
MAKING

CHANGE

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

IF YOU'RE DOING the same thing today that you did yesterday, chances are it's the wrong thing. No matter what industry you're in, you're facing a business landscape that's constantly changing, evolving, getting disrupted—and fiddling like BlackBerry at an iPhone release party won't get the job done. So if your business model isn't set up right now for future success, you'll need to continuously anticipate, evaluate, and adapt. And if it is ... same advice.

Of course, changes in strategy vary widely by kind and degree. Unless it's early days for your company or

something's gone horribly wrong, you probably don't need a full-on pivot from selling ice cream to developing bioweapons. In most cases, the sweet spot is somewhere between that and, say, Blockbuster Video trying to fend off obsolescence with higher late fees.

Sure, it's all a lot to take on, but here's a good place to start: We've spoken with a host of entrepreneurs who saw a storm coming, changed direction, and came out on the other side with a sparkling new ship. Read on to learn how they transformed their businesses—and their advice for evolving yours.



Andy Ruben
Founder and CEO
TROVE

“People would say they loved us, but then they’d never use the platform, which wasn’t personalized or well curated. Four years into running this company, I just knew it wasn’t right. At a lunch with board members, I proposed trying to save the company by working directly with brands to resell their used goods. We started with three brands—Eileen Fisher, Patagonia, and REI—and we spent the next three years working only with them. Doing so allowed us to really build out the circular shopping experience, from processing returns to revaluing used items to reselling them in branded online stores. Now we’re up to nine clients and 300-plus employees, and we’re on track to double revenue this year.”

Formerly known as Yerdle, Trove is a Brisbane, California-based technology platform for brands that want to own their resale channel. It is No. 268 on the 2021 Inc. 5000.

02.



01.



90%

OF EXECUTIVES BELIEVE COVID-19 WILL
FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGE THE WAY THEY
DO BUSINESS OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS,
ACCORDING TO A JUNE 2020 MCKINSEY SURVEY.

01 | JJ Ramberg

Co-founder
GOODSHOP

“Our company, Goodsearch, took off right from the beginning, and so we started adding services. One of them was called Goodshop, where we partnered with a bunch of stores and if you clicked through and shopped at the store, a percentage of what you spent went to your favorite cause. Soon people got really excited about that and started using it a lot more. So the whole team took a breath and refocused all of our efforts on Goodshop, and we actually changed the company name. And

that’s what we are 100 percent focused on now. So keep your eyes open. It’s easy to have tunnel vision and just think that what you started with is the way to go. But if you really look at your company, you may find there are opportunities—maybe even bigger opportunities than the one you started with—in your own product mix.”

Also a longtime TV and podcast host covering business, Ramberg was an Inc. Female Founders 100 honoree in 2020.

02 | Marla Beck

Co-founder
BLUEMERCURY

“Bluemercury started as an e-commerce-only company, back in 1999. In 2000, Nasdaq crashed and the dot-com bubble burst. And then, after that, there was no venture capital, no angel capital, no capital at all. We were down to our last \$150,000 in the bank. We had a really high burn rate. And so we decided we actually needed to open stores, because back then you could buy cosmetics only at drugstores or department stores. So we opened stores, and the rest is history. And that was our pivot—although there was no word for it back then.”

Washington, D.C.-based luxury beauty products brand Bluemercury was acquired by Macy’s in 2015, and now has around 160 stores nationwide.

03 | Oded Zehavi

Co-founder and CEO
MESH PAYMENTS

“We started out focusing on cross-border B2B payments for emerging markets, but we understood that we needed to readjust and rethink our strategy, and we didn’t hesitate. We shut down all of our business operations and decided to take the technology infrastructure we had built and move to a completely different business—corporate payments—with different use cases and completely different customers. I turned to my network of peers, which I’d built over a number of years, and they helped me highlight the business problems we needed to help solve. We started at zero and reached \$10 million in revenue in the first 18 months.”

In 2021, Zehavi raised a \$13 million funding round for his New York City-based company, a corporate payments and spend management provider.

03.

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A black and white photograph of JJ Ramberg, co-founder of Goodshop, sitting in a chair. He is wearing a dark t-shirt with the word "MESH" printed on it in a stylized, bold font. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light color.

MESH

Envisioning the Future of Payments

From door-to-door sales to changing an industry, this brother-sister duo founded Stax and is enjoying fintech success by turning insights into money



Nº815
2021 Ranking

596%
3-Year Growth

203
Employees

2014
Year Founded

Money is what drives business, but it also can provide insights if you can get it to talk. A desire to dig deeper into transactions is what led Orlando, Fla. brother-sister duo Suneera Madhani and Sal Rehmetullah to launch the fintech software company Stax (formerly Fattmerchant) in 2014.

The idea came when Madhani was working as a door-to-door salesperson in the payments industry in 2012, selling terminals out of the trunk of her Volkswagen Beetle.

“I saw we were moving towards a cashless society, and I thought there has to be a better way from an analytics standpoint,” says Madhani, Stax co-founder and CEO. “Data was living inside the transactions, but the payments industry was very commoditized. No processor or software company was providing a meaningful value-add to small business.”

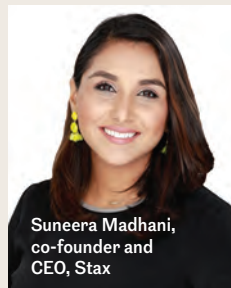
SEEING THE FUTURE

Madhani and Rehmetullah knew digital payments would become increasingly important in the future, but the distinct forms were siloed. For example, merchants may use separate solutions for invoices, mobile devices, and point-of-sale (POS) terminals.

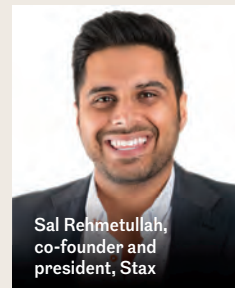
“No one place connects the three forms to provide a snapshot of a business in situations where merchants rely on multiple companies,” Madhani says.

Stax connects transactions to the business’s accounting, customer relationship management (CRM) system, and marketing platforms. CFOs and business owners can log onto Stax and understand the overall health of their business from a single dashboard.

Madhani and Rehmetullah also realized the importance of integrated payments. Stax’s application programming interface (API) for the software-as-a-service (SaaS) market is one



Suneera Madhani,
co-founder and
CEO, Stax



Sal Rehmetullah,
co-founder and
president, Stax

of the company’s biggest drivers of growth. “All software companies are essentially payment companies,” Madhani says. “Transactions take place inside embedded software. We’re one of four U.S. companies that do what we do.”

A TEAM EFFORT

Contributing to the success story is the Stax team. “The irony is that most of our team doesn’t come from a payments background,” says Rehmetullah, Stax co-founder and president. “We look for people who are innovative, big thinkers.”

Stax has raised more than \$150 million in venture capital so far, Rehmetullah adds.

It takes a winning culture to build a company of this size, says Madhani. “Our core values are getting stuff done, one team, and creating joy,” she says. “They’re not just values written on walls; they’re values taking place in the halls.”

Stax has grown from a brother-sister team with an idea into a fintech processing more than \$12 billion in payments since its inception. “We’ve had tremendous amounts of growth,” Madhani says. “We have more than 25,000 businesses that utilize our platform. We’re on a rocket to the moon.”

STAXPAYMENTS.COM

GROUPON

BEFORE: A site that organized people to accomplish a goal and donate money to nonprofits

AFTER: A site for getting group discounts offered by merchants

YELP

BEFORE: A business-search site based on referrals in users' networks

AFTER: A crowdsourced business-review site

Nick Mattingly

Co-founder and CEO

SWITCHER STUDIO



"If you're considering a pivot, make sure it's based on data. You need to have a clear view of the changes you will make and bold goals that you can measure to show traction along the way."

In 2020, Mattingly raised \$2.4 million in funding for his Louisville-based video-creation platform.

01 | Kim Lewis

Co-founder and CEO

CURLMIX

"We did hair product boxes for about two years, and we got to around \$200,000 in revenue. Sales weren't growing, but our customers kept buying one of them over and over and over again. It was our flaxseed gel. You have to literally boil raw flaxseeds that you would normally eat, get the gel from that, and figure out how to preserve the gel. I went to manufacturers to make it for us, and they all said no, this is too laborious. So we said OK, we have to do it ourselves. And that was the first product that we used to pivot our business. We did a prelaunch, and 60 slots sold out like that. We had never sold out anything. In the two or

three years that we had been in business, this was the most success we'd experienced. So we said, let's launch another hundred. And literally within hours, we sold out of that. I was like, 'Oh, my gosh, this is what people want.'"

Along with her husband and co-founder, Tim, Lewis moved the Chicago-based business from subscription boxes to a full line of hair care products.

01.



02 | Jack Dangermond

Founder and CEO

ESRI

"Ten years in, one customer got up and he said—this is what actually convinced us—'Jack, if you provide technical support for your software, I'll pay you \$5,000 a year.' And, actually, all 11 of the people at that meeting said, 'Yeah, we'll do the same thing.' So I added up the numbers, and I said, 'Gee, we could actually make a living off supporting our customers.' So we pivoted from the idea of being just an entrepreneurial company to the idea of being in service to our users."

Dangermond founded Redlands, California-based Esri, originally called Environmental Systems Research Institute, in 1969. Its mapping and data-visualization software is used by more than 350,000 organizations around the world.

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02.



Narrow Niche, Wide Reach for Prolific Ad Agency

With sharp focus on the home improvement industry, Ron Sherman Advertising has built a tried-and-true formula for lead generation

Ron Sherman
ADVERTISING

Nº4418

2021 Ranking

62%

3-Year Growth

5,000+

Commercials
Produced Annually

1M+

Leads Generated
Annually

Long-time Little Rock, Arkansas, meteorologist Ron Sherman was doing daily television weather reports when he started his advertising agency with his wife, Sheila Jumper, in 1986. But the strategy he created for his clients was so successful, he soon joined the agency full time.

The telethon-format commercials appeared during popular movies on weekends. He would travel from Little Rock to various locations to do unscripted, live commercials, inviting viewers to call for more information. Then he tracked the ads' effectiveness by watching how often the phones lit up in the next room. "It was real-time metrics," says Ron Jumper, CEO of Ron Sherman Advertising and the son of Ron Sherman, whose real name is Steve Jumper.

'STICKING TO OUR FORMAT'

After the agency began earning enough for Sherman to quit his weekday job, he purchased a former United Artist movie theater. Now, in that 20,000-square-foot space, Ron Sherman Advertising produces 5,000 to 10,000 commercials a year, Jumper says. In 2016, the company won the Guinness World Record for producing

the most commercials in history. But Jumper says the 3,503 spots Guinness recognized during its arduous verification process were just a fraction of the actual total.

From the beginning, the firm has specialized in the home improvement industry, with clients like window, roofing, siding, and bath remodeling companies. Besides working with one type of client, save the occasional outlier like a car dealership, the agency also has landed on a general advertising model it uses repeatedly. "One of our main success secrets is sticking to our format," Jumper says. The telethon format has been replaced with a three-part series and special offer.

OWN COMPANY AS TEST MODEL

Jumper also touts its broad geographic market expertise and presence in 140 U.S. metropolitan statistical areas. "Our agency knows every market in the country," Jumper says.

Before becoming CEO of Ron Sherman Advertising in 2020, Jumper owned The Apollo Agency (an advertising agency and 2020 Inc. 5000 honoree). In 2018, he purchased a company called Bath Makeover of Arkansas. Applying the Ron Sherman Advertising methods, he's increased that company's annual sales from \$600,000 to more than \$7 million in three years. The company serves as a test model for the ad agency.

"We refer to it as our in-house R&D department," Jumper says. "Everything we roll out to a client has already been tested in some way, or it's something we use currently at my home improvement company. That allows us to bring credibility to our clients."



Ron Sherman Advertising team members celebrate their 2021 Inc. 5000 win.

RONSHERMANPRODUCTIONS.COM

A Science-Backed Approach to Improving Business Performance

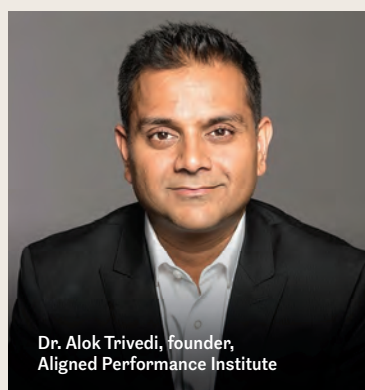
Dr. Alok Trivedi, media personality and founder of the Aligned Performance Institute, shares the origins of his science-backed approach to rewiring your brain

Entrepreneurs often solve challenges with strategy and hard work. But sometimes, their own minds are the roadblock. “You can do all the strategy you want, but if the brain is wired in an old pattern, the strategy will not play out,” explains Dr. Alok Trivedi, founder of the Aligned Performance Institute and creator of the Trivedi Process, a scientifically based approach to achieving a better life.

WHEN THE BOOKS DON'T WORK

Trivedi teaches entrepreneurs how to clear old brain patterns and rewire their business, wealth, and relationships. He discovered the process while running one of the biggest chiropractic practices in the country. On paper, he should have been successful. But in 2012, he lost his house during a divorce and struggled to take control of his life. He read personal development books and took courses, but nothing helped. Using his medical background and knowledge of the mind/body connection, he developed his own approach, which now includes 92 techniques and tools. “I didn’t have any money. I had nothing to my name. The only thing that got me out of it was to figure out the process to rewire my own brain,” he says.

The company’s 724 percent three-year growth rate is a testament to the rewiring process, Trivedi says. Another growth factor was pivoting to virtual events during COVID-19 and transforming into a multi-media company. The business now operates two cutting-edge studios from a new 5,000-square-foot office. In addition to running programs and events during the pandemic, Trivedi was able to do hundreds



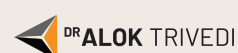
of media appearances, providing advice for navigating the psychology of COVID. “I’m a doctor at the end of the day—a doctor in an entrepreneurial skin,” he explains.

FOCUSED ON PEOPLE

Trivedi and his team—many of whom are former clients—have helped more than 500,000 people improve their lives and drive business performance. While most customers are entrepreneurs and small business owners, the company plans to expand its core products and use technology as a platform for teaching more people about the rewiring process. The techniques work for all people, not just entrepreneurs, Trivedi notes. His daughter even uses program content to run a class for kids, designed to help them live a healthier, more inspired life.

Trivedi’s goal for the future is simple: to help as many people as possible. “We focus on the people,” he says. “Then we let the numbers fall into place.”

ALOKTRIVEDI.COM



Nº672
2021 Ranking

724%
3-Year Growth

16
Employees

2016
Year Founded

NETFLIX

BEFORE: A DVD-rental service

AFTER: A platform for streaming video and original programming

SHOPIFY

BEFORE: An online snowboard equipment store

AFTER: A multiservice platform for online retailers



Jordan Jones
Founder and CEO
PACKED PARTY

“If you’re on the fence, make the jump. The scariest business decisions I’ve made in the past eight years have resulted in the best shifts in my business.”

Jones started Austin-based Packed Party in 2013 as a DTC company that sold themed care packages.

Today, it’s the exclusive provider of party supplies for Whole Foods.

01 | Rick Rudman Co-founder, president, and CEO **CURBIO**

“For our first three years, we focused exclusively on presale home improvement with a \$15,000 minimum. Since we didn’t get paid until the home sold, we also took a deed of trust on the property. In early 2021, we made a major pivot to remove the minimum and the deed-of-trust requirement, and to do projects for homebuyers, not just sellers. To execute this, we had to change our messaging, train our teams, and update all of our internal contracts and processes. We went from a specialty solution to the go-to home improvement company for every agent on every transaction. In the first quarter following these changes, our number of projects went up 109 percent, driving 35 percent more revenue.”

Prior to starting Potomac, Maryland-based home improvement business Curbio, Rudman founded a cloud-based PR software company that was acquired for \$446 million in 2014.

01.

02 | Vicky Tsai Founder **TATCHA**

“I probably kill 30 percent of our products. Even if one is years in the making, I’ll shelve it, or I’ll rework it or retool it. There’s no point in launching something that somebody else has already done. Most of our industry works the opposite way. They look to see what somebody’s done, and then they all just copy. But then we’re all just sort of like lemmings, all chasing the same concepts and the same customers and the same price points and the same benefits. And that’s boring.”

Tsai founded the San Francisco- and Tokyo-based skin care business Tatcha in 2009, and is on Inc.’s 2021 Female Founders list.

02.



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Technology Connects Borrowers and Lenders at the Right Time

Sales Boomerang is boosting returns by revitalizing relationships in the mortgage industry

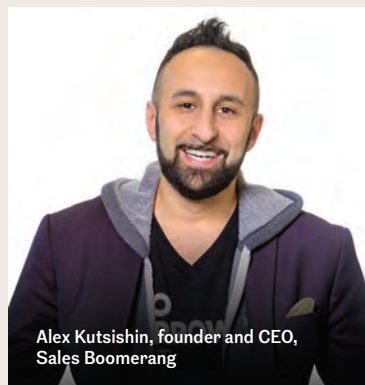
Saying “That’s the way it’s always been” to Alex Kutsishin is like waving a red cape at a charging bull. There’s a good chance he’ll accept that statement as a challenge that your company, or industry, is due for a massive shift. And he’s just the person to make big changes. The dynamic CEO and founder of Sales Boomerang thrives on spotting opportunities and converting them into big gains for clients.

That ability to sense a stagnant market primed for change led Kutsishin to start Sales Boomerang. While consulting for a mortgage marketing firm in 2015, he discovered a 10 percent sales conversion rate industrywide. Intrigued by that low number, he set out to learn where the other 90 percent of potential borrowers went. He found that 30 to 40 percent of leads who were denied a loan ended up securing one with another lender. Worse, lenders weren’t following up with those leads after the initial contact. Kutsishin repeatedly heard that letting relationships end with the first “no” was “the way it’s always been.”

REVIVING A STAGNANT BUSINESS MODEL

This timing and follow-up mismatch needed a solution. Kutsishin realized he had one, based on a prior consulting project that used artificial intelligence (AI) to connect large corporations with niche business software. Realizing he could apply that model to the mortgage lending industry, he founded Sales Boomerang.

Adopting the slogan “No Borrower Left Behind” as its true north, the software firm uses technology to pair borrowers with lenders at precisely the right time. Borrowers who aren’t ready for a loan receive a well-timed follow-up based on predictive analysis of when



Alex Kutsishin, founder and CEO,
Sales Boomerang

they’re more likely to sign. “Don’t spam them; service them,” Kutsishin says. By offering services at the exact time when buyers want them, every interaction feels well-timed and personal rather than random and out-of-touch.

FORGING A WIN-WIN-WIN PATH TO SUCCESS

The results? Phenomenal growth for Sales Boomerang and similar results for its clients, who also gain better relationships with their customers—a win for everyone involved. “Nobody’s doing it our way,” Kutsishin says. “Others may have similar data points, but nobody’s coming at it with the idea of helping both lender and borrower align on purpose.”

As for the future, the company anticipates continued rapid growth, with plans to expand its services to more banks and credit unions. By leveraging technology to create timely personalized interactions, Sales Boomerang hopes to continue helping its customers increase sales while strengthening the relationships that make those deals possible.

SALESBOOMERANG.COM

Sales Boomerang

Nº101
2021 Ranking

3,882%
3-Year Growth

70
Employees

Nº6
Fastest-Growing
Software Firm on
the Inc. 5000 List

Archiving Legacy Health Care Data

Triyam helps the health care industry manage patient data

Fifteen years ago, only 8 percent of health care facilities were using electronic health records (EHR). Today, that number has ballooned to more than 95 percent, according to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. But what happens to the old data that resides in an older legacy computer system?

The answer, Triyam founder and CEO Sudhakar Mohanraj discovered, was frequently nothing.

DIGITAL HEALTH CARE DATA PIONEERS

While working on a health care IT project, Mohanraj says he “came across a customer in North Dakota that had moved out of legacy systems into new software, but they still had the legacy server sitting there so they could retain the data.”

The Triyam founder immediately recognized the business opportunity that customer situation represented, as well as the wide-open market, which he estimates is now valued around \$1 billion.



Sudhakar Mohanraj,
founder and CEO, Triyam

With the increase of EHRs, a new market segment of health care data archiving has emerged within the last five years, says Mohanraj. Triyam’s product allows facilities to remove data from old servers and reformat it so the data can be uploaded to an archive. In this way, facilities are then able to decommission older legacy systems.

ARCHIVING HISTORICAL PATIENT DATA

The reason many health care facilities simply push old data to the side is that the process to export, reformat, and convert it for use in a new system is complex. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requirements mandate that old data be retained, so many facilities often end up storing it on old, inactive systems.

There are challenges with that decision, however, Mohanraj explains. One is the expense. The annual licensing fee to maintain a legacy system can be costly, as is maintaining operating systems for on-premises computer systems containing legacy data. Another is the security risk. The older the system gets, the more vulnerable it is to a security breach, he says.

Leaving data behind on an old system also makes it virtually impossible to use, Mohanraj says. “People want to query the data and find out, for example, what the business was like five years ago, so they can predict the future,” says Mohanraj. So Triyam is building tools to search the data, analyze it, and use it for business intelligence by powering it with artificial intelligence, he says.

Triyam is poised for continued growth. The company estimates that its product typically costs less than 25 percent of a legacy system. And in 2021, KLAS Research designated Triyam Best in KLAS for data archiving.

TRIYAM.COM



Nº1567
2021 Ranking

300.3%
3-Year Growth

12
Employees

\$2.46
million
2020 Revenue

BEFORE: A maker of playing cards

AFTER: A video-game and consumer-electronics business

BEFORE: A multiplayer video game

AFTER: A workplace-communication tool



01 | Julia Cheek

Founder

**EVERLY HEALTH AND
EVERLYWELL**

"I never originally believed that we would be involved in the testing response. It wasn't until the FDA emergency use authorization at the very end of February 2020 that we realized Everlywell could actually make a big impact. And so it was honestly somewhat of an easy decision. And it wasn't my decision. It was something that I brought to the team, and we talked about at length the fact that this would be a tremendous amount of work for undetermined impact. Regardless, there was a resounding commitment from our team that there was no better use of our resources and our time than to commit to trying to be part of the solution. It was not their job to work 24/7 during a pandemic, but it was a moment that they felt so mission-oriented that they couldn't imagine not doing it."

Cheek's digital health company Everlywell makes a range of at-home diagnostic tests. At the outset of the pandemic, it shifted in just two weeks to offering tests for the coronavirus.

02 | David Wolfe

Co-founder and CEO
THE FASCINATION

"We launched the Fascination as a place to discover and shop new culture-defining brands. We soon discovered we had made a strategic mistake—when we launched the new site it simply didn't work. We diagnosed the problem in a matter of hours and fixed it over a week. The results were transformative and our focus changed overnight. Our conversion rate increased five times in seven days. Call it a 'pivot' if you want, but I call it survival."

After launching in 2020, Wolfe shifted the Virginia Beach, Virginia, company's strategy from focusing on affiliate relationships to building out its transactional marketplace.

Bill Austin

Founder and CEO

BILL AUSTIN & ASSOCIATES

"Adaptation and perseverance is key. You cannot succeed if you don't allow yourself, your mindset, and your business to be malleable to circumstances outside of your control."

Austin's Columbus, Indiana-based system engineering company is a four-time Inc. 5000 honoree.

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02.

01.



Financial Freedom: Access to Nationwide Investment Property

Norada Real Estate Investments provides vetted turnkey investment properties

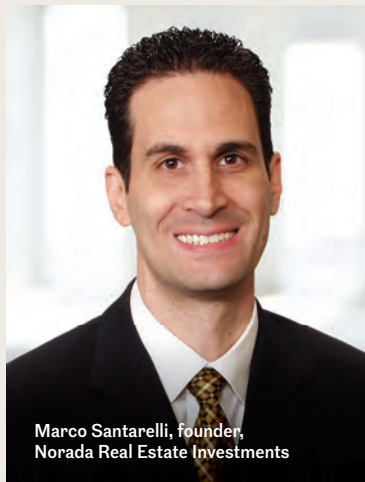
Marco Santarelli bought his first investment property at 18, when he could qualify for financing. “I had an interest at a young age in financial freedom and entrepreneurship,” he says. In 2003, after his dot-com company failed with the stock market crash, Santarelli went back to real estate investing, buying 84 units in nine months. At real estate workshops, investors kept asking him for tips and mentorship. But Santarelli was too busy assessing his own deals.

“That’s when a light bulb went off,” he says. Santarelli became a source for other investors, providing access to investment properties he wasn’t buying. That worked out so well he got his real estate broker license in California, founding Norada Real Estate Investments in 2004 to connect investors with curated turnkey properties in 25 markets nationwide.

HUB-AND-SPOKE MODEL

Norada’s model focuses on investment properties meeting these criteria: a good market, a good neighborhood, new or like-new condition, tenant occupied, generating a positive cash flow, and a good rate of return. The company’s six investment counselors are licensed agents who seek to understand a client’s investment goals, which are usually to build equity and increase passive income.

In addition to providing vetted residential income properties, the company connects investors to financing, professional management, and any services needed for a smooth sale and investment operation. Santarelli says Norada operates on a hub-and-spoke model. “Everything the investor needs is available to them through our network, as a spoke on the hub.” Norada’s only compensation is the sell-side broker fee, making their services free to their investor clients.



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Norada operates in 25 markets, mostly in the Midwest, South, and Southeast. Most investors don’t live in the area they buy in, rarely seeing the property in person. And though located in California, Norada doesn’t offer properties there. “I wouldn’t touch California with a 40-foot pole,” says Santarelli. “The numbers don’t make sense at all.” On average, Norada’s single-family home sale is around \$150,000, and \$220,000 for all properties, including duplexes and fourplexes.

While the pandemic further shrunk the existing home inventory supply, the build-to-rent market gained traction in the last few years, Santarelli says. Aside from not being immediately tenant occupied, the properties meet Norada’s other criteria and fill a market hole.

Santarelli is gratified to get regular emails thanking them for what they do. “Sometimes the people aren’t even our clients, but they hear our podcast and it changed their direction in life.”

NORADAREALESTATE.COM



Nº3917
2021 Ranking

80%
3-Year Growth

25
Real Estate
Markets

\$55
million
Deal Value Currently
Under Contract

BEFORE: A carpet-cleaning product for hotel rooms

AFTER: Water purification and energy services

BEFORE: A location check-in site where users shared photos of themselves with friends

AFTER: A photo- and video-sharing social network



Ami Kassir
Founder and CEO
MULTIFUNDING

“Every successful entrepreneur I’ve met is really stubborn. So it’s hard sometimes to know exactly when enough is enough. My best advice is to build a board of advisers around you. This will be extremely valuable to you as you make the tough decisions about whether and how to pivot.”

Kassir is an Inc. columnist who also runs MultiFunding, a Philadelphia-based consulting firm that specializes in helping small-business owners.

01 | Eddy Lu
Co-founder and CEO
GOAT GROUP

“My earlier company was a social dining network where we brought individuals together for group dinners. But there are a ton of friction points in this type of marketplace—you have to think about people saying, ‘Is the menu too expensive?’ ‘I’m gluten-free. Are there options for me?’ ‘What if I don’t like the theme of the dinner?’ So we decided to pivot from that. And when we built GOAT, we built it with the lens of: How do we remove as much friction from the sneaker market as possible?”

Lu’s Los Angeles-based company has more than 30 million members on its sneaker and apparel sales platforms, and has raised nearly \$500 million in funding.

02 | Megan Glover
Co-founder and CEO
120WATER

“When the pandemic hit in 2020, we had an idea: What if we leveraged our unique capabilities to monitor community wastewater for the early detection of Covid-19? We already had a modern sample-management process that we could use to sample wastewater instead of drinking water. Our new program was implemented by more than 100 utilities across 50 states, generating nearly \$1.7 million and impacting 33 million lives.”

Glover started the Zionsville, Indiana, water-testing startup after learning about lead contamination in Flint, Michigan. The company has raised more than \$11 million in funding.

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23%

OF INC. 5000 CEOs
PLAN TO LAUNCH
NEW PRODUCTS OR
PRODUCT LINES
TO ACHIEVE MOST
OF THEIR SALES
GROWTH OVER
THE NEXT THREE
YEARS.

02.

01.



Rural America Has a Broadband Champion

Millennium found it can make a bigger impact in the broadband world by focusing on underserved regions

From faster communication to a wider range of services, broadband technology is revolutionizing the flow of information. When it comes to rolling out the cutting-edge technology, large cities have an advantage as enterprise providers like AT&T and Verizon focus on serving urban areas first. Rural America relies on smaller fiber-optic networks, but those providers often face challenges, such as lack of funding and engineering know-how.

James Kyle, founder and CEO of Millennium, a broadband distributor headquartered in Delavan, Wisconsin, decided that focusing on smaller markets could have a bigger impact. Instead of simply supplying materials, Millennium evolved into a full-service consulting and resource company for growing fiber optic networks. This includes offering geographic information system (GIS) engineering, construction loans, equipment rental, and materials.

“Millennium has created a dynamic group to address what our clients need to achieve success,” says Kyle, whose company has 15 locations in the U.S. and one in Canada. “Most don’t have formal engineering or purchasing departments. We act as an extension of their business, redefining what it means to be a distributor.”

STAYING SMALL PAYS OFF BIG

The decision to go after smaller markets was intentional, says Kyle. “We could have easily driven revenue higher by focusing on major cities, but it wouldn’t have had nearly the community impact. I can’t begin to say how impactful our early management team was. We looked around to see what voids needed to be filled, and that fell in rural America.”

Millennium remains focused on underserved and rural communities in the U.S. and Canada. Many broadband companies in

those areas have challenges with logistics and funding, creating hurdles to providing the high-speed access that residents need to work, learn, and play from home. In addition to supplying construction materials, Millennium offers creative financing through Millennium Infrastructure Fund with bridge loans to companies waiting on funding and equipment rental to keep projects moving forward. Millennium Geospatial offers enhanced GIS services, using data from traditional engineers to increase efficiencies and make it easier to drive decisions.

SUCCESS LIES IN HELPING OTHERS

“In our industry, the first to market will usually be the most successful,” says Kyle. “It’s important that we help our clients get there faster. We’re not only getting closer to our clients; we’re creating opportunities that otherwise wouldn’t happen.”

MYMILLENNIUM.US



James Kyle, founder and CEO



7x
on the
Inc. 5000 list

139%
3-Year Growth

\$147M
2020 Revenue

2004
Year Founded

BEFORE: A video-dating service

AFTER: An online video-sharing platform

01 | **Simon Huck***Co-founder and CEO
JUDY*

"We launched our safety company JUDY in January 2020, and within six weeks, we needed to pivot from weather-related disasters to the impact of a worldwide pandemic. We tapped our certified emergency expert to share real-time updates on Covid safety measures, donated 50,000 N95 masks from our supply chain to the New York State Department of Health, and quickly created a new portable kit stocked with masks, sanitizer, and protective gloves. It was a master class in embracing change, chaos, and continual challenges. As a leader, I quickly learned that flexibility wins and pivoting isn't optional."

Huck's New York City company, which makes emergency prep kits, has raised more than \$2 million in funding.

01.

Stephen Baer*Co-founder and chief creative officer
THE GAME AGENCY*

"Every industry seems to be changing with lightning speed, and continuing to do the same old thing will make you a dinosaur in no time."

Baer's Stamford, Connecticut, business, which makes game-based training software, was acquired by employee training services provider eLearning Brothers in March 2021.

02 | **Pooneh Mohajer***Co-founder and CEO
TOKIDOKI*

"At the start of 2020, we realized that our wholesale business was about to take a significant hit—which it did, by 40 percent. Upon that realization, we aggressively focused on our DTC business, knowing that it was the only immediate viable channel for growth. We decided to increase our advertising budget and pursue a more aggressive, strategic approach with our dollars. It resulted in four times growth with better margins."

Mohajer launched Los Angeles-based lifestyle brand Tokidoki, her third company, in 2005.

02.

33%

OF INC. 5000 CEOs ARE ACTIVELY WORKING TO INTEGRATE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ROBOTICS INTO THEIR WORKFORCES.



01 | Jessie Hayes-Stallings

Founder and CEO
SKINPHOREA FACIAL BAR

“We took a look at our menu to determine what services our clients wanted that would provide the highest profit margin. Laser hair removal was one, because we had been referring clients to dermatologists for it. We devised a monthly membership that, number one, keeps our cash flow consistent so we can accurately budget everything. And, number two, if the profit margin for laser hair removal is 70 percent instead of 40 percent like facials, one person doing that all day can make up the profit for two employees. So when other businesses were feeling defeated, I felt like that was a great chance for opportunity. And I didn’t think twice. We ran with it within two weeks.”

Founded in 2016, Hayes-Stallings’s Detroit-based business has two locations and \$1.2 million in revenue.

Natasha Miller

Founder and CEO
ENTIRE PRODUCTIONS

“Don’t wait for a pandemic to be pivot-ready. If something isn’t working in your business, or if you see opportunities, pay attention. Look for options and ‘start ugly.’ There’s no sense in trying to make it perfect right out of the gate.”

Miller’s San Francisco event and entertainment production company made the Inc. 5000 list in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

02 | Stewart Butterfield

Co-founder and CEO
SLACK

“My co-founders and I built a web-based massive multiplayer game, which was a terrible idea. We worked on it for three and a half years and had 45 people at peak, and developed this system for internal communication that we really liked. Whenever there was an opportunity to improve the internal communication tool, we would do that, and then go back to what we were supposed to be doing. By the time we decided to shut down the game, we had a relatively fully featured proto-Slack that we all agreed we’d never work without again. And it was a pretty short hop from there to ‘We should try to make this a product.’”

Slack topped 12 million daily active users in 2019, and was acquired by Salesforce in 2021 for \$27.7 billion.



02.

SPREAD FROM LEFT: COURTESY SUBJECTS (2), GETTY IMAGES, COURTESY SUBJECT

**OF INC. 5000 CEOs
SAY THE PANDEMIC
HAS CREATED
OPPORTUNITIES
TO ADD MARKETS
THEIR BUSINESSES
HADN'T SERVED
BEFORE.**



03 | **Cate Luzio**
Founder and CEO
LUMINARY

“Pivoting is part of the game. Expect it. Embrace it. Love it. You can’t build a business without making changes and adapting to the market. It comes with the territory. You want to build a business? You should expect a little pivot-whiplash.”

Luzio founded the New York City women's networking business in 2018, and is one of Inc.'s 2021 Female Founders 100.