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# CAPITAL IDEAS\$

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**Y**OU KNOW THIS: There are no million-dollar business ideas that don't need at least a few bucks to get started. Those bucks might come in the form of bootstrapping, cashing out your savings, confident relatives, or even VCs—but one way or another, you don't get from idea to satisfied customer without investment of some kind easing the way.

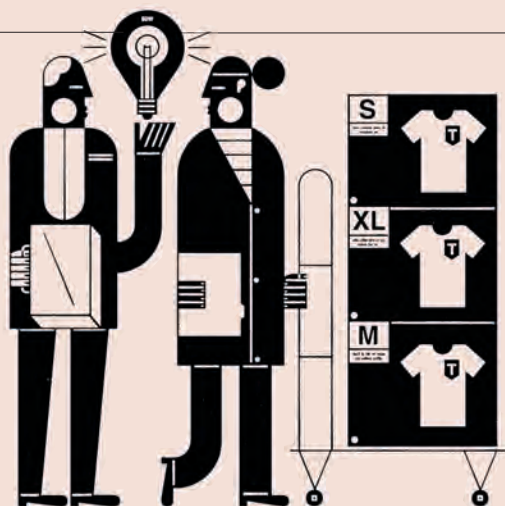
And the need for money isn't just to start. Scaling isn't cheap either. There's more staff, and more marketing, and more development and systems and inventory, and so much more. That requires more. Money, that is.

No surprise that some 40 percent of the already

successful Inc. 5000 are on the lookout for funding.

So, whether it's for the next month or the next five years, a smart founder needs to constantly understand how and where to find the necessary dollars—and how to deploy them wisely. There is one thing you can do that'll help. Because so many other entrepreneurs have had to contend with this business problem, and because we at Inc. know from entrepreneurs, all you have to do is turn the page. No, you won't find a blank check. But you will find a collection of the best tips, advice, and inspiration from founders who got it right. Read on for what you might call the money quotes.

## Doing It Yourself

**Bert Jacobs**

Co-founder  
**LIFE IS GOOD**

“One of the things we did in the beginning that’s very effective, and I don’t see enough companies doing, was go to our supply chain. We went to local screen printers and said, ‘We don’t have any money, but we have really good ideas. Here’s some great artwork. Will you front us 144 T-shirts?’ And some took a risk. We paid them back, with a little extra, pretty quickly, hoping that they would then lend us 500 T-shirts. And they did. And then the 500 T-shirts became 5,000 T-shirts.”

*Boston-based lifestyle brand Life is Good now has a reported \$100 million in annual sales.*

03.

01.

02.



04.

#### 01 | **Cherie Hoeger**

*Co-founder and CEO*  
**SAALT**

“Saalt started as a side hustle that was self-funded and supplemented with SBA loans to fund inventory purchases. We worked out of my husband’s real estate office. We reached profitability in our second year of business and have been able to maintain that profitability and fund growth through reinvested earnings. Budgets are still tight, but taking the self-funded route affords a lot of peace of mind, and we don’t have to answer to investors beyond ourselves.”

*Hoeger co-founded the Boise, Idaho, period-care company in 2018. In three years it has reached eight figures in sales.*

#### 02 | **Simon Taylor**

*Co-founder and CEO*  
**HYCU**

“Don’t rush into raising if you don’t have to. Waiting can be a major advantage. Focus on where you want the business to go before gauging how much gas to put in the tank. Take time to find investors that have the right synergy with your vision before you need to raise and have an opinion on what you’re looking for in a VC.”

*HYCU, an SaaS company headquartered in Boston, closed an \$87.5 million round in March.*

#### 03 | **Eileen Fisher**

*Founder and CEO*  
**EILEEN FISHER INC.**

“Borrowing money really went against my grain. I didn’t like to ask because I’d been very independent from the time I was a kid. I asked some friends, and, at one point, I asked my parents, who’ve never given me any money. And that was really painful, but I felt like, I have \$40,000 worth of orders; I can borrow against this. This is real.”

*Fisher started her eponymous fashion brand in 1984 with \$350. It’s valued at \$400 million today.*

#### 04 | **Dave Gilboa**

*Co-founder and co-CEO*  
**WARBY PARKER**

“We were terrified of losing other people’s money. So between the four founders, we took our life savings—\$30,000 each—and we didn’t raise outside funding for our first three years, even though we had a lot of signals that there was real consumer demand. If I had to do it over again, I probably wouldn’t be as penny-wise in the early days, and especially invest in hiring really great experienced team members early on.”

*DTC eyewear brand Warby Parker raised well over \$500 million in funding before going public in 2021.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 99

# A Change of Domain

How Donuts Inc. is shifting the way businesses use domain names to create their online identity

In 2014, hundreds of new top-level domains—the letters in a website address that come after the dot—were introduced, such as .live, .attorney, and .news. Businesses no longer needed to come up with a company name based on whether the .com address is available. They could now create a domain name that was a truer reflection of their business identity.

Also that year, Donuts Inc., a Bellevue, Washington-based tech company was given the rights to sell more than 200 of these new top-level domains. (The Donuts name is itself a word-play on the DNS servers that translate domain names to IP servers.) Until then, the domain name industry was dominated by one player, which focused on .com URLs. Donuts saw a chance to expand the web extension horizons. “Our founders saw a future where consumers had a choice and the opportunity to be true to their business name,” says Mina Neuberg, Donuts’ chief marketing officer.

## RAISING AWARENESS

It’s taken a while for businesses to have that “aha! moment,” where they realize they have a choice in their domain name. But once companies realize they aren’t confined to one kind of address, they quickly see the benefits of having something more tailored and sector specific. “You’re able to use the left and right of the dot to tell the world what you

do,” Neuberg says. “This allows you to have a short domain that’s authentic, to the point, and tells your story.”

## CHEAPER AND SAFER DOMAIN EXTENSIONS

It also can be less expensive to purchase a more industry-focused domain. Countless companies have had to switch their business name because the address they wanted was already taken, while others contemplated paying current registrants thousands for their preferred address. Donuts’ domains typically cost between \$5 and \$50.

Donuts’ extensions also offer many security features not available with other domain names, says Neuberg. When people purchase a domain, Donuts automatically identifies and blocks a large number of potentially malicious variations of their company’s name. That helps them protect themselves and their users from phishing schemes that use names that look similar to their own, as hackers are prevented from registering false iterations of that domain name.

It won’t be long before more sector-specific, top-level domains are everywhere. “Entrepreneurs are realizing that they don’t have to compromise on their online identity because they can’t get the right domain name,” she says. “The tide is starting to turn.”

DONUTS.DOMAINS

# 94%

of Fortune 50 companies own or use a Donuts domain to showcase their authentic online identity

AMAZON.CARE

DISNEY.PLUS

IKEA.TODAY

donuts inc

# Nº3628

2021 Ranking

# \$103

million

2020 Revenue

# 45%

Share of new top-level domains owned by Donuts

# 107

Employees

# 38%

OF STARTUPS FAIL  
BECAUSE THEY  
RUN OUT OF CASH  
OR ARE UNABLE  
TO RAISE CAPITAL,  
THE NO. 1 REASON  
FOR FAILURE

01 | **Tariq Farid**  
*Founder and CEO*  
**EDIBLE ARRANGEMENTS**

“My mother would always say you have to avoid debt like it’s a disease. I think it’s easy money that gets you in trouble. When you bootstrap, it’s magical how many things you can do when you have to figure things out. So I wouldn’t say avoid debt—avoid too much money or money you really don’t need.”

*Edible Arrangements, an Atlanta-based franchise business that sells fresh-fruit bouquets, had a reported \$587 million in 2020 sales.*



02 | **Michael Acton Smith**  
*Co-founder and co-CEO*  
**CALM**

“We grew to about eight million downloads without spending anything on marketing, partially because, while we would have loved to spend money on marketing, we couldn’t get investors on board. So we had to cut our costs to the bone, and just grow organically and think of viral ideas.”

*Smith’s mental-wellness brand raised \$75 million in 2020, driving its valuation to \$2 billion.*

01.



**01 | Lisa Price**

*Founder*  
**CAROL'S DAUGHTER**

"Even though I had insurance and things like that, there was this feeling of 'I'm just one mishap away from all of this falling apart.' And, at the time, when I decided to take on an investor, I had felt that I had done a lot by myself and 'I can't do any more.' I got into a warehouse, I got on Oprah. But to get to the next phase, there was just no other way."

*Price bootstrapped her beauty products brand for eight years before taking out a loan. In 2014, she sold Carol's Daughter to cosmetics giant L'Oréal.*

02.

03.



**02 | Kimberly Bryant**

*Founder and CEO*  
**BLACK GIRLS CODE**

"When I started Black Girls Code, I didn't have any funding whatsoever, but I had left my corporate job and I had a nice little stash in my 401(k) and my buyout package. I spent every dime of my 401(k). It's how Black Girls Code was able to survive for its first year."

*Since Bryant founded Black Girls Code in 2011, almost 30,000 students have participated in the technology education nonprofit's events.*

**03 | Michael Walters**

*Founder and president*  
**STUDIO503**

"Seldom is there an individual who is the absolute best at every position and function of the business. Think about finding other bootstrappers who have abilities and passions in areas different from your own and see if you can form a coalition or collaborative network, where you can each share valuable insights and advice with one another, without adding costs."

*In 2021, Walters's strategic business development firm studio503 was an Inc. 5000 honoree, and ranked as the fastest-growing private business in Minnesota.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 103

# Powering Unprecedented Insights for Health Care and Beyond

Deep subject matter expertise, the right team and technology, and strong client partnerships help Analytical Wizards serve the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies

**S**peeding up processes and improving decision making is a good thing for any business. But in health care, efficiencies can save lives. Analytical Wizards is a data analytics company that enables meaningful benefits in pharma and biotech, such as accelerating time to market for critical drugs and improving patient outcomes through better adherence to therapy.

The company's founders were determined to better use data and analytics in health care. Early partnerships with two leading pharmaceutical companies helped them develop their platforms. Today, six of the top 10 global pharmaceutical companies and five of the top 10 biotech companies are clients.

## IMPACTFUL PARTNERSHIPS, EXPERIENCE, AND PEOPLE

Leading companies use Analytical Wizards to automate resource-heavy processes, scale complex analytical models using artificial insights (AI), and machine learning (ML) to analyze disparate sources of data. CEO and Founder Ram Sharma explains the solutions reflect domain expertise as well as the experience of a talented, multi-disciplinary leadership team.

Together, that team has built two unique solutions. The WIZ platform analyzes and optimizes promotional spending. The IZE engine integrates multiple data assets to generate business insights across teams, from performance tracking to predictive triggers to identify new patients. Both tools

are data agnostic, so users can integrate data for real-time insights.

Chief Strategy Officer Jaya Subramaniam shares an illustration of the scale and parallel processing power of WIZ. A big pharma client had 30 brands and 160 markets. The client relied on five global team members, 10 regional team members, and three different vendor teams to generate marketing mix for the five biggest brands across the top 10 markets four times a year. Today, the WIZ platform enables ongoing analysis of the entire portfolio across every market, with a team of just five.

Sharma shares a different success story. One biotech client deployed IZE to accelerate clinical trial recruitment across three therapeutic areas. "They had never seen this kind of an impact and acceleration before," he says.

## EXPANDING BEYOND HEALTH CARE

Analytical Wizards' leadership team believes their solutions can help with analytics in other industries. One former client who now works in a multinational pizza restaurant chain, thought WIZ could benefit his new company. The team is now working on a pilot.

With talented people and strong platforms and solutions, Analytical Wizards intends to continue to make data-driven decision making and analytics scalable, efficient, and in real time, yet user-friendly and flexible.

[ANALYTICALWIZARDS.COM](https://ANALYTICALWIZARDS.COM)



Ram Sharma, founder and CEO, Analytical Wizards

**Nº1741**  
2021 Ranking

**263%**  
3-Year Growth

**100**  
Employees

**\$6.1**  
million  
in Revenue



# IP Law that Maximizes Clients' Business Opportunities

Caldwell Intellectual Property Law integrates with its clients to monetize innovations and build IP portfolios that reap financial success



## Nº349

2021 Ranking

## 1,363%

3-Year Growth

## 98.8%

Patent Application Allowance Rate  
(industry avg.: 62%)

## 4

locations

3 in U.S., 1 in London

Intellectual property (IP) law has a reputation as a hidebound corner of the legal field, but that's not the case for Caldwell Intellectual Property Law. Just like the firm's clients, many of whom are famous for being iconoclasts and innovators, founder and managing member Keegan Caldwell has developed a unique approach to the practice of IP law.

He started the firm in 2016 to provide quality and strategic IP services focused on monetization. With a foundation built on the core values of transparent trust, team first, and empirical strategy, the firm aims to maximize its clients' profitability.

Caldwell qualified to take the bar exam not by attending law school but by reading the law, à la Abe Lincoln and Kim Kardashian. He credits the collaborative ethos of his client base as the source of his firm's team-first spirit.

### BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP

While a recent American Bar Association diversity report found that women comprise just 22 percent of registered patent attorneys and agents, at Caldwell IP

Law, women accounted for 36 percent of new hires in the latest recruitment round.

Over the past three years, Caldwell IP Law has grown into a multi-office enterprise with a presence on both U.S. coasts and in London. Revenue has grown by more than 1,300 percent, the employee roster has mushroomed from two to more than thirty, and this is the second year in a row it's been in the top 500 of the Inc. 5000 list.

Last year, the top 10 IP law firms in the U.S. had an average patent application allowance rate of 61.7 percent and an abandonment rate of 29.5 percent, according to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Caldwell IP Law's numbers were 100 percent and 0.6 percent, respectively.

### HELPING OTHERS SUCCEED

Caldwell finds even greater reward in the role his firm plays in helping other businesses succeed, especially those that are underserved. "The arc of my life story includes some real low points, and I'm indebted to those who helped me get a second chance," he says.

The firm works with organizations that help mentor aspiring entrepreneurs who are currently incarcerated. Right now, it is helping one such individual who reached out after reading the firm's profile in Inc. magazine last year. "He has come up with an innovative idea to fundamentally improve a specific area of health care, and we are happy for the opportunity to help him pursue that dream," Caldwell says.

CALDWELLIP.COM



Left to right: Julie Tolek, Lois Artz, Emily Gaukstern, Lilly Mucciarone, and Katherine Rubino of Caldwell Intellectual Property Law



**John Mackey**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**WHOLE FOODS MARKET**

"We literally opened the first store before we were ready to open it, because we didn't have any more money. We couldn't meet the payroll. So we had to start selling some groceries to give us some cash flow. I remember we got a truckload of apple juice because we just didn't have enough inventory. So we just kind of filled the shelves with a lot of

apple juice so it didn't look empty. But people ask me, 'How long it did it take that first store to be profitable?' It took until about 2 o'clock in the afternoon on the first day."

*Mackey founded Whole Foods in 1980. The Austin-based supermarket chain went public in 1992 and was acquired by Amazon in 2017.*

**01 | Omar Palacios**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**BRING IT**

"Accounts receivable are the easiest source of cash and, at the same time, the easiest to lose. So be careful with spending money in the early stages. Spend a maximum of 85 percent of the cash

you have in, on a weekly or monthly basis."

*Based in Cary, North Carolina, Palacios's business and technology consulting firm is No. 912 on the 2021 Inc. 5000 list.*



**02 | Donie Yamamoto**  
Founder  
**VITAL PET LIFE**

"We managed our cash flow by putting our money back into the business. We used our cash for inventory and foundational infrastructure, like hiring contractors to support marketing and sales, to keep focused on growing the core operations."

*Yamamoto has not taken on any outside funding for her Los Angeles-based sustainable pet product business, which is No. 348 on the 2021 Inc. 5000.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 106



# AI-Powered Contract Management

LinkSquares frees in-house legal departments from mundane contract management tasks, so they can become true strategic partners focused on revenue generation and cost containment



The LinkSquares executive team (from left to right): Tim Parilla, Andrew Leverone, Eric Alexander, Chris Combs, Luigi Testa, Vishal Sunak, Juliette Kopecky, Steve Travaglini

**T**he lightbulb moment that sparked LinkSquares' establishment occurred when co-founders Vishal Sunak and Chris Combs were working together at a tech company undergoing an acquisition. The parent company asked for a summary of the 6,000 or so existing customer contracts, and because the company hadn't organized or been tracking its contracts, that request just wasn't possible. It would take many months to complete.

"That's when we realized that we can't be the only company that doesn't know what's inside its contracts," Sunak says. "And that's how LinkSquares got started." Although companies haven't paid much attention to contracts historically, says

Sunak, the future of the business often depends on what you've agreed to in contracts. "Contracts define all the major relationships that you have with your employees, with partners, with suppliers, with customers," points out Sunak. Not knowing what's inside your contracts, or not having control of what goes into them before they get signed, is dangerous.

Organizations can't afford to operate that way anymore. The good news is they don't have to.

## AT TECHNOLOGY'S LEADING EDGE

Although contract management technology has been around for about 20 years, it has advanced significantly in recent



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**Nº253**  
2021 Ranking

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**1806%**  
3-Year Growth

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**62**  
Employees

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**2015**  
Year Founded

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years through the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technology, Sunak explains.

That new capability to track, analyze, and compose contracts in seconds can have a transformative effect on a company's cash flow. Advanced contract management capabilities "give businesses greater command of their money going in and money going out," Sunak says.

And when LinkSquares' average client tracks 3,000+ contracts at a time, manual administration of those agreements "is an impossible ask," Sunak says.

#### **ELEVATING THE LEGAL DEPARTMENT'S STATUS**

"Legal teams are a strategic part of the business and they, understandably, want a seat at the executive table," says Sunak. Now that advanced legal technology makes it possible for members of the legal department to provide proactive insights around contracts, those teams can become true business drivers. "We always say that legal should be involved in each major business decision and can really help give companies a competitive edge," he explains.

Leveraging the capabilities of the LinkSquares platform, companies can save money, become more efficient, and

identify new business opportunities.

"The reality is that many legal teams are spending 80 or 90 percent of their time on the most mundane tasks, like renaming contracts, trying to track what their company agreed to in a spreadsheet or in Salesforce or ERP systems," he says, "when there's a better way to operate." Eliminating labor-intensive manual processes that can't scale opens up a world of possibilities, Sunak says.

The LinkSquares platform can provide clients with insights into its contract terms, display summaries, and issue alerts before contracts expire, among many other features.

Alternatives for searching large numbers of contracts for specific details include hiring an expensive law firm or offshore legal services company, costing tens of thousands of dollars and months of work; or using an AI-powered contract management system that will deliver the results in minutes as part of the system cost, explains Sunak.

"That speed, cost savings, and risk reduction deliver a huge ROI to our customers, and it's why we're on the Inc. 5000," he says.

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[LINKSQUARES.COM](https://LINKSQUARES.COM)



LinkSquares employees gather in Boston to celebrate the company's recent round of funding and growth.

01 | **Lucia Huang**  
Co-founder and CEO  
OSMIND

“Metrics are secondary in this market. The strongest proofpoint that will drive most VCs to bid is that you have a term sheet from another VC. Build close relationships with a few investors, use that momentum to attract interest from other investors, and you’ve built yourself a flywheel of FOMO.”

*Huang launched San Francisco digital health startup Osmind in 2020 and has already raised \$17.2 million.*

01.

02.

COURTESY SUBJECT (A)

# 0.7%

CHANCE FOR A  
STARTUP TO BE  
FUNDED BY A TOP  
VC, ACCORDING TO  
ANDREESSEN  
HOROWITZ FOUND-  
ING PARTNER MARC  
ANDREESSEN



COURTESY SUBJECT/2

03.

## 02 | Emily Smith

Founder and CEO  
**TELETEACHERS**

“Network, tell everyone you’re raising, start before you need to—so you can be having casual conversations and not be desperate.”

*Smith’s Chicago-based edtech startup TeleTeachers has raised \$2.7 million since its founding in 2019.*

## 03 | Zuleyka Strasner

Founder and CEO  
**ZERO GROCERY**

“I’m just not what most people think of when they think of a founder of a fast-scaling tech company. It takes a lot of work to convince people I’m the right person, I know what I’m doing, and I know what I’m talking about. But one of my superpowers is I will talk to anybody and everybody about what I’m doing. And I’m extremely resilient.”

*Strasner has raised \$4.7 million to build out the Richmond, California-based plastics-free grocery delivery service.*

## 04 | Vlad Magdalin

Co-founder and CEO  
**WEBFLOW**

“I would personally take a significantly lower valuation or work with a less well-known VC firm if it meant ensuring that I was working with a person who genuinely believes what I believe as a founder. Often, entrepreneurs forget that fundraising is the start of a decade-long partnership, not just a financing event.”

*San Francisco-based Webflow counts Y Combinator and Khosla Ventures among its investors. The website-design platform has raised nearly \$215 million.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 110



04.

# Business With a Soul: People Before Profit Is a Success Secret

Hafiz Sikder's people-first mindset has been a powerful catalyst to Axiom Healthcare Strategies' success

**H**afiz Sikder has nearly 20 years of experience in various leadership roles in the life sciences industry. Partnering with several big-name consulting agencies, he noticed one thing: the relationship was often transactional. When he left to start his boutique oncology and rare disease think tank in 2016, he vowed to change that.

At Axiom Healthcare Strategies, Sikder disrupted the model by building a team with deep clinical and commercial expertise and innovative minds. He embraced a people-first strategy, which turned out to be the secret to his success. An ecosystem that focuses on people—clients, patients, and teammates—all centered on a singular goal of transforming patients' lives.

"We're not a traditional agency where we will take on a book of business and manage it like managing a budget line," says Sikder. "We will always come back and say, 'Have you considered this?' or 'How about this pivot in thinking?' The money can always come later."

And it has. In just four years, Axiom Healthcare Strategies surged 685 percent in growth, creating a disruption in the typical consulting industry.

"We are taking work from brand-name consulting shops because clients cannot get the bespoke level of service we offer," Sikder says. "We have zero attrition from a client perspective."

## THE POWER OF PEOPLE

Sikder is also a disruptor in his culture. "When we were hiring talent away from our competitors, some of the candidates asked if we provided after-hours meals," he says. "I told them, 'I'd rather you don't eat dinner at work. Unless there's a crisis, shut down, go home.' That's not the life I am seeking for myself or for my team."

Axiom's benefits include Summer Fridays, quarterly Axiom days, SPOT bonuses, and shut-down week. And pandemic support includes surprise DoorDash dinner drop and cash payouts for unused vacation days.

Sikder has built an ecosystem of smart, caring teammates who can step in to lead the brand planning of a \$12 billion oncology brand and help a new start-up biotech launch its first niche drug.

Instead of cubicles and corner offices, Team Axiom comes together around a giant table. The flat organization has no org charts, managers, departments, or supervisors. Business consultants told Sikder, "You need reporting structures and systems. That's what



Hafiz Sikder, managing principal of Axiom Healthcare Strategies

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**Nº717**

2021 Ranking

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**685%**

3-Year Growth

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**2016**

Year Founded

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**53**Thinkers at  
the Table

traditional companies do.”

“We are not here to follow tradition; we are here to build a disruptive legacy,” quips Sikder with a smile.

#### BUSINESS WITH A SOUL

Giving back to society is an equally important part of leaving an enduring legacy, and Sikder built caring for others into Axiom’s DNA. Growing up in Bangladesh with a Jesuit and Muslim upbringing, he saw what it means to have a life with service at the core.

The think tank’s nonprofit arm, Axiom REACH, offers cancer patients free rides to their doctor’s appointments, provides full tuition scholarships and pre-professional support to underrepresented students pursuing careers in health care through its unique cohort-model ARGOS program, and sponsors lodging at Hope Lodge, NYC,

providing free housing for cancer patients receiving treatment.

“The Axiom REACH foundation has significantly contributed to the American Cancer Society over the last three years, providing critical funding and support,” said Dr. Mark Goldberg, American Cancer Society Board member. “The Axiom team has now set their sights on helping ACS obtain funding to address disparities that prevent equal access to cancer screenings and care across all communities.”

Team Axiom strongly believes genetic coding should dictate one’s prognosis in cancer, not your zip code. “It’s unacceptable that, as a society, we would allow such disparities across racial divides,” Sikder says. “We are here to change that.”

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AXIOMHCS.COM





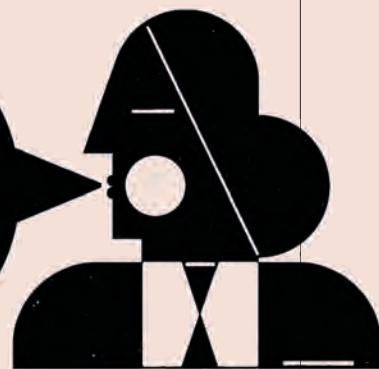
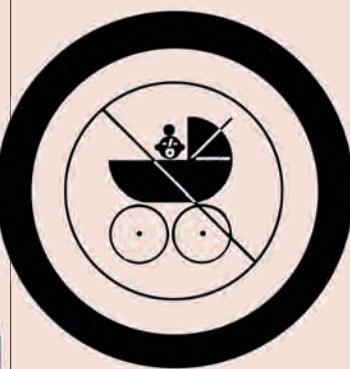
01 | **Alexa von Tobel**

*Co-founder and  
managing partner*

**INSPIRED CAPITAL**

“You’re not just looking for capital. The best founders are recognizing what they want. They want capital that comes with unfair advantages and capital that allows them to go faster.”

*Prior to founding venture fund Inspired Capital, von Tobel founded and led the personal finance business LearnVest.*



02 | **Joanna Griffiths**

*Founder and CEO*

**KNIX**

“This past March, I raised more than \$50 million while I was pregnant with twins. My one rule was if someone spoke negatively about my pregnancy and my ability to run Knix while raising a family, they were removed from the investment process. When you’re building a business, you’re building a brand that has values, so be sure to align yourself with those who share the same values, or they ultimately will not understand your brand.”

*Griffiths has raised more than \$50 million for her Toronto-based DTC intimate apparel brand.*



CONTINUED ON PAGE 113

COURTESY (SUBJECT)

# Partnering with America's Leading Endodontists

Providing administrative support to leading endodontists nationwide is fueling Endo1 Partners' impressive growth

One of the key challenges of any medical or dental practice is managing the administrative burden. Recognizing that, endodontic partnership organization (EPO™), Endo1 Partners was formed by four endodontists to provide comprehensive business and operational support services to endodontic practices.

Endodontists' dental surgical specialty focuses on the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of injuries to the tooth pulp, including root canal treatments and other procedures related to the interior of the tooth. "At Endo1, we partner with best-in-class providers across the country to reduce their administrative burden, so they can spend more time at the heart of their practice, providing high-quality dental care to patients," says Dr. Matthew Haddad, co-founder and co-chief executive officer of Endo1 Partners.

## DELEGATING ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES

Endo1 Partners was established in 2019 by Dr. Daryl Dudum, Dr. Matthew Haddad, co-founders and co-chief executive officers, and Dr. Mark Haddad and Dr. Darron Rishwain, co-founders and co-chief clinical officers. "We see a growing number of dental specialists who are weighed down by the burden of complex administrative tasks taking them away from practicing dentistry," Haddad adds. "As endodontists ourselves, we understand the day-to-day challenges of running a practice."

By joining Endo1, endodontists have the ability to expand and increase efficiency of their practices by accessing multiple resources and support functions, including custom marketing, IT support, human



From left to right: Drs. Daryl Dudum, Matthew Haddad, Mark Haddad, and Darron Rishwain



# Nº141

2021 Ranking

# \$57.7

million

2020 Revenue

# 2936%

Three-Year  
Growth

# 305

Employees

resources, payroll services, clinical compliance, and educational support. Additionally, new partners benefit from the knowledge and expertise of a network of successful endodontists and industry thought leaders.

## PRACTICING INDEPENDENTLY WITH A PATIENT-FIRST APPROACH

"Our primary focus has consistently been patient and doctor satisfaction. This truly resonates with the specialists we bring on board," says Dudum. "By joining the EPO, they enjoy the benefits of practicing independently while taking part in the benefits of a national partnership."

Endo1 has expanded into 16 new states, including Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Maryland, Oklahoma, Virginia, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. Endo1 now supports more than 85 practices and more than 130 specialists and is on track to exceed its goal of partnering with more than 100 locations by year-end 2021.

ENDO1PARTNERS.COM

# YouTube Marketing Pioneer Has a Billion-dollar Future

The CEO of AdOutreach is just 24, but he's been running a successful tech business for half his life



**Nº87**

2021 Ranking

**4515%**

3-Year Growth

**5500+**

Number of  
Clients/Customers

**1500**

Number of  
Workshop Clients

**T**he tale of catching the entrepreneurial bug as a child by starting a lemonade stand is almost a cliché. But that's what Aleric Heck, founder and CEO of AdOutreach, did. But Heck envisioned it as a way to generate seed capital for his real goal: a technology startup.

He achieved that goal at the ripe old age of 12 and repeated the process several times over during the next dozen years. Now 24, he sits atop a digital marketing enterprise with an eight-figure annual run rate. Along the way, he used cash flow from his ventures to pay for his college education and, ultimately, to launch AdOutreach.

His company's flagship offering is The YouTube Ads Workshop, a 10-week program where Heck and his team help their clients integrate YouTube ads into their marketing models. The program covers everything from scriptwriting to advanced targeting, helping clients launch, optimize, and scale their campaigns.

## "A-HA" MOMENTS DRIVING GROWTH

Heck grew his first tech venture, AppFind, into one of YouTube's largest app review channels, generating over 100 million views and more than 500,000 subscribers. Then, he convinced a developer to promote one of its apps with a YouTube ad that he produced. When a \$500 ad buy generated 11,000 downloads in just a week, the

developer offered him a six-figure salary with stock options to quit college and move to Silicon Valley.

Realizing he was onto something big—and wanting to remain the captain of his own ship—Heck declined. Instead, he used AppFind's considerable cash flow to launch App Outreach, a company that promotes mobile apps via YouTube ads.

## EXPORTABLE SCALABILITY

Heck's model could help all types of businesses generate leads and sales. He brought on Julia Gordy, a college friend who shared his vision of developing an incredible marketing empire, to help grow the AdOutreach team to more than 26 employees.

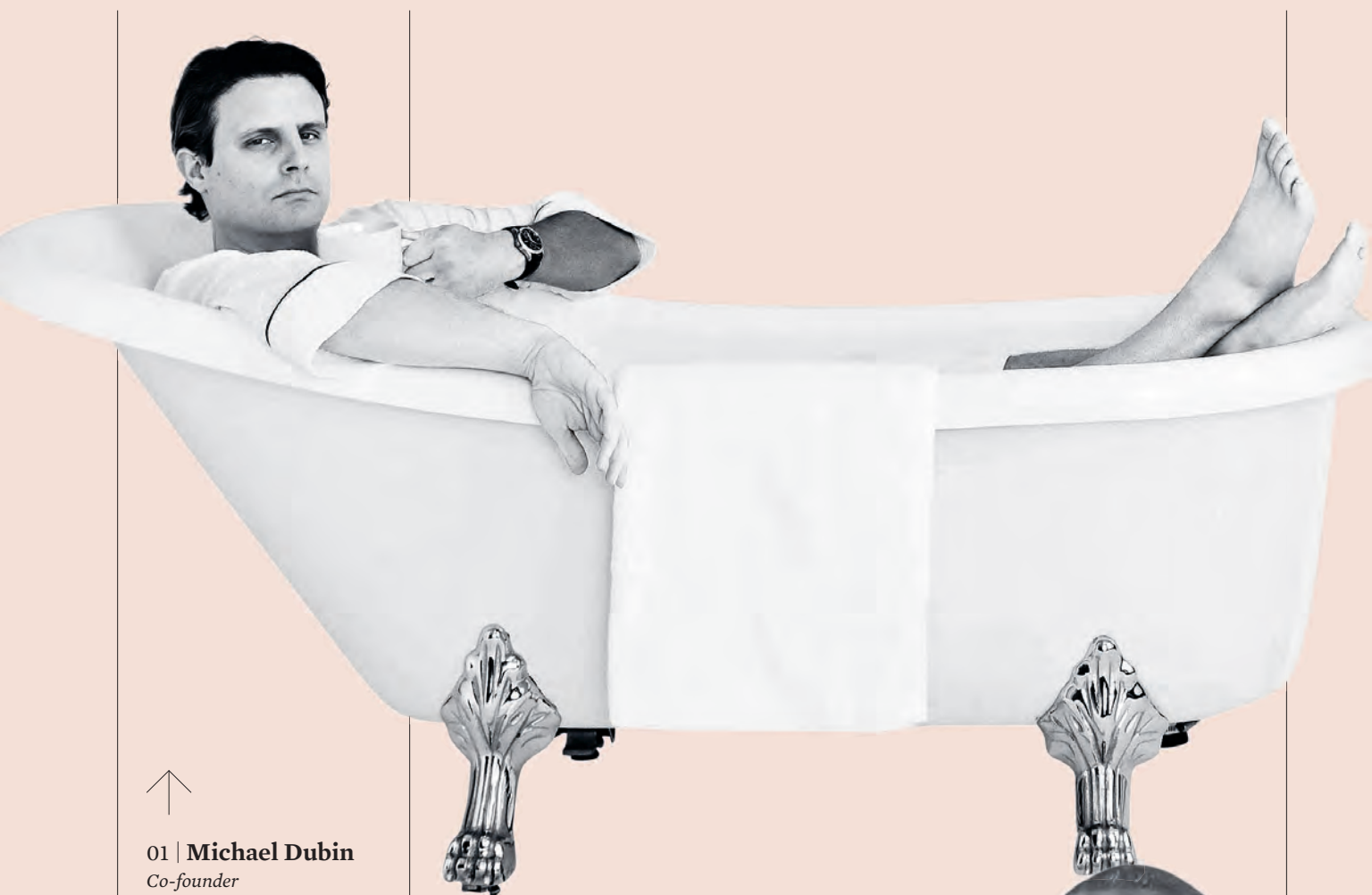
AdOutreach launched as a YouTube agency in 2017, but Heck recognized the scalability limitations that imposed. Many of his clients wanted to actually learn about YouTube advertising and handle it in house. He pivoted quickly to the workshop model that combines training with hands-on help.

"We've put together a dream team in our new headquarters in Austin and created a culture of empowerment," he says. "Value-driven video is the future of advertising, and I see us continuing to scale at the forefront of this movement. Our goal is to build a billion-dollar business."

ADOUTREACH.COM



Aleric Heck,  
founder and CEO  
of AdOutreach



**01 | Michael Dubin**  
Co-founder  
**DOLLAR SHAVE CLUB**

“You have to have a clear solution to a problem or a clear improvement on something that’s broken, or something that’s better. Because I don’t think people are looking for the next fancy purse, so to speak. Traditional VCs are looking for things that have the potential to be category killers, world changers. Big, big ideas.”

*In 2021, Dubin stepped down as CEO of Dollar Shave Club, the razor subscription business that sold to Unilever for \$1 billion.*

**02 | Chuma Ogunwole**  
Founder and COO  
**PYKA**

“Build a product that people are so excited to have that they’d do almost anything to have it—as if they’re lost in the desert and you’re offering them water. Then demonstrate that demand to your investors through letters of intent, customer contracts, or, most important, revenue. Fundraising gets way easier after that.”

*Pyka is an autonomous-electric-aircraft startup that has raised over \$11 million.*



# 13%

OF SMALL-BUSINESS OWNERS IN THE U.S. USE ROLLOVERS AS BUSINESS STARTUPS (ROBS) TO START THEIR COMPANIES

## 01 | Erin Carpenter

Founder and CEO  
**NUDE BARRE**

“In fundraising, I look at it as a numbers game—the more people you pitch, and the more noes you get, might just mean that you’re closer to a yes. It’s all about persistence and pounding the pavement—anything to keep up momentum and excitement.”

*In 2020, Nude Barre, a bodywear brand based in New York City, closed a \$1.4 million seed round.*

## 02 | Holly Thaggard

Founder and chair  
of the board  
**SUPERGOOP**

“Many interested investors had written letters. And we took every one of those meetings, knowing we were probably too small at the time, because we thought if we could share our brand story with 10 people in the room, they might just go home and tell 10 more people. You’ve got to meet with anybody who will listen to you.”

*San Antonio skin care brand Supergoop raised a \$6.5 million funding round in 2015. Three years later, its annual retail sales had reached \$40 million.*

02.

01.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 117

**Inc.  
5000** COMPANY SPOTLIGHT

# Building a Movement, Building a Brand

The founder of POWERHOME SOLAR, a leading solar energy company, shares his underdog story while evangelizing the advantages of solar

Earning a spot on the Inc. 5000 is always an achievement. But the bigger you get, the harder it is to pull it off. POWERHOME SOLAR's latest Inc. 5000 win—its fourth to date—may be the most impressive yet. The leading solar company grew from \$35 million in 2017, to more than \$365 million in 2020—a 940 percent three-year revenue growth.

Jayson Waller, POWERHOME SOLAR founding CEO and host of *True Underdog*, a Top 3 Entrepreneur podcast on Apple, says it's more than a business to him and the team—it's a movement.

## THE BATTERY ADVANTAGE

One reason behind the company's latest growth spurt is that it started offering customers solar battery storage from Generac in 2020. The battery stores unused solar energy, so people aren't left in the dark when solar panels aren't producing. To make it easier for customers, POWERHOME SOLAR developed an affordable financing option. The offer took off instantly. When COVID-19 hit, demand increased even more. Currently, more than 95 percent of POWERHOME SOLAR's customers are opting for the battery add-on.

Waller thinks people have had enough "of all the power outages and issues with the grid and utility companies." He believes going solar isn't just

about cost savings, but rather, energy independence. Offering the battery is a way "to do right by customers." It also is a feature many solar energy companies don't offer, he says.

## THIS WIN'S FOR THE UNDERDOGS

This isn't Waller's first rodeo. POWERHOME SOLAR is the third company he has bootstrapped. He shares what he has learned and interviews other rock star entrepreneurs on his popular podcast. He loves doing it, and it benefits the brand, too. Potential employees, customers, and partners get a chance to know Waller. They often are drawn to his candor and approachable style. "I didn't finish high school. I didn't go to college. So, a lot of people can relate to me. I come from a different mold. And I share that with people," he says.

Waller is an open book—which may be why he has written one. *Own Your Power*, available for pre-sale on Amazon, teaches readers how to break free and live an amazing life, using Waller's personal experiences as proof points. He hopes to show people that no matter where you come from, you can achieve big things. In this way, he is leading two movements: the rally for energy independence and the underdog crusade.

POWERHOME.COM



Jayson Waller,  
founding CEO of  
POWERHOME SOLAR

# Nº520

2021 Ranking

# 940%

3-Year Growth

# 2,100

Employees

# \$365

million

2020 Revenue



# Prioritizing People Helps This Business Thrive During Challenging Times

Putting people first fosters smart growth for SRP Environmental, a compliance and catastrophe response firm



Keith Sampson,  
CEO of SRP  
Environmental

## Nº2122

2021 Ranking

## 205%

3-Year Growth

## 60+

Employees

## \$23 million

2020 Revenue



**K**eith Sampson started a solo environmental consulting firm from his Shreveport, Louisiana, home in 1996. Today, SRP Environmental offers several distinct but related services with offices around the country. Sampson credits these diverse offerings, investments in technology, and proprietary methodologies as keys to the company's success. But the founder and CEO says the people who work for SRP are its most valuable asset.

### STEADY AND INTENTIONAL GROWTH

The original consulting business grew organically while adding new services, including industrial hygiene, safety training, Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) compliance assessments, and natural disaster response. In 2012, SRP expanded to new locations nationwide, making its first acquisition of another firm in Denver and its second of a Charlotte, North Carolina, company in 2016.

By operating as a single resource for environmental and safety compliance, SRP can help clients resolve multiple problems at once. The company also can quickly scale staff to meet any situation, which is a distinct competitive advantage.

This diversification kept SRP nimble during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it saw decreases in safety training offerings but increases in industrial hygiene and catastrophe response work. The oil and gas industry, a major source of clients,

was hit hard by the pandemic. But five hurricanes in the latter part of 2020 meant more disaster response work, leading to one of the company's strongest years. SRP expects to finish 2021 even stronger.

### A TEAM OF SMART, CAPABLE PEOPLE

Nurturing a cohesive company culture is also central to the company's success. "When people ask about the secret of my success, I say that you're only as good as the people around you," Sampson says.

The company invests in state-of-the-art technology and comprehensive staff training to ensure consistent adherence to their rigorous standard operating procedures.

These practices, combined with a strategy of promoting from within (the company's current COO started as a project manager) contribute to a low turn-over rate. Most staff members have stayed for 7 to 15 years. To encourage staff members in different locations to get to know each other, the company builds in time for socializing during virtual inter-office strategy meetings. Employees who are promoted train new hires, ensuring consistent service and inspiring confidence. And as Sampson looks to acquire more companies, he assesses them not just in terms of profitability and potential, but culture.

[SRPENvironmental.COM](http://SRPENvironmental.COM)

01 | **Damian Smith**  
*Founder, president, and CEO*  
**PEPPER FOSTER  
CONSULTING**

“Given that you are taking all the risk, you may be better off using lower-cost personal debt vehicles rather than business loans. Establish those personal lines of credit before you start the company, though, while you are still employed and have a W-2. Once you are self-employed, nobody will give you a mortgage or HELOC until you can prove at least two years of positive income from the company.”

*Portland, Oregon, strategy consulting firm Pepper Foster Consulting is a two-time Inc. 5000 honoree and is on Inc.’s Best Workplaces list in 2021.*

02 | **Alexandra Cristin**  
*Founder and CEO*  
**GLAM SEAMLESS**

“As a natural introvert, going out and pitching myself to investors seemed too daunting. Instead, I used alternative lenders such as OnDeck Capital, Shopify Capital,

and PayPal Working Capital. These are high-interest loans, but they provide instant funding based on your sales and don’t show up on your credit report.”

*Cristin bootstrapped her New York City DTC hair-extension business starting with only \$1,500, building it into a \$25 million company within five years.*

03 | **Travis Chambers**  
*Founder*  
**CHAMBER MEDIA**

“Find and persuade a superconnector, the person who knows everybody, to set meetings. If you try to set meetings yourself, you will have devalued yourself before even getting in the room. If you’re wanting to bring in a capital partner, get an M&A broker, as we did with XLCs Partners, one that has done deals for companies like yours. They’ll take you to market.”

*American Fork, Utah-based Chamber Media, a 2021 Inc. 5000 honoree, has been creating social video ads since 2015.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 120

01.

02.

03.



# A “Made in the USA” Brand Makes Political History

Ace Specialties creates American-made promotional products, which led to the opportunity of a lifetime

**W**hen Christl Mahfouz started Ace Specialties in 2007, based in Lafayette, Louisiana, a major oil and gas industry hub, the company launched with a single client and product: branded work gloves for local oil field workers.

A few months later, a chance encounter at a local restaurant led to a meeting with top executives at Anadarko Petroleum in Houston. She pitched her product and left that meeting with a contract to provide work uniforms to the company's oil field clients.

Applying technical knowledge gained in college, Mahfouz created a web portal that allowed offshore employees to order branded work gear online. This transformed the company into a one-stop shop for workwear, safety gear and uniforms. As its client roster swiftly grew, Ace expanded its offerings to include other branded items for their corporate offices, including shirts, pens, and hats.

## HARD TIMES LEAD TO LESSONS AND INSPIRATION

In 2015, the oil and gas industry—Ace's core client base—plummeted, hitting Lafayette especially hard. Mahfouz hit a point where she couldn't pay her bills and made some difficult decisions, maxing out credit cards and taking out high-interest loans. Struggling to make payroll, she was forced to lay off staff.

Mahfouz says she turned to God and began to pray for a solution. A few months later, she saw Donald Trump on television

and conceived a new direction for her company. She called her co-worker saying, “I know what we're supposed to do.”

Mahfouz and her co-worker sent design ideas overnight to Trump Tower. She received an immediate email response inviting her team to New York to pitch to the campaign. Mahfouz sourced every U.S.-made product she could find, including t-shirts, drinkware, and of course, hats.

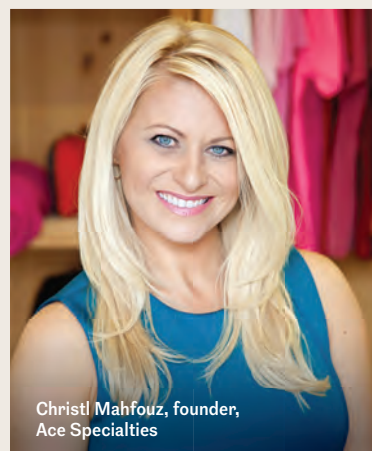
## YES, THAT RED HAT

Once again, Mahfouz found herself staring up at a skyscraper, ready to make a career-defining pitch. The campaign team was immediately drawn to the display table, trying on the promotional materials Ace Specialties prepared. When Mahfouz pitched the company's “one-stop shop” branding services for the campaign, staffers called in Mr. Trump to view the merchandise. That's when the idea for the Make America Great Again hat was born.

“We've built the most iconic brand in political history,” Mahfouz says. “It doesn't matter where you go in the world—the red hat—everyone knows it.”

Business slowed after the 2020 election, but Mahfouz remains committed to her original mission, sourcing U.S.-made products for her clients. Ace just announced the hiring of a new CEO, John Pence, a former advisor to the Trump Campaign.

ACESPECIAL.COM



Christl Mahfouz, founder,  
Ace Specialties

# Nº614

2021 Ranking

# 14

Years in Business

# 43

Employees

# 19 million

U.S.-Made Products  
Produced in 2020



# The Digital Consultancy for Mission-Driven Organizations

Supporting mission-driven businesses helps PRI, a digital consultancy, drive growth and an exceptional culture

**P**ublishing Resources Inc. (PRI), a digital consultancy that provides strategy, engineering, marketing, and creative services, is celebrating its 30-year anniversary—quite the feat in the dynamic digital world. Longevity is among several factors that makes this Inc. 5000 honoree unique, as well as its “never-stop-learning” ethos.

Adaptability is woven into the fabric of PRI's culture, says the company's President and CEO Chintan Parikh. “Whether we're partnering with a new client or onboarding a new member of the team, we look through a ‘long-haul’ lens,” he says. Over the past three decades, more than 90 percent of the company's clients have become repeat customers.

## DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUALITY

Of PRI's clients, more than half are nonprofits, and two-thirds are mission-driven. That is intentional, Parikh explains. “We put our values at the center of all we do, and we align with organizations and people who do the same.”

When hiring, the company prioritizes candidates who are passionate and knowledgeable about social causes, resulting in a workforce united by a desire to use their skills for good. The company has a robust engineering team and award-winning creative services, as well as specialized offerings. These include donor retention and digital community development, full-service podcasting, research and data analysis, corporate giving strategy, messaging, and others.

PRI's work with March of Dimes—a client for two decades—illustrates the strength of its client relationships, as well as its capabilities. One project includes building a data visualization tool for PeriStats, a free resource for maternal and infant health data. Since 2003, PRI has partnered with the popular comic strip “MUTTS” to cultivate an animal- and environmentally friendly e-commerce platform and online community, which today is nearly half a million strong. This year, PRI assisted the *Columbia Law Review* in constructing a digital tribute to the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, which drew praise from Hillary Clinton and other notable figures.

## A DIVERSE TEAM WITH SHARED VALUES

As a minority-owned and mostly women-led business, PRI embraces inclusivity and diversity. The team has been fully remote since 2015, but the company creates its strong, family-like culture by hosting virtual companywide socials and connecting beyond project calls. On the team's no-itinerary “water cooler” Slack channel, employees share pet photos, birthday wishes, and hobbies.

With a culture fueled by shared values, PRI has created an environment of collaboration and empowerment. “We're honored to continue supporting our valued clients and ready to forge new partnerships with passionate, mission-driven companies,” Parikh says.

[PRIDIGITAL.COM](http://PRIDIGITAL.COM)



**Nº3807**  
2021 Ranking

**85%**  
3-Year Growth

**30**  
Year Anniversary

**80%**  
Women Leadership



Chintan Parikh, President  
and CEO, PRI



01 | **Justin Tobin**  
Founder and president  
**GATHER**

“It’s important to focus on measured growth targets as opposed to exponential growth. We needed to make sure that our cash and credit line at the bank could keep up with our growth in revenue. Growing too fast often causes companies to trip over themselves and not be able to keep up with operating costs that scale too quickly. This also gives entrepreneurs the advantage of not feeling like they have to take on work they don’t want for the sake of top-line targets.”

*Tobin founded Gather, a New York City-based consulting firm and 2021 Inc. 5000 honoree, in 2010.*



**Zak Holdsworth**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**HINT HEALTH**

“We had raised our first angel round of around \$1.25 million, which was deceptively easy, and it had given me the false impression that our next round would also be easy. We were tracking decently well, and I made the assumption that since almost everything was in a better place than during our first round, I would be able to get our next round done within a similar time frame of a few months. We were targeting \$2.5 million for the seed round; it took me 52 weeks to reach it. When the first check hit the bank account, we had less than two weeks’ runway—we would have missed the next payroll. Given how long it had taken me to close the round, I was back out fundraising within six months for our Series A.”

*Hint, a San Francisco-based company that offers a software platform for direct care provider organizations, has raised \$15 million from AXA Venture Partners, Launchpad Digital Health, and other investors.*



02 | **Sarah Paiji Yoo**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**BLUELAND**

“What we’re really focused on is staying profitable and cash-flow positive at our option. That means our core business is profitable but we have discretionary levers that we’re deciding to invest in, like growth or incremental suppliers or R&D—activities that if we needed to, we could shut off and we’d be growing slower but the core business would still be profitable.”

*New York City-based Blueland, which sells household products in refillable and reusable bottles, raised \$3 million in a seed round.*



CONTINUED ON PAGE 123

# Specialized Commercial Cleaning Provides a Lucrative Niche

Family values and a strong niche have helped Superior Contract Cleaning find a clear path to success

**A**fter Rinea Blanchard became a widow when her husband was killed in a 1992 car accident, she was left to support her two small children on her own. In 1997, a friend asked if she'd be interested in teaming up on a new venture, offering construction cleanup services in their home state of Louisiana.

Eventually the partners went their separate ways, and Blanchard launched Superior Contract Cleaning, focusing on construction cleanup in the commercial sector. "I was a young woman with a lot of energy as well as a drive to succeed," she says.

Blanchard grew her company, adding new services like ongoing janitorial cleaning services. She partnered with another business that provided fire and water damage remediation services. But when Blanchard lost her biggest client, she had to file for bankruptcy in 2010.

Down but not out, she eventually got Superior Contract Cleaning back on track. This time, her son Zack Blanchard joined her as CEO. The pair worked together cleaning buildings, acquiring accounts, and expanding their services with strategic investments and a specialization in commercial large loss remediation.

## A DRIVE TO HELP OTHERS

The Blanchards have helped others during their time of need through their business. Zack Blanchard earned Master Restorer certifications in mold,

fire, smoke, and water, which helped Superior Contract Cleaning earn remediation contracts during disasters. Record freezing temperatures in Texas brought needs for remediation, including nursing and retirement home complexes. COVID also provided an opportunity for the Blanchards to help communities with disinfecting services and products.

"The sense of urgency that my son has, along with his determination, is the reason why we are able to help so many people," says Rinea. She credits the company's growth to the extensive certifications that both Zack and mitigation manager Jessica Guidry hold, along with their strong work ethics and attention to detail.

## STRONG FAMILY VALUES

A family-owned business, the Blanchards treat their team members like family, too. "The people who are with us today proved to themselves they are valuable, and they showed us they are motivated to perform at the highest level," Rinea says.

Rinea's determination to make a better life for herself and her family has set the tone for the company's success. "We're taking risks that many wouldn't dare do, by never quitting, continually growing in knowledge and training, and utilizing modern processes," she says.

[SUPERIORCONTRACTCLEANING.COM](http://SUPERIORCONTRACTCLEANING.COM)



# Nº1202

2021 Ranking

# 402%

3-Year Growth

# 14

Employees

# \$2.6 million

2020 Revenue



Zack Blanchard, CEO of  
Superior Contract Cleaning

# Tech and Corporate Culture Drive Leadership in the Auto Transport Industry

Every employee at Montway Auto Transport is invested in its success, and technology plays an important role in achieving it

**M**ontway Auto Transport's unique corporate culture is a primary driver of the Schaumburg, Illinois-based automotive transportation company's ongoing success. "Everyone brings their own experience and perspective to the company, but we all have the same goal: to deliver a five-star experience to our customers," says Dimitre Kirilov, president and CEO. Each of Montway's 230-plus employees know they play a part in reaching that goal, and they share a sense of ownership and responsibility for achieving it.

That attitude starts with training programs for new hires and ongoing learning opportunities. "Everyone understands how they impact the organization and how important the ideas they contribute are to improving our operation," he says.

## IMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY

As one of the largest auto shipping brokers in the U.S., Montway is a leader in a highly competitive industry. To stay in that position, it relies on a tech-forward strategy focused on innovations and solutions to meet the dynamic needs of its customers, which include individual consumers, lenders, car rental companies, moving and relocation companies, OEMs, fleet management companies, and both traditional and e-commerce car dealers.

Montway has been first to market with numerous technology solutions, including an online rate calculator to provide customers with instant shipping quotes and an auto transportation portal to sup-



Dimitre Kirilov, president  
and CEO of Montway Auto Transport

# Nº3732

2021 Ranking

# 89%

3-Year Growth

# 76.4

Average NPS\*  
in 2020

\*Net Promoter Score  
(customer experience metric)

# 140

thousand

Vehicle Shipments  
in 2020



**MONTWAY**  
AUTO TRANSPORT

port enterprise partners. Technology and service have enabled Montway to exceed pickup-to-delivery expectations for a major auto financing company, averaging two days less than the service-level agreement.

The company's latest innovation is a home delivery solution, launched in 2020. It gives auto dealers the technology to seamlessly offer home delivery to their customers and execute all quoting and transport activities via a managed service. "The pandemic changed the way people shop for cars," Kirilov says. "This end-to-end solution helps dealers compete on a national level while providing a contactless car buying experience for their consumers."

## TRUST EARNS BUSINESS

Kirilov got his start in logistics at a trucking company while simultaneously working as a real estate agent and broker. "Both businesses are really about customer service and being responsive and proactive to customer needs," he says. He joined Montway in 2010, holding several positions during his climb to CEO in 2018.

Montway's team plans to continue expanding through a combination of organic growth and acquisition of adjacent complementary businesses. "At Montway, we don't focus on selling, we focus on helping," Kirilov says. "We take an honest and transparent approach to everything we do."

MONTWAY.COM

# 10%

OF U.S. SMALL-BUSINESS OWNERS RELY ON FAMILY OR FRIENDS TO FINANCE THEIR BUSINESSES

01.

01 | **Saeju Jeong**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**NOOM**

“In the beginning, we had nothing. All I had was a passion and my co-founder. So through our network, we convinced the best product people first, and after the product people, we met early-stage investors. Early-stage venture capitalists, they’re not looking for product-market fit—they pay attention to the team.”

*Jeong’s New York City-based digital health platform has raised more than \$650 million from Sequoia Capital, Silver Lake, and other investors.*

02.

02 | **Seth Casden**  
Founder and CEO  
**HOLOGENIX**

“When it comes to investor funding, it’s like having construction done: Always expect to need twice as much money and for it to take twice as long. Be patient and stay optimistic, because if it’s taking longer than you thought, then you are in the same boat as 99 percent of entrepreneurs.”

*Hologenix, a Pacific Palisades, California-based materials-science company, is a four-time Inc. 5000 honoree.*



## CAPITAL IDEAS

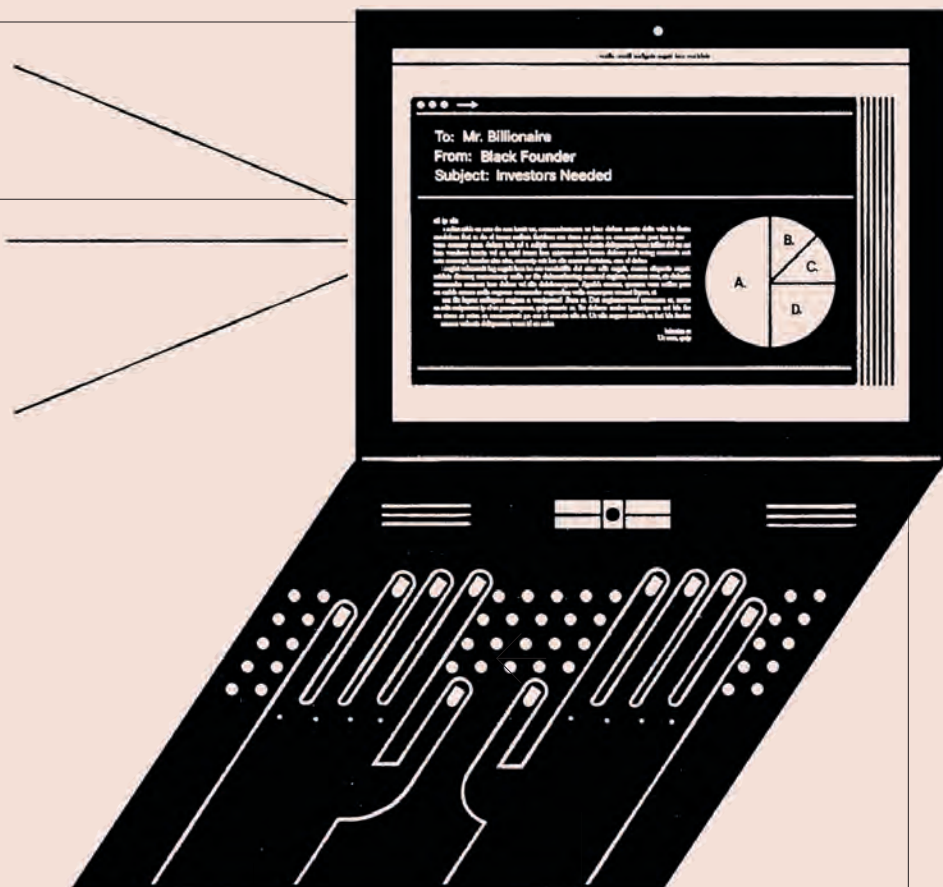
### Setting the Stage

#### 01 | Colin Darretta

*Co-founder and CEO  
INNOVATION  
DEPARTMENT*

“Many entrepreneurs tend to think, ‘Either I go get venture funding or I bootstrap.’ Very few think about venture debt, working capital lines, or other forms of leverage. And even fewer think about building a mixed-capital structure. Remember that selling equity, which is what venture funding is, is your most expensive source of capital. If you can avoid it without taking undue risk or hardship, you’re often well-served in doing so.”

*Innovation Department, a New York City company that builds and invests in early-stage businesses, has raised nearly \$4 million since its 2014 founding.*



#### 02 | Ruby Taylor

*Founder and CEO  
FINANCIAL JOY  
SCHOOLAND LEGACY!  
CARD GAME*

“As a Black founder with no social capital, I had to create my social capital one cold email at a time. It was not easy being rejected or ignored. But my driving force is that my purpose to close the racial wealth gap is greater than my ego. So I keep plugging away, emailing individuals in the corporate world who

have inspired me. A few months ago, I reached out to a billionaire, and, initially, I was so nervous I didn’t know what to write. Once I refocused and uplifted my humanity, my anxiety left, and peace overflowed. I have gotten meetings with SoftBank, Concrete Rose Capital, and Techstars through those cold email relationships.”

*Taylor launched Legacy!, a card game that teaches financial literacy, in 2020 through a Kickstarter campaign.*

CONTINUED  
ON PAGE 127



# Co-Founders Prove There's Power in Numbers

Artisan Design Group leverages size and scale to capture opportunities in the interior finishing industry

**M**ost entrepreneurs start businesses because they have a passion or expertise. It's the details that get in the way. From filing taxes to negotiating real estate leases, operations can take more time and attention than many owners expect, often causing a business to stall.

Larry Barr and Wayne Joseph, two veteran flooring executives, know there's power in numbers. The friends met at an industry event more than two decades ago, and each has more than 40 years of experience in the business. Barr was the CEO and president of Floors Inc., which focuses on single-family residential sales and installation. Joseph is the founder of Malibu Floors, which specializes in multifamily residential flooring installation and sales.

In 2016, they got together and launched Artisan Design Group (ADG) to capture opportunities for entrepreneurs in the interior finishing industry.

## PROVIDING THE KEYS TO SUCCESS

Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, ADG acquires and develops floor covering, cabinets, and countertop companies. The organizations retain their identity and community reputation, with entrepreneurs able to reinvest proceeds into ADG as a whole.

Presently, the ADG roster of 21 companies operates in 29 states. The pair looks for like-minded entrepreneurs who have achieved success through dedicated industry passion, operational excellence, long-standing business relationships, expertise in service delivery, and, most



**Nº1140**  
2021 Ranking

**426%**  
Growth

**1742**  
Employees

**\$878**  
million  
2020 Revenue

importantly, a strong company culture.

"The ADG way is to cultivate an environment where all members thrive by focusing on their core strengths to maximize business results," Barr says. "We are drawn to entrepreneurs with a competitive spirit who share our passion for winning the business in their marketplace."

"We look for solid, well-run companies with a long history of success," Joseph says. "All the companies have great local culture and leadership."

## HANDLING THE DETAILS

ADG enables and equips companies with additional critical tools and resources, including customized software applications, integrated systems, online design center capabilities, CRM analytics, centralized payroll and benefits administration, and a variety of other services. These expanded shared services and centers of excellence are led by highly skilled executives and functional expertise teams, providing companies with benefits only ADG can offer.

"We remove barriers and back-office administrative tasks that burden the entrepreneurs," says Barr. "They get to focus on what they do best, cultivating key relationships and running successful businesses."

Barr and Joseph aspire to develop and maintain a presence in all 50 states. "We are a young company with a huge amount of runway left for growth," says Joseph.

[ARTISANDESIGNGROUP.US](https://www.artisandesigngroup.us)



Larry Barr, co-chief executive officer, ADG



Wayne Joseph, co-chief executive officer, ADG

# Smart Choices Drive Hockey-Stick Growth for This Sales Training Company

With foresight, the right team, and a bit of a good fortune, Sales Gravy achieved exponential growth during a challenging year

**A**fter consistent 20 to 40 percent year-over-year growth during the previous eight years, Sales Gravy more than doubled in size in 2020 with a combination of foresight and smart business choices. It started in 2019, when Founder Jeb Blount began planning for the next recession. The Great Recession had caught him off guard, and he was determined to never let that happen again.

"Because most training is delivered in person, recessions can be devastating to training companies when corporate travel budgets get cut to the bone," he says. "But companies don't quit training their people, they just quit traveling."

So, with no downturn in sight, he began building a state-of-the-art, broadcast-quality studio complex to allow his trainers to deliver high-quality virtual instructor-led training (VILT) when travel wasn't an option.

## SALES GRAVY GOES ALL IN WITH VIRTUAL

When the world shut down in 2020 because of the pandemic, Sales Gravy was ready. The business quickly pivoted to an entirely virtual training model without losing a single customer or canceling any events. The Sales Gravy team developed an industry-leading virtual learning experience called VLX. Trainers were required to complete the VLX certification process.

As word spread about Sales Gravy's VILT capabilities, business picked up fast. "Our customers and their participants were

so blown away by the experience, they'd often say, 'WOW!' as they entered our virtual classrooms," Blount says. "They'd never experienced anything like it."

Sales Gravy's innovative virtual training approach also improves learning outcomes by breaking content into smaller chunks, delivered over time, to give participants time to practice and hone new skills.

## BULLISH ON THE FUTURE

Just a few years ago, Blount thought it was impossible to teach the soft skills required for sales, customer service, and leadership effectively in a virtual classroom. Today he is bullish on the future of virtual training and is even beta testing an immersive virtual-reality classroom.

Because companies save 50 to 80 percent of the cost of training by eliminating travel, they can greenlight more employee training, while reducing carbon emissions by as much as 90 percent, Blount explains. Productivity levels remain high because learners are not pulled from the field for long periods of time.

Sales Gravy also has expanded its e-learning platform, enabling small businesses to access an extensive library of on-demand courses and attend affordable VILT sessions. "Sales Gravy University gives small businesses and teams access to the same training programs as their larger competitors," Blount says.

SALESGRAVY.COM



Jeb Blount, founder,  
Sales Gravy

**\$G Sales Gravy**

**Nº2982**  
2021 Ranking

**129%**  
3-Year Growth

**6-15**  
Trainers  
During Covid

**2007**  
Year Founded

01.

01 | **Arun Mohan**

*Co-founder and CEO*  
**RADIX HEALTH**

“We self-financed for the first few years. When it became clear there was product-market fit, we decided to raise a small amount of capital to support our growth. Rather than asking for money from anywhere, however, we actually went to some of our early clients. Including them as investors aligned us even more tightly, ultimately resulting in a longer runway to succeed and a more robust relationship.”

*Mohan founded Atlanta-based Radix Health, a maker of patient-access technologies, in 2015. Earlier this year, it merged with health care software provider Relatient.*

02.

02 | **Paul Goldman**

*Founder and CEO*  
**MUSERK**

“Before we could technically afford it, we decided to work with a comptroller/CFO instead of trying to do our own financial docs. This allowed me as the CEO to focus on building the business and not spend my nights working on Excel docs that I wasn’t qualified to do anyway. As soon as you can afford it, prioritize this role in the company.”

*Muserk specializes in global rights management for music and video. In 2021, it ranks No. 779 on the Inc. 5000 list.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 130

# Real Talk Fuels Wealth Management Firm's Fast Growth

Through education and authenticity, Zinnia Wealth Management, a woman-owned and operated firm, achieves triple-digit growth

**C**harisse Rivers founded Zinnia Wealth Management in 2007 because she didn't like where the retirement planning industry was heading. Her colleagues were pushing "outdated practices and old-school theories," and they weren't keen to try fresh ideas. So, she launched Zinnia from her home.

It wasn't easy being a woman in what was then a man's world. People warned her she wouldn't make it. When she did, competitors tried to push her out. But Rivers never quit. Fifteen years later, her firm ranks No. 1673 on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies, with five offices across Central and Northern Florida, all led by female teams.

## THE "COFFEE TALK" APPROACH

Women have been known to take a safer, more analytical approach to managing money than their male counterparts, Rivers says. Zinnia Wealth Management also takes a unique approach to business development, focusing on education rather than sales. She frequently runs retirement planning workshops where she teaches pre- and post-retirees to prepare for curveballs, advises they interview two to three potential advisors, and go with their gut when choosing a partner. "There is something I love about educating people and giving them the knowledge and the confidence to make a prudent decision," she says.

Rivers' popular radio show, "Retirement Coffee Talk," shows off her down-to-earth yet upbeat, authentic style. When she started eight years ago, she knew nothing about radio. It took a full year to gain traction, with the help of a talented team. Now she is a radio pro and a regular on television. She is also writing a retirement planning book, due out end of year, entitled *How Can You Retire Now*.

## GOING FULL THROTTLE

Despite challenges, 2020 was the firm's biggest year yet. Rivers says she was motivated by faith and a healthy dose of fear, not for herself, but for her team. She decided to "go big or go home" and doubled down while other firms pulled back. She tested new tactics, like Facebook Live. Now she is looking to expand her team and explore markets beyond Florida. For entrepreneurs just starting out or facing tough times, Rivers stresses the importance of mentors and building the right team. Most importantly, you need to be mentally tough. "I fell off the horse and got bruised so many times, but I knew eventually I would stop falling. That's exactly what happened. One can't grow without failing a few times, so don't be afraid of failure," she says.

ZINNIawealth.com

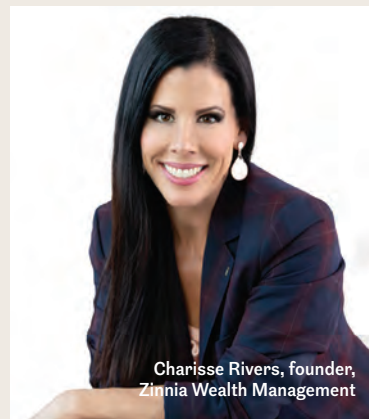


**No. 1673**  
2021 Ranking

**273.8%**  
3-Year Growth

**200 million**  
Retirement Assets  
Collected Over  
the Last 5 Years

**5**  
Offices



Charisse Rivers, founder,  
Zinnia Wealth Management

# A Blueprint for Success

How Poly Print went from struggling startup to sector success

**M**ost people who shop at the grocery store don't think much about the packaging or label on their favorite foods and household products. Packaging connects us to brands, protects the foods we eat from diseases, extends shelf life, and keeps food cost lower than any place in the world. So, you may be surprised to find out that the flexible packaging industry is a multi-billion-dollar business.

Tucson-based Poly Print is one of the country's more successful flexographic printing and converting operations, supplying more than 30 billion packages and labels annually for major grocery chains and brand owners. Success didn't happen overnight, with the company facing turbulent times more than once over its 29-year history. "This really is a success story, with the first 10 years in business being such a struggle," says Joe Genova, co-owner, vice president, and the son of Ron and Elsie Genova, the company's founders.

## ENTREPRENEURIAL STRUGGLES

In 1992, Ron was working for a flexible packaging company in California when an opportunity to purchase a small printing operation in Arizona became available. The flexible packaging industry was growing, and if they could just deliver a quality product, on time, then they could have a thriving business, Genova says.

That's been easier said than done. The company ran into a plethora of



Joe Genova, co-owner and vice president of Poly Print

## Nº4747

2021 Ranking

## 1400%

7-Year Growth

## 105

Employees

## 7

Consecutive Years with Double-Digit Growth



common business startup issues, such as unexpected manufacturing problems, not having enough capacity, and managing through an especially difficult 2008 downturn. "We were positioned for explosive growth," says Genova, whose first job was driving the forklift when he was 10. "But that didn't happen."

## SOLID SALES PLAN

In 2013, after struggling through the 2008 great recession, Genova decided it was time to focus on a robust sales plan, something the company lacked. The plan identified new areas for growth, such as labels for bottled water, pet foods, and consumer products like cosmetics, fertilizers, and detergents. Servicing the plan required more than \$15 million in new equipment, expansions, and staff, most of whom they trained internally. "Expanding into new markets is unconventional and risky in flexible packaging, but it was part of our growth strategy," Genova says.

Genova's plan has worked wonders, with the company growing by double digits every year since 2014, which is especially impressive in a sector where 3 to 5 percent annual growth is considered aggressive. "We moved out of our comfort zone and diversified the markets we service," Genova says. "The future is to stay the course, grow, invest, and maintain our status as leader in flexible packaging."

POLYPRINT.COM

6% OF BUSINESS OWNERS HAVE USED  
U.S. SMALL BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION LOANS  
TO START THEIR COMPANIES

01.

02.

03.

COURTESY SUBJECT(4)

01 | **Julia Collins**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**ZUME PIZZA**

“When you raise money in rounds, it’s appropriate to take money from the table. You should negotiate a way to sell some of your equity to build yourself a cushion.”

*Mountain View, California’s Zume Pizza has raised more than \$420 million. Collins is now the founder and CEO of Planet FWD, a San Francisco-based startup focused on sustainability in the food industry.*

02 | **Bharat Kanodia**  
Founder and chief appraiser  
**VERISTRAT**

“VCs will look at the idea, the team, and the numbers, but they will invest in an individual.”

*Kanodia, an Inc. columnist, founded Veristrat in 2010. The San Francisco-based company provides business valuation services and market research.*

03 | **Peter Colis**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**ETHOS**

“Be optimistic but transparent in what is going well and what still needs work. Admitting the imperfections goes a long way in building trust and saying you’re someone they can count on and work with, and the investors will get a full picture in diligence either way.”

*Since co-founding Ethos while in college, Colis has raised more than \$400 million for the life insurance business from SoftBank, Sequoia Capital, and other investors.*



**David Rabie**  
Co-founder and CEO  
**TOVALA**

“We started raising our Series B in late February 2020. With the stock market already declining, investors were nervous about what Covid would mean for everything. An investor gave us a verbal offer and pulled it the next day. That day? March 11, 2020—or, as it came to be known—‘The Day Everything Changed.’ Our demand was actually dramatically increasing, though, so, capitalizing on that momentum, we started pitching investors in late March and April that we had never met in person. For Comcast Ventures, we were the first deal they ever did without having the management team make their final presentation in person. It’s easy to forget now, but at the time, delivering important presentations over Zoom was entirely novel. But we had to roll with the punches, and it worked.”

*In a six-month span from 2020 to 2021, Tovala, a Chicago-based meal-subscription service, raised more than \$50 million.*



CONTINUED ON PAGE 135

# Facilitating Access to Capital

Rising interest in entrepreneurship has fueled growth at Commercial Capital Training Group, which creates new commercial loan businesses

One of the biggest challenges facing small businesses today is access to capital. In fact, the Guidant State of Small Business Report found that nearly 67 percent of small businesses cited lack of capital as their top concern. Cash flow is critical for small business success.

"Right now, banks approve about 24 percent of small business applications," says Kris Roglieri, CEO of Commercial Capital Training Group. The majority are left to fend for themselves, and many simply don't know there are financing options beyond banks, Roglieri says. Many don't understand the appropriate form of capital they should be pursuing, based on their situation, and they also don't know where to go get it.

## TRAINING COMMERCIAL LOAN BROKERS

Enter Commercial Capital Training Group, which was formed in 2009 to help train professionals to become commercial loan brokers. "People come to be trained to operate a commercial loan brokerage business, so they can go out and basically help business owners or real estate investors obtain capital," Roglieri explains.

In addition to the week-long training program and lifetime support via phone and email, Commercial Capital Training graduates receive access to a group of 100 lenders where they are pre-approved to act as brokers. "We have a select group of lenders who waive their time and business experience requirements when new

brokers are certified and trained by us," Roglieri says.

In the last 12 years, more than 1,200 students have graduated from the Commercial Capital program and have closed more than \$50 billion in deals in that time. During the pandemic, brokers closed \$900 million in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans alone.

Graduates can assist business owners and real estate investors anywhere in the U.S.; they aren't limited to working with clients in their home state. Although most graduates work as full-time business loan brokers, some use their financing network to complement their core business. Certified public accountants, for example, often use their connections to help their clients, he explains.

## SUCCESS THROUGH CUSTOMER FOCUS

Roglieri also attributes much of the company's success to its customer-centered culture. "Everybody on our team is incentivized to support our trainees," he says. Employees are considered part of our family, and that collaborative atmosphere dedicated to supporting graduates as much as possible "is why we excel," he adds.

"We like to think of ourselves as leading a revolution, helping small business owners get the capital they need," Roglieri says.

COMMERCIALCAPITALTRAINING.COM



Kris Roglieri, CEO,  
Commercial Capital  
Training Group



COMMERCIAL  
CAPITAL  
TRAINING  
GROUP™

**Nº3950**  
2021 Ranking

**79%**  
3-Year Growth

**21**  
Employees

**\$8.4**  
million  
2020 Revenue

# Facing Adversity with Conviction

Companies face many adversities as they grow, but few are willing to risk everything to uphold what they think is right

**R**isking your financial livelihood is not for the faint of heart. Chuck McDowell felt like he was in a TV drama when he spent four days defending his actions before a federal judge as timeshare industry giants lobbed one accusation after another at him.

At stake was \$5.9 million that he would have to pay if he lost. During the hearing, he heard people talk about “what a horrible person I was by helping people cancel their timeshares that they had been lied to about,” he says. Though stressful, he persisted because he wanted to fight for others.

“I knew I was in the right, and they were in the wrong,” he says. In the end, it took the jury 12 minutes to decide in his favor. It was this moment that paved the way for Wesley Financial Group’s future.

## FINDING PURPOSE

McDowell didn’t always find himself in the firing line. Before cancelling timeshares, he actually sold them. It didn’t take long until he noticed how top salespeople used lies and deceit to close deals. Once he became the top salesperson, he quit.

“I couldn’t live with myself lying to others to make a living,” he says. To make amends, he called former customers and told them how to get out of their commitment. Fast-forward a year later, and he began to receive calls from other timeshare owners that heard McDowell could help them get out of their situation.

These encounters led to the start of Wesley Financial Group.

Since its founding in 2011, the company has canceled more than 16,000 timeshares, eliminating more than \$265 million in timeshare debt.

## FENDING OFF LAWSUITS

As Wesley Financial Group, LLC gained traction and started growing at a steady pace, one of the world’s largest timeshare companies started to target Wesley after his company helped thousands of consumers out of their timeshares. Other lawsuits followed.

Juggling a growing business while being sued by angry corporations is no small feat, especially when the opposing parties are huge multi-billion-dollar companies.

McDowell says he’s often asked why he continues in a business that puts him in the crosshairs of so many. To him, it’s a mission to help people.

“I’ve listened to countless stories from people sharing how they were manipulated and how they were grateful for our help. We’re still here, fighting every day for the rights of consumers,” he says.

WESLEYFINANCIALGROUP.COM



**Nº447**  
2021 Ranking

**1100%**  
3-Year Growth

**424**  
Employees

**\$89.4**  
million  
2020 Revenue



Chuck McDowell, founder and CEO, Wesley Financial Group

# Disrupting Traditional Startup Filing Services

Inc Authority saves startup entrepreneurs time, money, and provides peace of mind when establishing an LLC or corporation

For more than a decade, the number of new businesses formed monthly in the U.S. hovered around 200,000, U.S. Census Bureau data reports. However, in 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, the number of startups climbed past 400,000 and continues to rise today, as workers assess what they want to be doing with their lives. Alongside the Great Resignation comes the Great Startup Surge.

Per the National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020 was the highest year on record for new business applications in more than 15 years. That spike in new business applications has served to fuel both entrepreneurial activity nationwide and the growth of business formation specialists like Inc Authority, which provides free incorporation services. There is no cost to register an LLC or corporation through Inc Authority, except for the required state registration fees.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP NUMBERS SKYROCKETING

"Many people who lost their jobs due to COVID opted to start a business to replace their income," says Inc Authority CEO Greg Martin. Tens of thousands of those new entrepreneurs then turned to Inc Authority to establish their new business entities. To further raise its profile, Inc Authority partnered with Daymond John, founder and CEO of FUBU and star of ABC's *Shark Tank*. "In the public's eye, Daymond personifies entrepreneurship and is the perfect choice as Inc Authority's brand ambassador," Martin says.

In spite of offering free incorporation, Martin stresses that Inc Authority is highly profitable. Using the company also saves busy entrepreneurs time. "Most startups don't know what they don't know about how to register their business, and navigating state bureaucracies is often frustrating," Martin explains. "We're experts in the rules and regulations," which can save new business owners considerable time.

"Entrepreneurs trust us to set up their LLC or corporation right the first time. Our 4.8 Trustpilot rating backs that up," says Martin.

## ONE-STOP STARTUP SHOP

Once a client's business is registered, Inc Authority provides low-cost marketing, branding, and tax and accounting solutions, among other services, to help support the needs of the new business as it scales.

Unlike other web-based incorporation services, Inc Authority has a live staff, with both native English and Spanish speakers, available to counsel new business owners by phone. Having a trusted resource available reduces anxiety and provides helpful advice.

"We believe in our DNA that the lifeblood of the U.S. economy is new business formation. New business owners are the job creators; they are the innovators," Martin says. "We exist solely to support entrepreneurs."

INCAUTHORITY.COM



**Nº1500**  
2021 Ranking

**315%**  
3-Year Growth

**7,109**  
5-Star Reviews

**2015**  
Year Founded



Daymond John, CEO, FUBU,  
and star of ABC's *Shark Tank*



01 | **Chris Bell**

Founder and CEO  
**PERCH**

“While I was raising Perch’s Series A, investors spoke about ‘founder-company fit’ in the same way they spoke about ‘product-market fit.’ And so I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about how to ensure that my own personal narrative can inform and elevate the Perch narrative. It becomes a cycle: Your background validates your vision, but as you explain your vision in greater depth, you can further validate your background. You’re the expert: Show it.”

*Perch acquires and operates DTC brands. In 2021, the Boston-based business closed a \$775 million Series A round led by SoftBank’s Vision Fund.*



02 | **Saar Yoskovitz**

Co-founder and CEO  
**AUGURY**

“Most first-time founders with an engineering background (like me) fail to tell a story that prompts investors to make an emotional investment in the vision and mission of their company. Don’t just talk about your technology or the potential return on investment. Talk about the radical positive change that

your product can bring about in the lives of your customers and in society at large.”

*Augury, a New York City manufacturing tech business, raised a \$55 million Series D round in 2020.*

## Coming to the Table

01 | **Carey Smith**

Founder

**UNORTHODOX VENTURES**

“Entrepreneurs generally need far less money than they think they do, and far less than what VCs are willing to give them. Just as important as the money, if not more so, is guidance from people who have actually built a business from scratch, people who’ve been down the road—and made all the wrong turns and know the dead ends. They need, in other words, actual f--king help.”

*Smith started his investment firm after selling his business Big Ass Fans, a maker of fans and lighting, for \$500 million in 2017.*

02 | **Daina Trout**Co-founder and Chief Mission Officer  
**HEALTH-ADE**

“Learning that investors are not your friends is a really important lesson. That’s not to say they’re bad people. I actually like my investors and I think they’re really good partners. I would recommend them. But I had the misinterpretation that they were there for me as an individual. Our interests meet in certain respects, but we’re not entirely aligned.”

*Trout’s Torrance, California-based kombucha company has more than \$200 million in annual retail sales.*

03 | **Eric Kinariwala**

Founder and CEO

**CAPSULE**

“Being able to learn from investors has been really, really valuable, but that can happen only when you have a high degree of trust. I think about it the same way you think about recruiting the team: People have to be values-aligned from the very top, and then everything can flow from there. If you’re not values-aligned, it’s really hard for everything else to fall into place, because you’re disagreeing about things on which there are no logical resolutions.”

*Kinariwala launched New York City-based digital pharmacy Capsule in 2016 and has since raised a total of \$570 million in funding.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 139



# Automation Makes SaaS Implementation Faster

GoSaaS seamlessly moves enterprise applications to the cloud with industry-specific apps

**M**ost apps, settings, and data transfer easily when moving from an Android to an iPhone. So why is there no automated mechanism to move from on-premises enterprise software to Software as a Service (SaaS)? A customer asked Hassan Ramay this when he was at a technology solutions company. A lightbulb went off. In 2017, Ramay and three colleagues co-founded GoSaaS to provide autonomous migrations and implementations, which they call Implementation as a Service (IMaaS).

A traditional implementation can take up to two years, because vendors like Oracle require customization, Ramay says. In response, GoSaaS developed an implementation platform and applications for high tech, life sciences, and manufacturing to layer on top of Oracle's software, speeding up the process.

## BEST PRACTICES BAKED INTO PLUG-AND-PLAY INDUSTRY APPS

Instead of starting from scratch with each client's customization, GoSaaS developed their platform and applications before signing on clients. "Implementation consultants are still doing things the same way as 20 years ago by customizing for each customer and repeating process thinking," says co-founder Tom Nelson. GoSaaS builds GoStarts, which are end-to-end enterprise use cases with industry-customized apps and integrations. GoSaaS and client and staff then spend less time rehashing common industry processes, so they can focus on the company's unique situation, gaining competitive advantages, Nelson says.

GoSaaS considers itself a software company, not a consulting company, since its core offerings are its platform and GoStarts. "We have more software developers working on our products than consultants working on implementations," Ramay says.

## ADDRESSING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Companies need products to meet business objectives, like systems to address FDA audit issues, ISO certifications, or revenue growth. GoSaaS's apps tackle these challenges. The GoStart software applications layer on top of Oracle Cloud. "Oracle can't solve each industry's unique needs, so we built add-on software," Ramay says. "That's where we're solving a business problem."

Given this approach, GoSaaS often works with a client's business side rather than its IT staff. "We resonate with those who are tech-savvy and tired of the status quo or those who have never seen the status quo," Ramay says.

GOSAAS.IO

GoSaaS

**Nº109**

2021 Ranking

**2017**

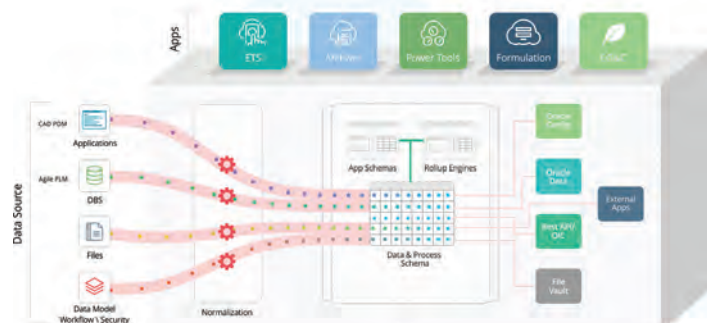
Year Founded

**\$4.95**  
million

2020 Revenue

**3763%**

Three-Year  
Growth



# Driven by Impact, Tax Firm Measures Success by Children Nourished

As a full-service accounting firm, OTB Tax focuses on strategy and saving clients money

**C**ourtney Epps hates accounting. That's a strange thing for the founder and CEO of a full-service tax preparation firm to admit. But Epps realized that the tax work allows her to not just save her clients money but also provide nutrition and water to malnourished and medically fragile kids. That's why at OTB Tax (Outside the Box Business Solutions), she has an impact goal, not a monetary goal.

Epps was an accountant working for a big firm after college, but she quickly became an entrepreneur. She owned retail stores, wholesale companies, an insurance agency, and ultimately a nutrition-focused network marketing company. On the side, she continued preparing returns during tax season.

## A HOME-BASED BUSINESS FOCUS

Network marketing gave Epps insights into the business and tax side of a home-based businesses. She realized that these businesses could save a person \$4,000 to \$8,000 a year in taxes, even if they didn't make a profit. She explained the concept in blog posts and videos that she asked her network marketing colleagues to share. "The business exploded," she says.

Epps shifted from just preparing taxes, to helping small and midsize businesses with tax strategy as well. "I love helping people," she says. OTB Tax is now a full-service accounting firm concentrating on strategy and freeing

up money, she says. Her staff prepares 3,000 returns a year. No tax return is filed until Epps has a tax strategy session with the owner. She also shares her message through a membership program and public speaking engagements. Epps built the company from her own home while homeschooling her six children. The company moved into an outside office in 2019.

## TAX PREP FOR A GREATER PURPOSE

While founded in 2011, OTB's growth accelerated in 2018 when Epps became a social company. A percentage of OTB's gross revenue goes to MannaRelief and The Last Well. The donations are fully tax-deductible, "but it creates an impact for our customers," Epps says. For every dollar in revenue, OTB provides one immune nutritional supplement through MannaRelief, "more than six million servings since April 2018," she says. OTB sends clients postcards twice a year showing what OTB donated through their relationship.

Epps' impact goal is to provide nutrition for 50,000 children a day—a goal that will require \$20 million in annual revenue. "That is our driving force. We're looking for clients who want to give back, to be part of something greater. Our purpose is helping more and giving more," Epps says.

OTBTAX.COM



Courtney Epps, founder and CEO, OTB Tax



**No 538**  
2021 Ranking

**2011**  
Year Founded

**\$2.4**  
million  
2020 Revenue

**894%**  
Three-Year  
Growth

01 | **Alison Greenberg**

*Co-founder and CEO  
RUTH HEALTH*

“Everyone has a deck. Instead, we created a Ruth Health Investment Memo. Five pages of prose and deep explanations of our problem, solution, market, and vision helped close our pre-seed round. Decks are too easy to flip through without reading. Sometimes, making them read carefully with a compelling memo is the way to get noticed.”

*In 2021, Ruth Health, a Los Angeles-based telehealth company, closed funding rounds of \$725,000 and \$2.4 million.*

# 3/4

APPROXIMATE PROPORTION OF  
VENTURE-BACKED FIRMS IN  
THE U.S. THAT DON'T RETURN  
INVESTORS' CAPITAL

01.



02.



02 | **Jeff Schneble**  
*CEO  
HUMAN INTEREST*

“We’ve composed 10-page investor memos that clearly outline Human Interest’s market opportunity and strategy for driving sustained growth. Reading the memo was mandatory preparation for investors we met with. A few meetings were cut short when investors hadn’t done their homework.”

*Earlier this year, Human Interest, a San Francisco-based provider of 401(k) plans for small businesses, announced a \$200 million Series D funding round.*

## Coming to the Table

01 | **Lillian Roberts**

Founder and CEO  
**XENDOO**

“I believe you have an audience until you lose them, and if you lose them, you can’t get them back. Talk about the problem, your company’s scalable solution, the company’s traction and stage in the life cycle, and the market size within three minutes. If you’re unable to share those details in under three minutes, you may need to improve your clarity.”

*Xendoo is a Fort Lauderdale, Florida, online bookkeeping and accounting platform for small-business owners. In 2019, it secured \$3.5 million from investors including Rise of the Rest, a fund run by Steve Case’s firm Revolution.*

01.

02 | **Cameron Johnson**

Founder and CEO  
**NICKSON**

“First impressions are everything, so obsess over your pitch deck and product presentation—don’t forget, your three-minute pitch and 10-page deck are potentially worth hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars. While the process can be taxing, it can also be rewarding. If your odds of landing funding are 1 percent, then you should be ready to shoot at least 100 shots.”

*Billed as the “Uber of furniture,” Dallas-based Nickson raised \$12 million in 2021.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 143



# Connecting the Finance World

Networking can be messy, especially when it's virtual; OpenExchange helps make the most of virtual events

**A**s a young equities trader, Mark Loehr had a special phone that could connect him with 120 different people at the touch of a button. About three times the size of a toaster, the "trading turret" had 120 buttons on it—one for each contact—so he could quickly and easily call the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange or elsewhere to place trades.

Turrets and technology have evolved since then, but the pleasure of that ease of use stayed with him. As video conferencing became more popular, Loehr saw an opportunity to make the experience easier and more pleasant. He helped launch OpenExchange to facilitate video meetings and virtual conferences.

"I have always imagined that meetings would move from physical to virtual, very much like e-commerce," he says. Just as there initially was widespread distrust of using credit cards on the internet, today there are hang-ups about virtual meetings and various mishaps that can happen, he explains.

To ensure meetings and virtual events go off smoothly, OpenExchange uses live agents. Before an event, they'll check details like equipment and whether there will be live presentations and breakout rooms. During the event, the facilitator will make sure everyone shows up, the speakers are ready to go, and things stick to the schedule.

At the end, the organizer receives analytics to track attendance and engagement trends.

## RAMPING UP DURING COVID

Video conferencing has been on the rise for a few years, but when Covid-19 pushed offices to work remotely in spring 2020, its popularity exploded. OpenExchange saw three-year growth of more than 2,300 percent and went from 50 to 1,500 employees in 2020. It also went through an acquisition. It bought Nucleus195, a video-based independent research firm, to grow its presence in investor relations. Still, Loehr emphasizes that growth doesn't happen overnight.

"The infrastructure was there, the leadership was there, the trust in employees was there. So that when the call came and Covid created all these demands, we were able to do it," he says.

OpenExchange has more plans for growth. It's branching out from financial services to serve other sectors such as health care, law, and consumer goods. It's also expanding its OpenExchange.tv platform so clients can reach new audiences through livestream and video on demand.

"There are certain places where we think there's a good fit," he says. "It's time for us to expand our addressable market."

OPENEXC.COM



# No183

2021 Ranking

# 2301%

3-Year Growth

# 2009

Year Founded

# \$26.5

million

2020 Revenue



Mark Loehr, CEO  
at OpenExchange

# Wireless Company Creates Community Through Connectivity

TruConnect bridges the digital divide with affordable mobile and internet services

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the country's digital divide, leaving low-income students, unemployed workers, and families at a painful disadvantage. Lack of connectivity made virtual learning, job hunting, and telemedicine difficult. To Matthew and Nathan Johnson, co-CEOs of TruConnect, this divide was old news rising to a front-page crisis. When the brothers co-founded TruConnect in 2010, self-funding the company, their mission was to help bridge the gap for those without access to modern telecommunications and broadband. Their solution? Offer wireless service and free mobile devices to qualifying low-income consumers via Lifeline, the federal program established during President Ronald Reagan's administration, along with budget-conscious, pre-paid plans.

## POWER THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH TECHNOLOGY

TruConnect relies on industry-leading technology and efficient operations to deliver high-touch service to its customers. As a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO), the company buys network access from a Tier-1 wireless carrier. "What sets our company apart is our significant investments in optimizing the business and customer experience. This industry traditionally falls short on user experience, innovation, logistics, and supply chain management," Matthew says.

TruConnect invests in information technology infrastructure and artificial intelligence to meet its goals for customer experience, expansion, and positive social impact. By modernizing its billing platform

and overhauling its customer onboarding journey, the company is poised for sustainable growth and market changes "Our investments improved the speed at which we can roll out services to customers," Nathan says.

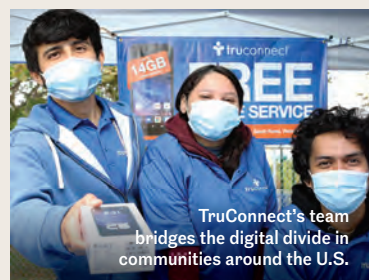
## DELIVER MORE VALUE FOR CUSTOMERS

Some states offer funding for free phones with subsidized voice and data services, and "some competitors offer refurbished phones to cut costs," Nathan adds. TruConnect's model provides more customer value by custom designing and manufacturing its own 4G LTE-capable smartphones, as well its proprietary software to enhance the customer experience.

TruConnect also includes solutions in its service like international calling and a Wi-Fi hotspot locator, that enables subscribers to conserve their data by accessing available secure Wi-Fi networks. TruConnect third-party applications connect subscribers to job boards, food banks, government benefits, and telehealth providers. "We give our subscribers access to services that help them find better jobs, improve their lives, and get back on their feet," Matthew says.

TruConnect employs a small but highly qualified and remarkably productive team, Nathan says. "TruConnect's people are the heart and DNA of its brand and mission," he says. "We bring together good people who want to make an impact. Together, we deliver access to more data and better services, making people's lives easier."

TRUCONNECT.COM



TruConnect's team bridges the digital divide in communities around the U.S.



**Nº3002**  
2021 Ranking

**128%**  
3-Year Growth

**97**  
Employees

**2010**  
Year Founded

# NO.



01 | **Emily Best**

Founder and CEO  
**SEED&SPARK**

“One of my best investor meetings ever was walking in to meet Arlan Hamilton in the earliest days of Backstage Capital. I had been getting so many noes and was honestly in a rough place. The first thing she said to me was, ‘Finally! I’ve been trying to invest in your business for a while!’ It was everything I didn’t know I needed in that moment: someone else with that much conviction about what we were doing. It was an early lesson for me to seek out people who are already excited about what you’re doing. They will find ways to be helpful far beyond the money.”

*Los Angeles entertainment platform Seed&Spark has raised \$5 million through equity, equity crowdfunding, and rewards-based crowdfunding.*



## \$2.4 Billion

TOTAL AMOUNT  
RAISED BY BUSI-  
NESSES ON CROWD-  
FUNDING PLATFORM  
INDIEGOGO SINCE ITS  
LAUNCH IN 2008

