

OUS MAKING WAVES IN BUSINESS

My Entrepreneurial Journey

By James Averdieck (F 79)

I started my first business Gü Puds when I was 37 – a lot later in my career than most entrepreneurs but I'm actually quite risk-averse! Before I took the plunge, I knew that to make it work I needed a "Pot Noodle" of an idea and a good business plan. It had to work – I had no plan B so I was completely committed and obsessed by it – I would bore my friends and family ad nauseam. It was this obsession which ultimately paid off and Gü grew to become a well-known brand.

There was no single thing that made it work. Success is a very high bar in the food industry because it's so competitive... but we had a great product, a brand that people loved and talked about... and finally a great team, which included another OU who moved to Paris to run our business in Europe – **Kate Lucas (J 92)**. Kate has also since become a successful entrepreneur in her own right.

After selling the business in 2010, I tried a few new things, including TV presenting for SKY – unfortunately the series called *Cooks to Market* lacked the X factor, so I returned to the world of brands and supermarkets which I know and love. I started my next business *The Coconut Collaborative*, a range of plant-based yogurts, in 2014. Second time round I wanted to do something a bit different – a healthier business that was also more sensitive to the environment.

The inspiration came to me when I was on holiday in the Far East and a coconut fell from a tree, just at the moment I was trying to work out what to do next with my life. So, I developed a range of plant-based yogurts, made just with the milk of a coconut, and after a lot of work getting the product right, the business has also been a great success. The product is now in all UK supermarkets as well as across Europe. My brother, **Edward (F 79)** took the business to America and we opened an office in Los Angeles, which has also gone very well. Californians are health-obsessed and the fact that the yogurts taste great has meant that sales took off quickly. My daughter, **Phoebe (L 16)** is now a brand ambassador working in LA, London and Bristol, and her highlight so far was sampling David Beckham on our rather delicious chocolate pots in Santa Monica last summer!

Again, our focus on a high-quality product, nice brand and a fantastic team has paid off. I always think that you have to be just a little bit better than your competition... and ultimately having the best product on the market, competitively priced, is the way to win.

Uppingham was a very different school when I was there in the early 80s – it was quite a tough, competitive environment – pastoral care was still a long way off! I don't think we ever talked about entrepreneurship – we were far more interested in Pink Floyd, David Bowie and Carlos Santana's guitar skills! But I learnt to become independent and to survive and adapt quickly when situations change – vital skills for the entrepreneurial life. I have grown to appreciate the benefits of an Uppingham education more since I left. The optimistic and unpretentious manner of OUs coupled with a can-do attitude is a winning combination and makes us good people to do business with!





Gretel

www.gretel.co.uk

There is an astonishing £50bn sitting in lost or forgotten accounts, savings and investments in the UK. Following 2.5 years working with the Government to put in place measures to address the issue, **Duncan Stevens (WB 92)** recently launched Gretel – a free to use, revolutionary online financial hub, built to help an estimated 20 million people reconnect with their lost or forgotten money.

Gretel works by taking small amounts of basic information provided by its members – name, address, date of birth – and using artificial intelligence and machine learning, matches this to data held right across the financial services industry. All of this happens in under three minutes, saving consumers and companies months of time and effort.

Asked what success looks like for Gretel, Duncan is very clear; “There are nearly 20 million people who we’d

love to reconnect with their money. If we could, it would be a massive win for us, and for society. It would also be genuinely transformational for the financial services industry, solving many decades of problems, and bringing organisations closer to their customers than ever before.”

It is very clear to Duncan that his time at Uppingham shaped not only the person he became but also the career choices he made. “It equipped me with social skills, determination and resilience that any entrepreneur needs. However, it was the support given to me by one trustee, when my father’s business collapsed, that has influenced me the most. It was the first time I experienced such selfless generosity from a stranger, and it ignited a desire in me to help others. I am profoundly grateful for that.”

Duncan would be delighted to partner with OUs and firms who share his ethos on helping society. More than anything though, Duncan would love you to sign up with Gretel so you can see if there is anything out there for you!

Fix8

fix8.com

Fix8 is a kombucha brand, created by **Freya Twigden (J 10)** after she discovered the drink whilst living in Shanghai and became infatuated with making and sharing it herself. She then travelled all over to meet other kombucha obsessives in Hawaii, San Francisco, Portland and LA, before launching her own product, Fix8, into Selfridges in September 2018.

Freya’s idea was to propel fermented soft drinks beyond the realm of health and into the mainstream market as an everyday lifestyle product. In a world of one dimensional, and often unhealthy soft drinks reliant on sugar and caffeine, Fix8 offers natural probiotics, B Vitamins and amino acids to make you feel good from the inside out and quench a thirst.

Fix8 is available in three flavours; triple ginger, strawberry tulsii and citrus saffron, best consumed for a morning tonic, afternoon lift or as an evening mixer to replace sugary soda. With unique botanical flavour combinations, refreshing acidity and award-winning branding, Fix8 has quickly established itself as the kombucha of choice in high-end bars such as The Connaught Bar, retail outlets, casual dining establishments and health clubs.

Fix8 is available at Ocado, Whole Foods Market, and over 300 independent bars, cafes and restaurants.



The Country House Department

www.thecountryhousedepartment.com

In June 2020, **Andrew Russell (Hf 97)**, launched a new estate agency business, designed to disrupt the top end of the country house market.

Both Andrew and his business partner had previously worked for Strutt & Parker, where Andrew ran a regional office. Together they launched The Country House Department, a modern medium for the finest country homes. Based in Oxford, they operate across Oxfordshire, the Cotswolds and Berkshire.

They created the business because they felt that this sector of the market had been dominated by a handful of established national agents for decades and complacency had set in. The Country House Department does not have a high street presence and, as such, lower costs allow them to operate in a more flexible and bespoke way for their clients. The ethos is very much low volume, high quality with an emphasis on the best client care.

There are a number of ways in which Andrew’s new model differs from that of traditional estate agents, however, a major difference is the way in which they present their clients’ properties to the market. They created their own style of photography, borrowing from the world of luxury travel and lifestyle magazines. The rich and immersive photography, coupled with film footage and virtual tours, really provides a sense of lifestyle that a property has to offer; not just the bricks and mortar. The Country House Department also charges fees in a different way, using a set rate fee structure, that is transparent and fair.

The Country House Department operates from a selling price of £1m upwards and, in the few months they have been trading, they have already sold some beautiful houses and have a strong register of stunning homes for sale.

If you have a property that you are considering selling, or you can introduce anyone to Andrew, The Country House Department are offering a 10% discount off their set rate fee structure for anyone quoting ‘Uppingham2020’.

Lifesaver

www.lifesaverpower.com

Archie Wilkinson (Hf 03) co-founded Lifesaver two years ago – producing power banks that charge your phone across live events and venues. Lifesaver stands out from competitors as a certified B Corp (the 199th in the UK), meeting the highest standards of social and environmental impact.

Since it started, Lifesaver has reached 40,000 customers, across 11 countries, from events like the Ryder Cup in Paris, to Formula 1 in nine countries, the Grand National and European festivals. They have also worked with big brands like Nissan, Google and Three mobile.

Lifesaver was on track to grow 400% again this year but then the pandemic hit, smashing their revenues to zero. A couple of weeks into lockdown, and after watching the daily briefing with nurse, Ruth Kelly, they launched a new campaign *Lifeline to the Frontline* (lifelinetothefrontline.com). With an endorsement from former US Astronaut Scott Kelly, and founding donations from Nissan, Octopus Energy, Landbot and Boodles, they have donated over 1,200 Lifesaver power banks to nurses and patients in 16 hospitals across the UK, keeping them powered and connected.



The company is now seeking £180k via EIS to develop their product, making it more sustainable, and to help shake up the \$27bn power bank market.

For more information contact archie@lifesaverpower.com

Bluetree Group

www.bluetreegroup.co.uk

In 2009, when Uppingham friends **James Kinsella** and **Adam Carnell (both Fgh 00)** launched *instantprint*, from a small and ‘freezing’ office in Newcastle, the pair aimed to make the world of print as easy as possible for small companies. After making a name for itself, with initiatives such as advice for start-ups, artwork checks and free design templates, *instantprint* joined forces with *Bluetree Design and Print*, a traditional screen printer focused on selling large format print to major corporate clients, and they formed the *Bluetree Group*.

Bluetree Group has established itself as the largest online print company in the UK and, as well as winning Company of the Year at the Sheffield Business Awards, the firm has twice been named in *The Sunday Times Fast Track 100*. The company’s success has been built on its ability to deliver a comprehensive range of marketing materials and offering its customers a wide variety of production options.

Bluetree Group was expecting the firm’s growth trajectory to continue in 2020, but, like the majority of businesses around the globe, the company was halted in its tracks by the widespread impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. As the virus took hold in March, print sales plummeted dramatically. With revenues hovering at around 20 per cent of the company’s regular takings, James and Adam took decisive action.

Adam comments: “The first move we made was to adapt our print ranges in order to serve companies operating within the pandemic.” James adds, “We introduced new products to do with social distancing, like floor stickers and signage. We then turned our hand to visors and it was at that point we began to consider manufacturing facemasks. Despite initial uncertainty, we soon discovered we were well positioned in that area. We’d recently purchased a new 45,000 square foot unit adjacent to our 100,000 square foot main site and converted this space for the mass production of Type IIR surgical masks; becoming the first company in the country to make them. We built clean room environments, retrained team members, and moved people across from the print side of the business to this new venture.”

Perhaps the biggest challenge *Bluetree Group* has encountered throughout this period is a difficulty in acquiring the raw materials

necessary for mask production, which, understandably, have been some of the planet’s hottest commodities. As a solution, the firm devised its own material, a vital and highly sought-after meltblown fabric, used as a filter layer in all grades of surgical mask. It is the latest noteworthy event in what has proved to be a transformative year for *Bluetree Group*. At a time when unemployment levels throughout the country are increasing, the expansion of their operations has created over 400 new jobs for the local workforce.

James concludes “We are incredibly fortunate to have an amazing team who have embraced all of the challenges that have come our way. We think the future is bright for *Bluetree Group*, on both the print and surgical mask sides of the business. Throughout the pandemic we’ve demonstrated how well we can adapt, and I believe we’re well positioned to continue growing in both segments.”



James Kinsella and Adam Carnell – labelled ‘the heroes who rose to the PPE challenge’ by the *Daily Mail* in August when their achievements to help make Britain more self-sufficient in PPE were covered in the press.



Simple Cyber Life

Simplecyberlife.com

In February 2020, **Jonny Pelter (SH 01)**, a cyber security expert from London, launched SimpleCyberLife.com – a revolutionary new solution that helps families protect themselves online. Following the launch, Jonny was interviewed live on a BBC News Business Briefing and, within a few months, the company was selected for the O2 /Telefonica NCSC (National Cyber Security Centre) Cyber Accelerator programme. They have been working with O2 and the British intelligence agencies ever since to refine their proposition.

Jonny explains: "With the arrival of Covid-19, online safety for families is more important than ever. Cyber-crime has sky-rocketed as a result of the pandemic and the sector is begging for an innovative solution. The consumer online safety market is focused on producing 'point solutions', e.g. a more intelligent parental control app. These, by their very nature, provide an incomplete solution to the variety of attacks being subjected to families online. Instead of creating yet another point solution, we've prototyped a disruptive web platform that acts as an aggregator, designed to make the implementation of existing protective technology much easier.

So, what does Simple Cyber Life actually do? When you join the website, it helps you understand what protection your family specifically needs, helps get that protection set up on your devices and online accounts and then provides ongoing support for any questions or issues you have going forward.

Our goal is to provide technological peace of mind for families the world over: Not sure whether you need anti-virus software or not? Is your son being cyber bullied on Facebook or is your daughter receiving illicit messages on Instagram? We can help.

At present, we're currently fundraising from angel investors so if any OUs are interested in investing, please do get in touch on jonny@simplecyberlife.com."

HASTE

www.haste.cc

Founded in 2018 by **Andy Hastings (SH 93)**, Haste is a sports coaching business specialising in cycling performance and nutrition.

After a successful career racing on the road and track, Andy now coaches others to reach their full potential by sharing his extensive knowledge and experiences. The regime he followed to win national and international titles involved learning about the biomechanics of the human body, training techniques and nutrition for performance and recovery. His 1:1 coaching, for racers and club cyclists, offers practical steps tailored to individual goals and lifestyles.

Haste also organises bespoke cycle trips catering for all styles of riding, abilities and budgets throughout Europe. From two-week fully immersive pro-team cycling experiences in Majorca, to more leisurely tours to Lake Como to watch and ride the prestigious Il Lombardia race, as well as trips to the famous mountains of the French Alps. Andy devises pre-trip training programmes to help riders reach peak performance – as well as ongoing advice whilst away. He can even organise a support car and bike mechanic to accompany riders, for those wanting the full concierge experience.

Look out for the Haste YouTube channel, launching soon, with tutorial videos to help those who prefer training with visual aids.

If you are looking for a coach, nutritional advice, are taking on a sporting challenge or would like to plan a cycling trip abroad, Andy would love to hear from you on andy@haste.cc



TechNiche

techniche-europe.com

After leaving the major events industry, **James Russell (Hf 98)** set up a clothing technology company called TechNiche in 2014 which sells across 50 countries worldwide. James recently developed a unique cooling suit for migrant workers in Qatar; building the stadiums for the FIFA 2022 Qatar World Cup. Currently 80,000 suits have been deployed in the region, reducing heat stress.

James is also launching a new luxury activewear brand called Phantom Apparel London which will be available across Europe by 2022. He lives in London with his wife Ellie and two boys, Humphrey and Bertie.

Left: James Russell (right) and Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary for Health.