ourselves on quality," Gold says. "We build mutually beneficial relationships with all our customers, which is why they do not go to competitors." That attitude first landed them the No. 64 spot on the Inc. 5000 list in 2018, and then No. 1,766 in 2019 in addition to this year's spot.

THE CUSTOMERS ASSUME THE PROCESSING FEE

WOW Payments' cash discount program concept differs from traditional credit card payments, where merchants absorb the processing fees. Instead, merchants change their prices so the customer pays the fee. The merchant increases base prices by 4 percent, assuming customers will use a credit card. A $10 item becomes $10.40. Customers who want a discount will pay cash, and that 4 percent discount is noted on the receipt. Either way, the retailer keeps the full $10.

WOW Payments' surcharge program allows merchants to add a 4 percent surcharge for credit card use when following specific rules, and again, the merchant still receives the full product price. The charge covers everything from credit card and bank fees to hardware, software, and much more. They believe so strongly in their model they don't offer contracts.

By using WOW Payments solutions like QR code or online ordering, kiosks, or point of service (POS) equipment, some merchants get a new revenue stream, increasing earnings by 20 percent.

"In New York City, when all businesses were closed, some restaurants used outside kiosks, allowing passersby to seamlessly order," he said. "Others put our free ordering solution on Facebook, Google, Yelp, or other sites to avoid Uber Eats' hefty fees." Some WOW Payments merchants save up to $20,000 a month in credit card processing with the service.

2020 Ranking
3046

$7.7 million
2019 Revenue

128%
3-Year Growth

2015
Year Company Founded

COMPANY CULTURE

The company's culture focuses on ethical behavior and helpfulness. "Doing the right thing enables us to grow faster because of word of mouth. The business owners love us and want to recommend us," Gold says.

WOW Payments staff have checked in on business owners and ended up pitching in, washing dishes for a few hours when the owner was short-staffed. Others have answered calls at 3 a.m. and brought a terminal immediately to the business. The team respects customers enough to tell them when they are unable meet their needs. "They aren't the type of people to lie. They respect the business owners and would not do anything that could hurt their business," Gold said. Staff members have similar relationships with clients and with each other, contributing to the company's success.

"If customers don't say WOW when experiencing payment processing with us, that means we have not done our job correctly," Gold says.

WOWPAYMENTS.COM



Members of the WOW Payments team in NYC

How One Ad Tech Firm Uses AI for Better Results

Ntooitive Digital harnesses data for speed and efficiency, helping clients grow revenue

Sci-Fi novelist Arthur C. Clarke once said, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." And Ntooitive Digital's co-founders set out to prove it. Ryan Christiansen and Vikas Khorana started the company in 2015 with one purpose: help companies grow through innovative and data-driven digital marketing strategies using sophisticated technology.

The award-winning Las Vegas-based marketing technology company bridges the gap between digital marketing, sales, operations, and customer acquisition teams. They offer creative design and strategic planning, along with their own centralized cloud-based software. "It's increasingly important to ensure the money you're spending in software or marketing to run your business is maximized for efficiency," says Christiansen, CEO.

DATA, TECH, OMNICHANNEL SUPPORT: THE SECRET SAUCE

Ntooitive created two technology platforms: a proprietary business efficiency tool and a data analytics program that uses predictive modeling to improve performance. That's important because traditional marketing campaigns lack granular measurements, says Khorana, Ntooitive's president and CTO. Their software can automate workflows, unify buy-and-sell-side ad channels, and tighten control of multiple data platforms. The result is significant cost savings for clients.

The company identifies client goals and uses a platform-agnostic and omnichannel approach for media campaigns. That may mean finding users on Facebook, Instagram, national outlets like CNN or Fox News, or programmatic channels like Connected TV. Their tech leverages AI and ML and can accurately measure ROI, "the holy grail of marketers," Khorana adds.

The founders tested their software while building the firm, shortening their client acquisition timeline.

2020 Ranking
839

569%
2020 Growth Rate

59
Employees in 2019

2015
Year Founded



Co-founders of Ntooitive Digital: Ryan Christiansen (right) and Vikas Khorana

THE 3Cs MODEL

Ntooitive focuses its business on the 3Cs: conversion, channel, and creative. The team identifies the conversion point for every business and marketing channel to accurately track success. They are channel-agnostic in developing campaigns, as long as the right channels can find the right audience. The company's technology allows measurement of conversion points on any channel, so clients' marketing and sales teams are using the same data. The creative elements must be aligned with conversion metrics, tagging specific parts of the ads to understand engagement.

The agency has expertise in health care, retail, nonprofits, and e-commerce. Under Ntooitive's lead, one large e-commerce company consolidated campaigns for multiple brand websites, going from revenue of a few thousand dollars a month to more than $8 million a month. Customer references drive much of their growth. Ntooitive's initial clients are still with them, Khorana says, partly because the Ntooitive culture stresses "do the right thing," and be OHD: open, honest, and direct.

"Even though determination towards growth reigns, it's never at the price of fun and good times. The people and culture at Ntooitive have and always will be a key component," says Christiansen.

NTOOITIVE.COM

A Twenty-Year History of Honesty and Growth

MediCopy saw a chance to improve health information exchange—and the company has landed on the Inc. 5000 list seven times



Elliott Noble-Holt, founder and CEO, MediCopy

Elliott Noble-Holt's personal motto is "live so you don't have to explain." His late mother used to say this to remind him to do the right thing, professionally and personally. With ethics and honesty, Holt has grown his company MediCopy from a one-man show in Nashville, Tennessee, to a national health information management company with 200 employees.

MediCopy facilitates the secure delivery of protected information from health care partners to requesting parties, namely attorneys, insurance companies, government agencies, and patients. By prioritizing quality assurance and creating an inclusive and caring culture, MediCopy has landed on the Inc. 5000 seven times since its launch in 2000.

"I CAN DO IT BETTER"

Holt has a long history with medical records. When he was 15, he would accompany his mother to her job at an orthopedic office. "For shits and giggles," he would help pull charts and files. When the office put him on the payroll for $4.25 an hour, he thought he was rich.

Holt worked there until age 17, when his father died. He felt depressed and lost. He went to college but dropped out after 10 days and returned to the orthopedic office. The office used a vendor—now MediCopy's largest competitor—to handle requests for medical information. The vendor was slow-moving and prone to error. In 2000, when Holt was 21, he asked his supervisor if he could copy medical records on weeknights and weekends to make extra money and ensure things were done correctly. "With just $50 in my checking account, my mother took me to buy a copy machine. If you signed up for AOL, they would give you a $500 gift card. I used that gift card to buy my first copy machine and started copying medical records for my first client."

GROWTH YOU FEEL GOOD ABOUT

Two decades later, Holt is at the helm of an industry-leading business that works with more than 3,000 hospitals and physician practices. MediCopy grows organically by investing in security and technology to keep up with electronic medical records, prioritizing quality assurance, and conducting client surveys to improve customer satisfaction. The company's transparent and diverse culture contributes to 98-percent employee retention. Holt is also proud that 60 percent of the management team are African-American or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). "We are not over here just checking boxes to be politically correct. Everyone here has worked their ass off to get where they are," he explains.

The pandemic has been an unexpected growth driver because health care companies that have furloughed employees are turning to MediCopy to field health information requests. He expects to more than double in revenue within five years, honoring his parents' memory by doing right by his customers, partners, and employees.

MEDICOPY.NET

200
Employees

7th
year on the Inc. 5000

115%
3-Year Growth

2020 Ranking
3295

MediCopy

CREATED FOR MEDICOPY BY INC. STUDIO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 116

"What's important for any business is to have a philanthropic heart. And it's not just about writing checks. It's about getting your teams out into the community."



KENDRA SCOTT

Founder of and designer at her eponymous jewelry company, Scott doesn't view philanthropy as a box to check off. During a Real Talk conversation in May, she spoke about why you need to get your whole team involved in helping a worthy cause instead of simply donating money to charitable organizations.

"IF OUR CUSTOMERS ARE HAPPIER THAN OUR COMPETITORS' CUSTOMERS, WE'RE GOING TO CONTINUE TO THRIVE AND GROW."

NEIL BLUMENTHAL

Blumenthal built eyewear brand **Warby Parker** by knowing that you must understand your customers before you can make them happy. "We didn't come in with any assumptions on what the right thing to do was," he told Inc. in July.



"You don't ride crises out. You fight crises. ... I'm not afraid of people challenging me."



TARIQ FARID

Founder and CEO of **Edible Arrangements**, from a June Inc. interview

CONTINUED ON PAGE 122

FROM LEFT: COURTESY SUBJECT; REDUX; GETTY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 121

"When times are bad, creativity rules. For young upstarts, this is the ideal time."



BARBARA CORCORAN

Corcoran Group founder and ***Shark Tank*** co-star, from an Inc. interview in September

"COOKING FOR ME WAS AN ABILITY TO SEE THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE MORE TALENTED THAN ME, BUT I HAD THIS UNDENIABLE BELIEF THAT I COULD OUTWORK THEM."

DAVID CHANG

Celebrity chef and founder of restaurant business **Momofuku Group** and entertainment group **Majordomo Media**, Chang had to overcome depression before he could find success as an entrepreneur. Speaking with Inc. in October, he noted that his love for cooking fueled the grit and stubbornness that helped him work harder than people with more natural talent.

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GETTY (2)

Connecting Vision to Purpose

Learning Sciences helps clients' employees understand how their efforts impact the company's mission, increasing engagement and dramatically improving results


Peter Ranzino

As a late teen, Peter Ranzino would sneak into the Louisiana State University library to read business books and magazines, including *Inc*.

"At the time, school was not a financial option, but I wanted to learn how to start a business, and in that library, I knew there was an answer to my question, 'How do I get from where I am now to where I want to be?'" he says.

The answer came quickly: find a customer. Ranzino hit the phones and landed his first meeting with a $6 billion insurance broker in Chicago. He had only a vision, nothing tangible. In a subsequent meeting with the company's director, he landed his first client. He later sold the intellectual property of the Multimedia Training Network to that same firm. Then he launched a second online training company. After a successful 10-year run, it was acquired by his investors, who later sold the company.

In 2008, Ranzino started Learning Sciences, a learning and development company, and focused on clients with complex learning needs. The company quickly learned that it was good at understanding a corporate culture and grasping the business or learning issues surrounding workforce development, regulatory compliance, and manufacturing processes. By applying sound business principles and instructional theory, the company produced well thought out learning solutions that delivered on their promise.

Soon thereafter, companies with international reach, including FOX, Phillips 66, The Walt Disney Company, CITGO Petroleum, NBC Sports, NBCUniversal, and The Training Trust Fund for the International Union for Stage and Theatrical Workers, began to call, becoming long-term clients. Since then, the team has built long-standing relationships within three main business sectors with global impact: energy, information and entertainment, and the public sector.

2020 Ranking
535

862%
3-Year Growth

#66
in Software Industry

95+%
Client Retention

LEARNING SCIENCES CORPORATION

"We are fortunate and grateful that all three industries consistently refer colleagues and partnering companies to us. Our growth and expansion are extending further into the judicial system, manufacturing, and health care industries," says Ranzino.

Today, Learning Sciences technologies engage 100,000 trainees per week.

TYING TRAINING TO COMPANY PURPOSE

"Our job is to help management drive their vision into their workforce. Employees need to understand how their role contributes to success, which breeds empowerment and enthusiasm into their job performance, their employer, and for most, their personal lives," says Ranzino.

By capturing critical training data that can be used to analyze skill proficiency, provide insight to high-performing employees, and manage data to aid the company in corporate audits, Learning Sciences continues applying new approaches in web-based learning and learning management systems (LMS).

"The investment in training is measurable. Creative learning approaches engage and teach an employee how to do their job better. Tying training to the company's purpose creates a deeper, more committed engagement between employer and employee," Ranzino explains.

Looking ahead, Learning Sciences is now integrating its learning technologies into business tools and analytics for underserved markets.

"Our company started with a six-foot folding table, lawn chair, and a phone. It's grown because we deliver on our promises. As long as we keep doing that, we will continue to see growth and value in our company, our clients, and ourselves," Ranzino says.

LEARNINGSCIENCESCORP.COM

CREATED FOR LEARNING SCIENCES CORPORATION BY INC. STUDIO

A Radical New Approach to Payment Processing Fuels Growth

How Fattmerchant came up with a new approach that benefits merchants

2020 Ranking
436

$8 billion
in Payments Processed

1047%
3-Year Growth

7000+
Clients

Growing up in a family of entrepreneurial immigrants, Suneera Madhani, founder and CEO of Orlando, Florida-based Fattmerchant, culled firsthand knowledge about the pain points of running a small business, one of which was payment processing. As she pursued her own career in that very industry, she recognized a massive opportunity for creative disruption.

"The industry was outdated, heavily commoditized, and had zero regard for the success of its clients," she says. "I knew there had to be a better way."

Madhani is a self-described "data nerd" and lover of all things subscription. She saw the tremendous volume of transactions midmarket businesses were running as a motherlode of data value that no one was mining. Radically simplifying the payment experience with a first-of-its-kind, subscription-based credit card processing company would provide merchants with real transparency.

WILLPOWER AND A THICK SKIN

Obstacles abound when starting a new venture—even more so when it's something that's never been done before. Along with the typical challenges of launching any new business, Fattmerchant had to find a bank sponsor, recruit software developers with the right skills, and build a team. "Honestly, I don't know how we made it through," she says. "It was sheer willpower and the willingness to get a 'no' and try again."

Madhani had an invaluable source of help in her brother, Sal Rehmetullah, Fattmerchant's co-founder and president. Growing up, the siblings worked closely together in the family business, and they bring complementary skill sets to Fattmerchant.

"He's a sheer whiz at operational scaling, finance, and sales, while I thrive in vision, product, and marketing," she says. "We divide and conquer the organization as two heads, and I believe having this strong foundation up top is a primary driver of our tremendous growth."

$4M TO $5B IN 4 YEARS

It took six months to get Fattmerchant up and running, but it still did more than $5 million in payments its first year. Within four years, volume had grown to $5 billion, which Madhani credits to putting customers' needs first.

Fattmerchant's Omni technology accommodates all business payment types—online, in person, ACH, shopping cart, mobile—and consolidates all data into a single unified platform. Its flat subscription-based pricing model can provide business owners with significant savings over the industry's conventional fee-per-transaction model.

Recently, the company has been expanding its client base by targeting software firms that can utilize Fattmerchant's API to process customer transactions through their own platforms. "The ability for independent software vendors to embed payments in their ecosystems creates a seamless experience," Madhani says. "Over time, we see the potential for us to impact a greater number of midmarket businesses by empowering the software companies that serve them."

FATTMERCHANT.COM



Suneera Madhani, founder and CEO of Fattmerchant

fattmerchant

Success Means More than Revenue for this IT Provider

Customer retention and culture drive revenue growth for Skynet Innovations—but they are not what motivates its founder

When Skynet Innovations, an information technology (IT) solutions services provider, started in 2008, most companies thought of IT as the people you call when your computer is broken. Today, it is so much more. Technology and information security have become integral components of businesses strategies, and IT's role has increased in scope and importance.

CEO Shaun Sexton founded Skynet in Cincinnati, Ohio, because he wanted small to midsize businesses (SMBs) to have access to the same high-quality IT support as enterprise companies. Over the last 12 years, Skynet has grown from a local business to a national service provider with clients across nearly every state. The key to its triple-digit growth rate is customer retention and culture, Sexton says.

2020 Ranking
1459

303%
3-Year Growth

99%
Client Retention Rate

200+
Clients

NEAR TOTAL CUSTOMER RETENTION

Skynet works with businesses across all verticals, including health care, manufacturing, and finance, providing outsourced technology support and consulting services that make companies feel productive and supported. Sexton tells his team they work for the client, not Skynet. "You never try to do something that benefits us and not the client," he explains. "You focus on what's best for the client always."

As IT becomes more important to businesses—a way to get to the next level and stand out from the competition—Skynet plays a more active role in its partners' decision-making. Customer service and constant touch have led to a 99 percent client retention rate. "I live by the motto: 'It takes months to land a new client, but it takes seconds to lose one,'" Sexton says.

HIRING FOR CULTURAL FIT

Skynet doubled its head count this year, and recruiting and onboarding has at times been challenging. When hiring, personality and cultural fit have been the most important


Skynet Innovations Founder and CEO, Shaun Sexton

factors. The company needs employees who can deliver the level of service that leads to the customer satisfaction it is known for. "We figure we can teach the other stuff," he explains. "They have to agree with our vision first and foremost. Then they have to have the passion to make it happen." That vision is to provide exemplary IT services, on par with the services enterprise companies enlist, while treating people with respect. Sexton says he probably talks about culture about 20 times a week. He believes if you have a strong culture, everything else falls into place.

External factors also contribute to Skynet's growth. Technology will only get smarter and more integral to businesses, says Sexton, and investment in IT security will continue to increase. Skynet is ready. Though success isn't about revenue for Sexton, and it never has been. It is about creating meaningful outcomes for clients and providing for every part of this team. He cautions entrepreneurs not to lose sight of why they started in the first place.

"You are probably doing this for your family, right? It is important to stay focused, but at the same time, never be too busy to take a moment to hold your child or pet your dog," he advises. "Success shouldn't be determined by the money you make, but rather the freedom to live your life the way you want to live it."

SKYNETINNOVATIONS.COM

A Solar Energy Underdog Story

No get-rich-quick schemes here—POWERHOME SOLAR believes success takes time, hard work, and sacrifice

2020 Ranking
255

$500 million
Projected 2020 Sales

1600
Employees

$56 million
Sales in Sept. 2020

A common mistake entrepreneurs make is thinking they will get rich quick, explains Jayson Waller, an award-winning serial entrepreneur and founder of POWERHOME SOLAR, No. 255 on the Inc. 5000. In 2014, Waller left a lucrative home security business to launch POWERHOME SOLAR, only to lose millions his first few years. But he stayed the course, and in doing so, built a soon-to-be billion-dollar business on a mission to empower Americans to own their energy.

The turning point came in 2017, when Waller's company switched from installing Chinese panels to U.S.-made products. It was risky because the panels were more expensive, but they were better products with a longer warranty. Customers responded, and the company doubled nearly overnight, Waller says. Today, POWERHOME SOLAR serves nearly 25,000 residential clients across 10 states and has installed solar at five NFL stadiums, one MLB stadium, and a college campus.

LIBERTY FOR ALL

POWERHOME SOLAR offers a suite of energy efficiency products and services—not just solar panels. These products help customers save money while contributing to a greener planet. Waller says people assume solar panel customers are more likely to be left-leaning politically, but 70 percent of his customers identify as Republican. Waller also says POWERHOME SOLAR is the only company he knows of that incentivizes customers to invest in battery storage as well as panels to achieve true energy independence. He believes battery storage will become increasingly important as more people adopt electric cars. "We want to be ahead of the curve," he says.

TAKE THE STAIRS

Waller's decision to only accept "A- and B-players" also drives growth and shapes the culture. He adopted this in 2016 as he worked to make the company profitable. Not settling for C-talent allows the company to breed leaders from within. All sales management positions are filled internally, and the whole team shares Waller's passion. Culture contributes to impressive growth, even in trying times. During the pandemic, the company increased head count from 750 to more than 1,600 employees. September 2020 was the business's best month yet, and it is on track to produce $500 million in sales by year end. Next year, Waller believes the company will hit $1 billion. Waller is currently exploring bringing on an investor and is vocal about his intention to go public or sell someday, so "every employee has some kind of life-changing event through POWERHOME SOLAR."


Jayson Waller, founder of POWERHOME SOLAR

To stay connected with his growing team, improve market awareness, and inspire entrepreneurs, Waller hosts a popular podcast called "True Underdog." A high school dropout himself, Waller is the underdog poster child. He's comfortable with struggle and cautions that many people fail in business because they seek instant gratification. "There is no elevator in business. You've got to take the stairs," he explains.

Waller urges entrepreneurs to live frugally in the beginning and reinvest in the company. "The company will pay you back one day—but it is not about that. It's about making it great for everybody, so everybody gets paid back. That is what we've always done and will continue to do."

POWERHOME SOLAR

POWERHOME.COM

People

The ones who make it all possible

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"HOW DO YOU HIRE PEOPLE WHO RAISE THE BAR FOR EVERYONE ELSE? I LOVE THAT CONCEPT, BECAUSE I AM SOMEONE WHO LOVES TO LEARN FROM OTHER PEOPLE. AND SO WITH EACH EXECUTIVE LEADER WE'VE BROUGHT ON WHO HAS DEEP EXPERIENCE IN THAT FUNCTION, I KNOW THEY'RE RAISING THE BAR FOR EVERYONE."



SHAN-LYN MA

Co-founder and CEO of wedding-registry startup **Zola,** Ma relies on her love of learning to help her grow as an entrepreneur. During an Inc. interview in June, she talked about how she hires executives with complementary experience to help the rest of her team learn skills she couldn't teach them herself.



"It's easy to lay people off. It's hard to hire people back."

CAREY SMITH

Founder of **Big Ass Fans** and **Unorthodox Ventures**, from an Inc. conversation in June

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GETTY (2)

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"The most important way for people to succeed is when they love themselves. If you aren't happy, if you aren't well, if your mind isn't vibrating at a good vibration, it's going to be hard to run a good startup."



BEATRICE DIXON

Co-founder of feminine hygiene company **the Honey Pot**, Dixon knows that running a company effectively isn't possible if you're dealing with mental health issues. She spoke with Inc. in October about how your personal well-being can help define your company.

"WHAT WE'VE REALLY LEARNED IS THAT WE NEED A STRUCTURE. WE NEED THE BONES OF THE COMPANY, AND PEOPLE HAVE TO BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR SPECIFIC IMPORTANT THINGS."

EILEEN FISHER

Founder of her namesake fashion brand, Fisher ran her company for years before settling on an organizational structure that fit the business. In June, she explained why every company has to come up with a unique structure that defines responsibilities without sacrificing collaboration.





"I hate fundraising. If I had my druthers, I'd never do it again."

TRISTAN WALKER

Founder and CEO, **Walker & Company Brands**, from an August Inc. interview

WALKER: ROG & BEE WALKER; GETTY (2)

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Focus on the Employee Experience

In a volatile sales business, Liberty Home Mortgage sees happy workers as the key to success

You might say that Khash Saghafi, a lifelong wrestler, has been pinned to the mat a few times in the mortgage lending business. By the time he founded Liberty Home Mortgage Corporation in 2014, he had been through the Great Recession, mounting credit card debt, and two near bankruptcies. His relentless optimism – "You cannot keep a negative thought inside of me for more than one second"– kept him from calling it quits. That perseverance has helped him achieve an annual growth rate of nearly 250 percent for his Cleveland, Ohio-based business. He credits what he calls his greatest assets—his employees—with getting him to this point.

SLOW GOING

A first-generation Iranian-American born into a family full of doctors, Saghafi originally intended to take the same path. But ultimately, he ended up going in a different direction. "When the dream of being a doctor ended, what did not end was my dream of being the best at wherever life was going to take me," he says. Seeing entrepreneurship as a promising road to success, he tried out several different businesses—including roofing, day trading, and house flipping—but finally found his stride in mortgage lending.

Saghafi started in the mortgage industry in 1999, and in May 2002 opened his own mortgage company. He charged $54,000 to his credit cards to finance his newly formed business. "I was absolutely choking to death financially," he says of those early years, but he dug himself out of debt. Then came the 2007 housing market crisis and Great Recession, when he racked up another $600,000 in credit card debt. He paid that off, too, and rebuilt.

Saghafi says he no longer makes the kind of rushed business decisions he made as a young entrepreneur in his mid-20s. He is now much more patient, and he cultivates the kind of work environment in which employees look forward to coming in to work every single day.

STRESS-FREE ZONE

Saghafi's old business mentality was "sprint, work, and never let up." These days his directive is, "Sprint for 45 minutes, and take a 15-minute break." In the 12,000-square-foot office suite housing their corporate headquarters, staffers often spend their break time playing video games on 55-inch screens or engaging in Nerf gun battles while music blares in the background. Before COVID hit, there was a full-time chef, and Saghafi had plans to hire a full-time masseuse—an upgrade from the two massage chairs currently on the premises. There is no dress code. Workers are encouraged to leave the office whenever they need to take care of personal or family matters.

Saghafi has learned that employees are less effective when they are stressed out and that people can get more work done in a relaxed environment than one in which someone is always looking over their shoulder. He is convinced that the primary focus of a sales business should be on the employee experience rather than customer relations, because happy employees provide the best customer service.

"Take care of your employees, and your employees will take care of your customers," Saghafi says, explaining the philosophy that has led to massive success for this up-and-coming business.

LIBERTYHOMEMORTGAGE.ORG



Khash Saghafi, founder of Liberty Home Mortgage

LIBERTY HOME MORTGAGE CORPORATION

2020 Ranking **1734**

$22.4 million 2019 Revenue

160 Employees in 2019

247% 2020 Revenue Growth Rate

CREATED FOR LIBERTY HOME MORTGAGE CORPORATION BY INC. STUDIO

Built with Honesty, Integrity, and Quality

First Factory focuses on cultivating the best environment for its developers to do their creative work



Creative, open, and secure offices in Costa Rica

2020 Ranking
2425

307
Industry Rank

171%
2020 Growth Rate

150
Employees

Founding First Factory, his software development company, on Pi Day—March 14, 2000—was a bit of unintentional symbolism that CEO Jason Roff says he didn't even realize until years later. The company serves clients who are looking at outsourcing as a more affordable and flexible alternative to hiring in-house developers. What started out as a "side hustle" became a full-time business in 2006 when Roff expanded the company from its New York City base by adding a nearshore office in Heredia, Costa Rica.

Roff says there were a number of reasons to choose Costa Rica. Its timezone compatibility with North American businesses made it convenient. In addition, the country has high-quality infrastructure and education systems. Plus, it's a nice place to visit for in-person meetings, making it a natural choice for clients. But as impressive as the setting is, the biggest selling point is what goes on inside the company's office.

SPACE TO THRIVE

"I wanted to make a place where great people could do great work," Roff says. He named the company after the famed art studio Andy Warhol created in New York's Union Square, with the idea of designing a space that gave software developers the same kind of community of support to create great work. Joel Spolsky's popular blog on software provided more industry-specific inspiration. "He wrote about how to get developers to do great work, and that was giving them a space to thrive," Roff says. "Give them the right tools. Don't restrict them."

Don Gregori, who was a First Factory client before becoming the company's Chief Operating Officer in 2017, adds that design features like open workspaces, natural sunlight, and even the office furniture reflect that deliberate attention to the work environment. "Jason bought rollerblade wheels for all the chairs, so it's quiet," Gregori says. "There's a level of detail that eliminates distraction." This precision is carried throughout the team's work with clients, too. It is a core principle reflected in everything they do.

TAILOR-MADE TEAMS

At First Factory, a lot of care goes into building the right team for each client—matching developers not just in terms of technical skill but also in terms of personality. In every case, the goal is for a long-term relationship to blossom. Roff says adhering to First Factory's core values – honesty, integrity and quality – has enabled the company to keep many of its clients for five years or more. The longest relationship to date was a set of projects for one client, spanning 15 years, which helped fund the opening of the Costa Rica office.

Gregori notes that they work with clients to find opportunities within a project for developers to gain more technical and leadership experience. He adds that even more important than the steady growth in the size of the staff (it was 87 in 2019 and currently stands at about 150) is providing a chance for employees to grow and to advance their careers. That's why First Factory pays so much attention to creating a level of engagement and sense of ownership that lets employees "feel that their DNA is in the company," Gregori says.

FIRSTFACTORY.COM



Blake Anderson, CEO of Pet Parents

From Problem to Product

Taking end-to-end control of logistics made exponential growth possible for Pet Parents by ensuring inventory was always in stock

Blake Anderson, CEO of Pet Parents, can vividly remember one of the first product reviews ever posted for his company's washable dog diapers. In the review, the customer wrote that his beloved 14-year-old dog had sadly been relegated to the kitchen due to incontinence issues, and thanks to Pet Parents, the dog could now rejoin his family in the rest of the home.

"I'll never forget that," Anderson says, "and now I and everyone at Pet Parents works tirelessly to create more moments like that one."

AN EXPLODING MARKET

There are as many as 89.7 million pet dogs in the U.S., according to the American Pet Products Association, with owners expected to spend more than $94 billion on pet products and services in 2020, per Packaged Facts.

Providing for pets, who have become more like family than friends—aka "fur babies"—is big business.

It was Anderson's own childhood dog, Blondie—a yellow Labrador retriever—who ended up inspiring the business. When Anderson stumbled across dog diapers in 2015, he realized that they could have been a godsend for his aging dog. Curious about this newfound product, he found the two category leaders, ordered them, and proceeded to dissect and study them. He knew immediately he could "build a better mousetrap."

What followed was months of product research, reading reviews, and brainstorming new approaches that led to the development of a dog diaper that was better made, better quality, and more convenient. Pet Parents launched in January 2016 with a single product—washable dog diapers.

The company's first year in business, Pet Parents generated just under $500,000, with Anderson as the sole employee. By 2019, it had grown to a multimillion-dollar venture with eight employees.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Anderson's relatively smooth startup process and growth trajectory was due to his previous entrepreneurial experience, he explains. To earn money during college, he set up an e-commerce website that sold drones and drop-shipped them. However, when drones surged in popularity, he couldn't keep enough inventory in stock. With no control over manufacturing, he was at the mercy of his distributor. "I had used the same business model with hunting products," Anderson says, "and I had the same issue with inventory." Meaning, the model didn't work.

"I knew I could sell products," Anderson says, "but I had to control the inventory from beginning to end."

Although dog diapers were initially viewed as a niche product, for Pet Parents they were a "jumping off point." Today the company sells a variety of products designed to solve pet owner problems. From several offerings designed to address everything from pet incontinence to chew toys, supplements, and now cat diapers, Pet Parents aims to build on its success by staying in its lane.

Today its pet products are sold on the company's website and in hundreds of pet specialty retailers across the U.S.

"This past year has largely been a year of focus on infrastructure, systems, processes, and increasing bandwidth in order to support future growth." As a result, Pet Parents is poised to continue its growth trajectory into the future, "which is a testament to our approach," Anderson confirms.

PETPARENTSBRAND.COM

2020 Ranking
378

1208%
3-Year Growth

4
Years in Business

1+ million
Pet Families Served

Pet Parents

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 128

"I'VE RUN A FEW DIFFERENT BUSINESSES AND I DEFINITELY PREFER HAVING A CO-FOUNDER. YOU CAN SHARE THE EXTRAORDINARY HIGHS TOGETHER, YOU CAN PICK EACH OTHER UP DURING THE LOWS, AND THERE'S NO EASY WAY TO ANSWER THIS OTHER THAN JUST GETTING IN THE TRENCHES TOGETHER AND WORKING TOGETHER."

MICHAEL ACTON SMITH

Co-founder and co-CEO of mindfulness and meditation app **Calm**, Smith loves having a partner to help with the "critical execution work." During an interview in July, he also talked about why you and your partners need to be able to tell a great story about your brand's future.



"Align yourself with positive people."

JOHN PAUL DEJORIA

John Paul Mitchell Systems co-founder, from an April Inc. conversation



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Rising from the Ashes to Launch a Fast-growing Publishing Business

Determination and vision helped launch Faith Bridge Christian Planner when the founder's life was at its lowest point

After four years of military service, Victor Delacruz found himself in what he calls "a pretty precarious situation." He'd moved to New York for graduate study at New York University and owned a successful business. But a dispute with his partner put that in jeopardy.

"I spent all my money on legal fees, and I lost everything," he recalls. He lost focus and failed to complete his degree. Reduced to couch surfing, he became increasingly isolated, and his mental health was suffering.

But rather than just giving up, he tapped into his strong Christian faith to turn his life around. His next venture was Faith Bridge, publisher of the Christian Planner line of organizer products. In just four years, he's grown the company from a Kickstarter launch to eight figures in total sales.



Victor and Melissa Delacruz

WHAT WORKED FOR HIM COULD HELP OTHERS

"I created Christian Planner to help Christians pragmatically integrate God into their daily life," Delacruz explains. Incorporating that time in his daily goal-setting, planning, and journaling activities made him more productive, more focused, and less prone to stress and anxiety. He realized that what worked for him could help others, and he poured all his energy into making Christian Planner a success.

He started the company with his wife, Melissa Bezas Delacruz. She is Faith Bridge's chief creative officer, responsible for all design work. Victor, who has a degree in communication and media studies, is the CEO. They rely on a team with skill sets in other areas to help them make smart business decisions.

A WELL-DEFINED TARGET CUSTOMER

Christian Planner is looking to build their content around a concept called the Five F's (faith, family, food, fitness, and finance), which gives it a massive and well-defined target customer base. "Our mission is to help people who are pragmatically trying to improve their lives, who are trying to live an integrated life spiritually, professionally, and with their families," he says. "We're not pastors or ministers; we're an everyday Christian family trying to help other Christian families.

The Christian book market generates $600 million in annual sales, and the Christian Planner brand's nondenominational positioning has broad appeal. Delacruz's future plans include leveraging its consumer base—which he says is "sticky and devoted"—and raising growth capital to expand the brand and curate a broader line of products. "I know we're small right now, but ultimately we'd like to do an IPO," he says. "We've worked so hard to get here; we know we have what it takes to get to the next level."

CHRISTIANPLANNER.COM

2020 Ranking
92

$18 million
Cumulative Sales

4
Employees

3663%
3-Year Growth

CHRISTIANPLANNER

A Customer-Driven Market Shift

MuniciPay found success by inventing a new way to streamline electronic payment processing

A simple customer request led to the launch of MuniciPay, a custom payment technology company. At the time, Jamie Nonni and his business partner, Patrick Allen, were running Nationwide Payments, a company focused primarily on retail transactions. Their customer wanted to split payments at the point of an automotive sale, so that title and registration fees could be paid with one card transaction. It was a simple request, but one they could not accommodate.

So, Nonni and Allen created a team of software engineers. Their task: develop a solution that enabled an unlimited number of transactions from a single payment to fund multiple payment accounts. The company would go on to earn a utility patent for its novel solution.

Founded in 2008, MuniciPay was initially a spinoff from Nationwide Payments, which Nonni and Allen later sold. "MuniciPay was an opportunity to diversify into the specialized niche market of Government payments," says Nonni, co-founder and CEO of the Portland, Maine, company. MuniciPay has since broadened its reach to additional nonretail customers such as utilities, education, medical, not-for-profit, fuel supply, waste management, and others.

RIGOROUS R&D

Streamlining customers' payment processes is how MuniciPay has achieved success. In the first five years, the company had about 500 customers. Now, it's reaching more than $5.4 million in 2019 revenue and processing more than $250 million in annual payments. But getting to that point took a long time. First, Nonni and Allen, who is COO of MuniciPay, sent their vice president of business development on a yearlong road trip to various government trade shows, querying people from payment departments. "We took feedback from hundreds of municipalities and designed our system around what they gave us," Nonni says.

The first version of the software came about six months after the completion of the market research. That initial version was developed to satisfy the needs of smaller municipal offices. After a few years, when new security regulations came about, Nonni and Allen made the decision to upgrade the platform. A project they thought would last 18 months took five years. "It's very complex software that meets and exceeds stringent requirements for security," he says.

2020 Ranking
4869

$5.4 million
2019 Revenue

6th
Year on the Inc. 5000

59%
2020 Growth Rate

REDUCING TIME AND HASSLE

"Municipalities that have adopted the MuniciPay system have gained significant efficiencies with reconciliation across all their payment channels, with some larger offices even being able to reduce their staffing as a result," Nonni says. During the pandemic, the company has helped government agencies that formerly received mostly in-person payments make the quick switch to remote e-commerce payments. "Because they already had our cloud-based system, it was a really simple add," he says.

The biggest growth area for MuniciPay is integration with third-party software companies seeking to add a secure payment solution without the hassle of added compliance and security upgrades. "The MuniciPay system, with its certified point-to-point encryption (P2PE) solution, solves that problem and enhances the value they can offer to their customers," Nonni says.

WWW.MUNICIPAY.COM



MuniciPay Co-Founders Jamie Nonni and Patrick Allen