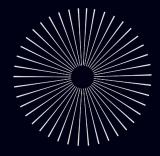
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Triumph Over Change

The year in spectacular growth.

From the September 2022 Issue





There's rapid growth, and then there's the sort of rapid growth that can melt the enamel right off your damn teeth. Surely that's what it felt like for the founders in this edition of our annual list of America's fastest-growing private companies. For they have piloted their startups on an atmosphere-piercing ride the likes of which we've not seen before. Among the top 500, the median revenue growth rate over the past three years is 2,144 percent—up from 1,820 percent for the 2021 list. • A strength runs through America's small businesses that defies the forces twisting our econo-

my into such weird knots. In some cases, you'll find Inc. 5000 founders honing their business models to battle these forces directly-like Nick Carter in Indiana, who built a supply chain solution that unites farmers and grocery shoppers. Or Cherie Kloss, a former reality show producer who took a big swing at the labor shortage with her nurses' hiring platform, SnapNurse. The result? Oh, about 146,000 percent revenue growth. Even more astonishing? That lands it at No. 2 this year. • The top slot goes to BlockFi, a crypto outfit that, at presstime, appeared likely to weather the crypto winter that has battered and bankrupted so many others-a testament to its adoption of rigorous practices more common in traditional finance firms. As for its growth? Well, let's just say you have to see those numbers to believe them. • Still, perhaps no one embodies the spirit of the class of 2022 like Vlad Kytainyk, a Ukrainian immigrant and CEO of No. 50, Kitrum. He made a plan to get his software team in Ukraine out of harm's way before Russia invaded, and executed it without losing staff or clients. Kytainyk, like Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, addressed his troops with steely confidence. "If you can't do that," he says, "why are you running this business?" That's the Inc. 5000 brand of leadership—with teeth.

HOW THE 2022 INC. 5000 COMPANIES WERE SELECTED

2022

Companies on the 2022 Inc. 5000 are ranked according to percentage revenue growth from 2018 to 2021. To qualify, companies must have been founded and generating revenue by March 31, 2018. They must be U.S.-based, privately held, for-profit, and independent-not subsidiaries or divisions of other companies-as of December 31, 2021. (Since then, some on the list may have gone public or been acquired.) The minimum revenue required for 2018 is \$100,000; the minimum for 2021 is \$2 million. As always, Inc. reserves the right to decline applicants for subjective reasons. Growth rates used to determine company rankings were calculated to four decimal places.



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For more information on company spotlights and other advertising opportunities, contact Pete Franco: pfranco@inc.com.



BlockFi's Great Rise—and Even Greater Escape

It was the country's fastest-growing private company —until the crypto winter blanketed the sector. Here's how an innovative financial startup is succeeding through good, old-fashioned fundamentals.

From the September 2022 Issue



Back in January of this year, Flori Marquez, 31, and her co-founder, Zac Prince, 36, were running the fastest-growing company on the Inc. 5000. That company, BlockFi, was a crypto trading and financial services platform designed to be the bridge from traditional finance to the crypto economy. From the very beginning, the startup's strategy had been to demystify crypto and transform the digital currency-made possible by the explanation-resistant technology of blockchain-into something more mainstream. BlockFi wasn't trying to capture crypto moonbeams in a jar and sell them as energy. Instead, Marquez and Prince wanted to offer products that were familiar to most consumers, such as credit cards and interest-bearing accounts, using crypto as the asset base. For years, it had all gone according to plan.

Jersey City, New Jersey-based Block-Fi launched in 2017, and made its first crypto-backed loan the following January. Having devised a loan product using outside capital, the founders also wanted to create a savings product that would build an ongoing pool of capital for lending, as any bank would. That product, the BlockFi Interest Account (BIA), debuted in 2019. There was nothing complex about it: Retail customer—generally ones who are tech-savvier than typical investors—would park their crypto at BlockFi and earn interest rates that were vastly superior to the rates banks were offering, albeit without FDIC insurance.

Since its clients already had digital wallets to hold their crypto, a trading platform was the logical next step; Block-Fi's \$18.3 million Series A round in July 2019 funded its launch. Now customers could trade Bitcoin and Ether in addition to borrowing and lending. By the time BlockFi announced its B round in February 2020, it had \$650 million in assets under management, a 160 percent increase since closing the A round. And that was just the beginning. By year's end, revenue had jumped some 20,000 percent, and the company had \$5 billion in assets under management. It also introduced a crypto rewards credit card with Visa.

BlockFi's strategy was clearly working. Its revenue neared \$500 million in 2021, primarily from lending and trading, a 25X increase from the prior year, which was itself a 20X rocket. Like others in this arena, including Binance and Coinbase, BlockFi's growth was hitched to the price of Bitcoin and other crypto coins. Those prices shot ahead last year as crypto gained more acceptance among consumers, Wall Street institutions, hedge funds, and even stodgy pension funds.

For a time, even as Bitcoin turned south in early 2022, BlockFi seemed to motor along. Marquez and Prince thought they'd built a cyber winter-proof organization. BlockFi is a centralized finance (CeFi) company, structured more like a bank, with an audit and risk committee that reports to the board. This past May, though, crypto tokens called Luna and TerraUST, available on the Anchor lending platform, began to tumble. Crypto's market cap dropped from a peak of \$2.9 trillion in 2021 to just below \$1 trillion by June.

| BLOCKFI CEO: ZAC PRINCE |
|----------------------------|
| CATEGORY: |
| FINANCIAL SERVICES |
| THREE-YEAR |
| REVENUE GROWTH: |
| 245,616% |

NO.



BlockFi's founders found themselves swimming against a tide that was dragging the entire crypto industry under. "What I love most about my job is that I get a new job [all the time]," says Marquez, who worked for a hedge fund and fintech startup before co-founding Block-Fi. "It used to be every six months. Now it's every month."

When one of BlockFi's competitors, Celsius Network, froze withdrawals, cit-

ing "difficult" market conditions, Block-Fi customers started to head for the exits. The squeeze was on. The company, which had planned another capital raise to expand its balance sheet, encountered resistance to its funding efforts, primarily because new lenders demanded to be put at the head of the line should the market continue to decline. Block-Fi wanted to protect customers--and to send a market signal. Ultimately, instead BlockFi wasn't trying to capture crypto moonbeams in a jar and sell them as energy. it wanted to offer products familiar to consumers.

of going public as they had been discussing with JPMorgan at the beginning of the year, Prince and Marquez had to grab a life preserver from crypto platform FTX and its founder, Bahamas-based crypto billionaire Sam Bankman-Fried: a \$400 million line of credit, in return for an option to buy the firm.

The investment will let BlockFi return to a growth path but it is no guarantee the company will endure in its current form. FTX can exercise the option in October 2023. The agreement does have an escape hatch: At any time before that date, Marquez and Prince can make the option go away by paying FTX two or three times the agreed-upon sales price, depending on how well the company performs. "It's not outside the realm of possibility that we could be in a position to buy back this option," Prince, a former fintech executive who serves as Block-Fi's CEO, said on an Animal Spirits podcast, "and keep going as an independent company and be publicly traded."

And so, essentially, he and Marquez are restarting their startup, with 85 to 90 percent of their equity washed away, but with more than 650,000 accounts and \$3.9 billion of assets under management, as of August 1.

Which leaves them to prove that this chaotic, not-quite-currency called crypto is really the future of money—and that companies like BlockFi can be the banks of the future. They probably have about a year to make their case. *—Bill Saporito*





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Inc. 5000 company spotlight

Clean Food for the Masses

Avatar Natural Foods is targeting America's health issues with a fresh take on ready-to-eat food.

M aster Chef Diego Silva and his partner, Michael Oghigian, want Americans to eat better. And their Henderson, Nevada-based food service and manufacturing company, Avatar Natural Foods, makes clean, ready-toeat food accessible, affordable, and delicious.

Silva and Oghigian have worked in the food sector in one way or another for more than two decades. Soon after he immigrated to the U.S. at age 17, Silva landed a job as a restaurant dishwasher. He worked his way through the ranks, eventually becoming a pastry chef. By age 21, he opened his first restaurant. While that venture closed in 2007, that steady determination led to the launch of Avatar Natural Foods when he was just 23.

Since then, the company has grown to be a leading gourmet food manufacturer, distributor, and importer. It has grown to nearly \$30 million in annual revenue and earned a coveted spot on the 2022 Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies.

EVERY COMPANY IS A TECH COMPANY

More than a decade ago, Silva realized how technology would revolutionize the food service industry. As he learned about food service tech, he traveled to more than 50 countries and toured roughly 200 factories to find the best balance of innovation and automation without sacrificing the human element of his business.

"We are able to process from fresh to frozen, all the way through," he says. "Very few companies can do what we do."

INVEST IN YOUR MISSION

Silva believes that clean, healthy food could be part of the solution to health problems like cancer, diabetes, and other illnesses. "People want to eat clean," he says. The challenge? Making the food affordable and accessible.



The company opened an 80,000-squarefoot kitchen and outfitted it with the equipment they needed to produce food on a large scale. By controlling the environment and making products entirely in-house, Avatar can achieve greater efficiency and shelf life without sacrificing quality. The team's goal is to have more than a million-square-feet of U.S. processing facilities within the next several years.

STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF

Avatar Foods has a number of mass market customers, but also produces niche brands and offers private label, co-packing, wholesale, and fulfillment services. Its own brands include Yaya's Kitchen, Eat Pita, Tuscany Cookies, and Fiave Donuts.

While Avatar adapts to serve new markets, its ingredients and product quality are non-negotiable. The company will not add preservatives, chemicals, hydrogenated fats, or other ingredients that are not clean. "When people buy what you make, the love you're putting out transcends through what they eat," he says. Silva says that's a bond of trust they will not break.

AVATARNATURALFOODS.COM



2007 Year Founded

45,000 Pounds of Food Produced Per Day

> 200+ Employees





Improving Health Care Price Transparency

WellRithms helps employers reduce costs and gives everyone a voice in the business of health care.





We've all seen the news stories: Someone needs emergency surgery or undergoes a routine procedure and then receives a surprise and, often, sky-high—medical bill, even though they have health insurance.

Inflated charges and abusive billing are largely to blame for most of these unexpected bills. Now, WellRithms, a Portland, Oregonbased medical bill review company, is trying to tackle this problem. The company focuses on improving health care reimbursement transparency to reduce costs for employers that self-fund their employee health plans. Its innovative approach to helping customers has landed the company on the 2022 Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies.

PROTECTING EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS

WellRithms gives employers with self-funded health insurance and their employees access to affordable health care by helping them avoid "balance billing." This is when a provider bills the patient the difference between their fee and the amount covered by the patient's insurance policy.

Balance billing usually occurs when the provider is outside of the insured's policy network. Depending on the policy, an employee may



be on the hook for these charges. However, a provider often will use the patient's bill to get the health plan to pay, which can be costly for employers with self-funded plans who cover out-of-pocket claims.

WellRithms has its own captive insurance company that allows it to assume the risk of medical claims and "deal directly with a provider's egregious charges," says Merrit Quarum, M.D., WellRithms' founder and CEO. Quarum is a former practicing physician with more than 25 years of medical reimbursement experience.

When someone receives a surprise medical bill, the common practice is for them to retain an attorney to deal with collection efforts or negotiate a settlement. WellRithms eliminates the financial liability for employees and employers.

The company also combines facility costs and profit margins in group health to determine reasonable payments with hospitals and providers.

DRIVING DOWN HEALTH CARE COSTS

WellRithms is already delivering results. Last year, the company reviewed 55,000 out-of-network bills and increased savings from 40 percent to 75 percent, with fewer than 100 appeals.

"Providers were satisfied with our fair and correct payments. When patients were balance billed, the liability for the bill was moved to the captive, and no patient experienced any collection actions," Quarum says.

Quarum adds that most people don't understand how health care reimbursement works, but WellRithms is focused on empowering and educating its clients about the process.

"WellRithms looks forward to partnering with health plans and employers to encourage everyone that they can have a voice in the business of health care," Quarum says.

WELLRITHMS.COM

CREATED BY INC. STUDIO

Inc. 5000 company spotlight

Turbulent Times Call for Strong Employee Relationships

Rely Workforce Group discovered that hiring and nurturing the right talent is good for business and employees.

f Covid taught us anything, it's that unpredictable circumstances can quickly impact business. In the wake of the pandemic, a tsunami of forces including supply chain delays, inflation, an increasingly hybrid workforce, and "The Great Resignation" continue to shift workplace dynamics. As a result, business leaders who long for "The Before Times" will probably see different results than those who think creatively and roll with the changes. That's exactly what Charlotte, N.C. staffing firm Rely Workforce Group did, and it's paying off.

etworkere eroup finds advantages in nurturing employees.

ADAPT TO THE UNEXPECTED

While there's no way to be ready for every crisis or market shift, willingness to try new things when blindsided by unforeseen factors is essential. After building a successful startup in 2016, President and CEO Douglas Alvarenga had to hire new recruiters after the original staff became disenchanted as market conditions changed. In 2008, it was easy to place staff because people needed jobs, but Alvarenga says today's workers are asking for more—including better pay, bonuses, and temp-to-hire prospects—and they need to be sold on opportunities.

"We had to pivot," Alvarenga says. "Knowing that, we looked at what made us successful." Alvarenga and his vice president of operations, Jaquelin Chavez, decided to start from scratch by hiring new recruiters, training them "from the ground up" to engage with and sell to staff while putting their internal team members on track for a rewarding career.

SEEK TALENT IN NEW PLACES

Having little luck with online job postings or more seasoned recruiters, Alvarenga and Chavez looked beyond both the staffing industry and the Charlotte market. Trusting their instincts based on years of experience about who would make good hires has paid off. In fact, the Rely team met one of their strongest prospects at a job fair and saw potential in her. Now an employee, she works in onsite workforce management and is moving into an operations role at the firm.

NURTURING PEOPLE DELIVERS ROI

Finding new talent wasn't the only strategy Alvarenga and Chavez employed; retention was equally important. Chavez developed and implemented onboarding processes designed to support new recruiters by offering clarity and a welcoming work environment. With input from staff, she also created standard operating procedures and training and development opportunities. "We're constantly showing them new recruiting methods and processes," says Chavez. These tools help their recruiters cultivate the necessary relationships that allow them to sell today's more discerning temporary workers on job placements with clients.

"We definitely see a big ROI from the training and development programs that we put in place," says Alvarenga.

RELYWORKFORCE.COM







2x Inc. 5000 Honoree





Growth Through Advocacy and Representation

Elite Business Strategies makes consequence management more diverse.

ĘĻIŢĘŖŲSĮŅĘSS

80 Federal Disaster Responses 300k+ Products 1000 Brands 100+ U.S. Distribution Centers Princess Ousley's first deployment as a government emergency manager was to a Mississippi town in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She soon realized that the job wasn't as simple as walking each person through the standard Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) application process.

Ousley recalls the heart-wrenching stories. There was an elderly man who left weeping after recounting how he'd watched helplessly as his disabled wife drowned in the flood waters. One grandmother spent more than three years trying to acquire permanent housing for herself and her grandchildren. And some individuals who didn't speak English were fearful of encountering immigration authorities after going to the disaster-recovery center. Each situation needed a tailored response.

"I later discovered that what I was really tasked to do was called meaningful communication," says Ousley, who started her company, Elite Business Strategies LLC, to offer a better approach to emergency management. "I couldn't start with the paperwork. I had to start with their story."



READY TO RESPOND

Since October 2011, Elite Business Strategies' senior executives have responded to more than 80 presidentially declared disasters. Headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida, with additional offices in Orlando; Hampton, Virginia; and Fayetteville, Georgia, Elite Business Strategies grew from a two-person team to a company with more than 400 people at its peak of employment in 2021. It also has a cadre of more than 1,000 on standby for project assignments.

The company's operations include its emergency management consulting for state and local government agencies, the E3 Construction division, and the myElite Products division. The firm's focus has expanded beyond strictly emergency management into what Ousley calls "consequence management" and mitigation for events that may not start out as emergencies.

INCLUSIVE RECOVERY

One of Ousley's main goals in founding Elite was to reduce the disparities in access to emergency assistance, as well as help make the recovery economy more inclusive. She makes hiring people from the affected area a priority on every project.

"Allowing locals to participate in the disaster economy is a big deal because usually opportunities are farmed outside of that community," Ousley says.

While she's proud of the numbers that quantify Elite's growth, Ousley says she's even prouder of the dedicated people who make it possible.

"What measures success to me is that I have employees who genuinely enjoy coming to work every day," she says. "They enjoy contributing to the mission and moving the company forward."

EBSLEADERS.COM



Adaptability Drives Ad Agency's Growth

Kashurba's growth comes from its ability to pivot to serve client needs.

J oe Kashurba started his entrepreneurial journey in high school. He produced a student band video at a local pizza parlor and sold copies to the members' parents. After he built his own website to promote his fledgling video-production business, a new opportunity in web design was born. That business grew so fast that the teen eventually set video production aside to focus solely on website design. To get more design customers, he taught himself the ropes of online advertising, which led to another transition.

Since 2017, Kashurba combined those talents and has operated exclusively as a direct response digital advertising firm, though the legal name of the Pittsburgh-based firm is still Kashurba Web Design Group, LLC. The business continues to run virtually and has added team members located throughout the country. As the company's founder, CEO, and chief strategist, Kashurba says adaptability has been critical to both the company's growth and that of its clients.

DIGITAL ADVERTISING DISRUPTED

The agency prioritizes flexibility in the way it serves clients. For example, when advertising clients began to push for more transparency and faster response times from their agencies, Kashurba enlisted a popular communication app to keep his customers in the loop. "We started working directly with clients in Slack and running all of our ads within their accounts for full transparency," he says.

Pivoting has sometimes meant veering from industry convention. Kashurba says the company has figured out how to advertise on Facebook and Google advertising at scale, largely by ignoring the platforms' own best practices advice, he says.



"Facebook and Google want you to trust their platforms, but we do a lot of media buying manually to squeeze additional performance out of the platforms," he says.

SMALL BY DESIGN

Constant change also describes the agency's creative process, with ad developers testing hundreds of ideas to find the winners. "It's almost like we're 'day trading' creative," Kashurba says. "We don't just create an ad and let it run for a year. Every week we're producing and testing different ads."

Kashurba has been deliberate about collaborating with a small clientele. That strategy allows the firm to provide services tailored to each client's needs. He also lets new customers "test out" the company with small-budget or even unpaid projects.

"We'll do a test to see if we can generate leads and profit for them," Kashurba says. "We're willing to start small, prove what we can do, and scale up."

KASHURBA.COM









17 Team Members



Inc. Masters is dedicated to two ideas. The first is that nobody understands the rewards and challenges of leading a fast-growth company better than the honorees of the 5000. And the second is that staying connected to your Inc. 5000 peers and to Inc.—the only publication wholly devoted to your success—will help you prosper.



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coaches, and cheerleaders rolled into one.

influencing Inc.'s coverage and helping shape how Inc. serves entrepreneurs like you.

Inc. 5000 company spotlight

Making Your Customer the Hero

ASAR Digital sustains explosive growth by minimizing costs and maximizing efficiency with unique customer experience solutions.

A s Sanjjeev Singh worked with clients in his role at business enterprise software developer SAP, he saw the same issue time after time. Midmarket companies needed SAP software to run their companies, and they also needed help deploying it. But the big consulting companies to which they turned were often tough to work with and too expensive for their budgets. As a result, customers turned to options other than SAP and were ultimately dissatisfied.

Singh founded ASAR Digital to be a solution for midsize firms deploying SAP. He used his experience from years in the tech sector to understand his customers' problems and provide unique SAP implementation services while delivering a top-notch customer experience. Using a strong project methodology and superior technical expertise, he and his team were able to deliver solid solutions at a fraction of the cost. That approach has earned the Lisle, Illinois-based company a spot on the 2022 Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America.

BUILDING A SOLUTION

From the beginning, Singh set out to address his customers' biggest pain points: costly software and complex processes. He worked diligently with his team to build rapid deployment packages for various SAP Solutions for midmarket customers. He used a combination of teams from various regions to provide competitive pricing, choosing only team members with strong technical skills who handle projects with speed and accuracy, which is crucial when customers are spending millions of dollars.

The approach has worked. Since 2017, ASAR Digital has doubled in growth each year, reaching an expected annual revenue of \$10 million in 2022. The company now has roughly 120 employees and has big plans for expansion that



include offices in Tempe, Arizona; Delhi, India; and Bogota, Colombia.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

From the beginning, Singh knew he would need to establish credibility in such a competitive sector. He's showcased his software expertise as the co-author of three books. And the company has earned status as an SAP Gold Partner.

But, Singh's purpose isn't just about generating revenue. His goal is to build a sustainable and ethical company with integrity by ensuring his business model always serves his customers' evolving needs. "I tell our team members daily that our critical success factor is that we have to make our customers the hero, and we'll be in business forever," he says.

Through real-world expertise, agile business practices, and relentless improvement to deliver the best possible service to customers, ASAR Digital has advanced along an impressive growth trajectory. And by helping customers succeed in ways that fit their budgets, ASAR Digital continues to find success by helping its customers do the same.

ASARDIGITAL.COM



\$10 million 2022 Revenue

100% Growth Rate (per year average)

> 120 Employees

4 Locations



Portrait of the **American Entrepreneur By the Numbers**

They don't follow the rules. They don't take no for an answer. They push harder when everyone else guits. And they are America's most diligent job creators. Meet the CEOs running the fastest-growing companies in the U.S. This is how they got here. *—Lindsay Blakely*

From the September 2022 Issue



"The reason I started the business was for personal freedom. I wanted to make enough money so that I could manage my life on my terms. Bringing on a partner means that I have to answer to someone, and that is the opposite of why I started the company."

-Anonymous



WANTED

TO LEAD THEIR

OWN

COMPANIES.

cite hiring and retaining good staff.

cite meetina demand.

87% ARE OVER 35. 80% HAVE FOUR-YEAR DEGREES OR MORE. 520/0 ARE SERIAL ENTREPRENEURS.

FORTY-SIX PERCENT HAVE TURNED DOWN VENTURE CAPITAL. INSTEAD, TO LAUNCH THEIR COMPANIES THEY TAPPED:



THEIR OWN SAVINGS 80% CREDIT CARDS 25% LOANS FROM FRIENDS & FAMILY 24% 66

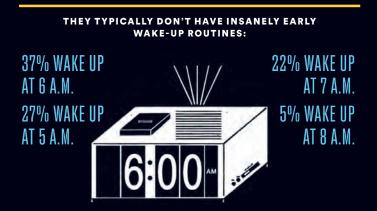
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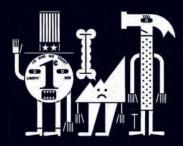






UNCERTAINTY IN THE ECONOMY IS TAKING A TOLL. THESE IS-SUES THEY SAY, ARE "EXTREMELY IMPORTANT" RIGHT NOW:

TAXES 50% INFLATION 48% REBUILDING THE ECONOMY 43% EDUCATION 38% HEALTH CARE 32%



Most admired entrepreneur: ELON MUSK

Most overrated entrepreneur: **ELON MUSK**



"He's unfiltered and extremely successful in groundbreaking industries."

—Eric Kimberling, Third Stage Consulting Group

"He's obviously successful, but I wish he would shut up."

—Anonymous

IF THE GOVERNMENT COULD DO ONE THING TO BETTER HELP THEM AND THEIR BUSINESSES, IT WOULD BE:



—Brett Trembly, Get Staffed Up



Built to Survive a Crisis

DaBella's strong corporate culture gave it staying power during the pandemic.

C ven the CEO of DaBella finds the Portland, Oregon, home improvement services company's remarkable growth during a pandemic hard to believe. Sales shot up nearly 50 percent, from \$86 million in 2019 to \$120 million in 2021. In 2020, the company opened eight new locations, the largest expansion it had ever had. And with revenue still rising after crossing the \$100 million threshold, the next target is to surpass \$1 billion by 2026.

"What Covid taught us is that nothing can really stop our company after we made it through that process," says Donnie McMillan, Jr., who co-founded DaBella in 2011 and named it for his twins, David and Isabella, who were born the same year. "Any company that survived 2020 had a crisis that was forced upon it. DaBella shone in 2020."

KEEPING COMMUNICATION OPEN DURING THE PANDEMIC

In the early days of the pandemic, constant communication was the company's lifeline. "Every single day, every one of our locations wired into a Zoom call for a half-hour to an hour," McMillan says.

The health and safety of employees was the top concern. DaBella executives huddled regularly to get their heads around the potential seriousness of the situation and decide whether the company should stay open.

"We were deemed essential almost immediately, because we're in construction, but did we want to put our people out there?" is how McMillan recalls their dilemma.

He says the ultimate decision was to remain open for the time being but shut down a location where anyone contracted the coronavirus. The company also made changes to comply









40k Projects Completed



with social distancing guidelines. For instance, employees who ordinarily made in-person contacts at people's homes were transferred to newly opened call centers.

"Our culture as a company is, it doesn't matter what you're hired to do, you may be doing a different job within 90 days to six months," McMillan says, "Our adaptability became part of the new norm."

"THE TEAM IS EVERYTHING"

For McMillan, it's paramount that DaBella employees at every location reflect the company's core values and its motto: "Lead. Care. Grow." "We want to improve the lives of everybody who works here and the lives of our customers," he says.

At DaBella, making employees' lives better means giving them the opportunity to advance. The story of the company's chief marketing officer, Grace Sorensen, who started as an hourly employee and rose to an executive post where she managers more than 400 people, is just one of many examples. McMillan believes the company's rapid growth is partly from having a dedicated team of employees who always challenge one another and want the best for the company and its customers.

"The team is everything," McMillan says. "Everybody has a core work ethic and a drive to take care of their people."

McMillan notes that while many business owners view their own roles as the most important for success, he thinks that top-down view is wrong-headed.

"I learned a long time ago—and I think it's the most important lesson I learned—that one is not a big enough number to do anything significant," McMillan says.

"The team that we put together here does amazing things. They believe they can, and they do."

DABELLA.US





Off the Chart

A former nurse builds a health care unicorn in just four years and changes her profession forever. The pulse-quickening history of Cherie Kloss's SnapNurse.

From the September 2022 Issue



When she was 15 years old--decades before she would go on to revolutionize health care staffing—SnapNurse founder Cherie Kloss was emancipated from her family. Her father, a Korean immigrant, decided he needed to return to Seoul to pursue a job opportunity. She'd have to fend for herself, but Kloss was undaunted: Her father had armed her with an immigrant's faith in the American dream.

Kloss moved in with a friend and got a full-time job at a bakery. She finished high school, and went on to college and nursing school. Next came a master's in anesthesiology, and then 10 years as a working anesthetist.

But in 2006, at the height of the reality TV craze, Kloss met a producer for A&E Networks, and decided that sounded like more fun. Over the next 10 years, through a media company she created and ran out of her house, MLC Media (short for "midlife crisis"), she sold no fewer than 38 shows about everything from Kentucky backyard oil prospectors to Alabama gold miners in the Amazon—and watched eight of them make it to the air.

Through it all, she kept her anesthesia work as a kind of side hustle, filling shifts whenever someone needed her—which begat yet another great career leap. "I was working at 11 different locations, and they'd call me to see if I was available, and I would have to bring my paper credentials in a manila folder," Kloss recalls. "It was all missed voice mails and bananas, and I said to myself it really needed to be on an app so I could easily find jobs and they could easily book me."

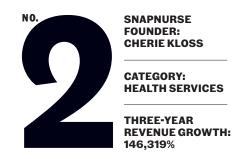
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She reached out to an old classmate, Jeff Richards, who was then the director of anesthesia at Atlanta's Grady Hospital. Richards had recently earned an MBA and written a paper outlining a hypothetical health care staffing app as part of his coursework, and couldn't help thinking he needed to join her. Together, they knew the systemic issues from both nurses' and administrators' perspectives.

In 2017 the pair officially launched Atlanta-based SnapNurse as a digital mar-

ketplace for connecting contract nurses and health care institutions. Modeling the software on that of gig-economy companies such as Uber and Airbnb, they made it simple for nurses to validate their credentials and find jobs, and simple for managers to find and select nurses. Attendance-tracking connected directly to payment. Just as it was once a revelation for people to click a button on their phones to summon a car, track its whereabouts, and pay for a ride to anywhere, it was transformational for both health care workers and administrators to move their constant hiring dance to SnapNurse. Once it had taken weeks and headaches to line up a gig; now, nurses could be on the job within a day or two.

It was transformational. Once it had taken weeks and headaches to line up a gig; now, nurses could be on the job within a day or two. Hospitals began adopting





the system, mostly in the Atlanta area, and the company started growing. In 2018, revenue was \$775,000. It grew fourfold in the next year.

Then came Covid. While the platform had been built originally for on-demand next-day bookings, suddenly hospitals didn't want different nurses flitting in and out daily—that seemed unsafe in a pandemic. But they did need extra help. SnapNurse started pursuing larger contracts, providing groups of nurses for longer periods, sometimes months at a time. The company soon found itself the go-to staffing tech solution for hospitals everywhere. "Our ability to handle scale took us past all of [the competition] by 10-fold in a two-year period," says Richards.

The result: From 2018 to 2021, Snap-Nurse grew nearly 150,000 percent. That's not a typo. And most of that growth occurred in just two of those years. In 2020, annual revenue jumped from \$3 million to \$88 million. By 2021, it had hit an astonishing \$1.1 billion.

With hypergrowth comes complications. It's a challenge as old as entrepreneurship itself. But it's all the more vexing when the complication is a byproduct of what elevated a company to begin with. Snap means speed. And that is the reputation we wanted to build that we deliver faster than any agency.

Indeed, one of the keys to SnapNurse's growth was a decision Kloss made early in the company's history to enable nurses to get paid on the same day as their shifts. "Snap means speed," she says, "and that is the reputation we wanted to build—that we deliver faster than any agency."

The reason it's not a standard offering, of course, is that it's a major squeeze on a company's cash flow. The SnapNurse team knew this early on, but didn't count on its off-the-charts growth. That quickly meant its credit line w as insufficient; it was suddenly on the hook for more and more payouts while waiting for its billing cycles to catch up. Eventually the company landed with Wells Fargo, where it now holds a \$400 million line of credit.

SnapNurse also struggled to grow its team quickly enough to handle all the incoming business. But today, after two-plus years of breakneck growth, the company is scaling more reasonably. It expects to finish the year with about \$1.6 billion in revenue, roughly 50 percent more than last year, and strong profits. It has 450 employees, and 350,000 nurses currently on the platform.

In late July, SnapNurse announced that Kloss would be stepping down as CEO, though she'll remain on the board. It's just the latest bold move for a woman whose entire life has been a series of gritty reinventions.

"I think it's because I was never told, 'You can't do that,' " Kloss says. "As long as you don't need a license, you can do just about anything." —*Tom Foster*



Multiplying Your Success

From the September 2022 Issue



You beat the odds. Obliterated expectations. Even made this year's Inc. 5000. Now your business is officially a success. Congratulations! But while you've certainly earned a glass of champagne and a victory lap (though probably not in that order), we know how entrepreneurs operate. The same drive that spurred you to your latest milestone won't let you rest until you've reached the

next one. And the one after that. There are always more worlds (and markets) to conquer.

That's why we asked dozens of past and present Inc. 5000 honorees for advice on where you go from here. We sought their guidance on how, once you've achieved a goal—recording eye-popping revenue growth, landing a coveted customer, locking down a deep-pocketed investor—to parlay it into even bigger and better things. Everything from some clever self-promotion to a gimlet-eyed reassessment to a whole new strategic plan.

Rest assured that your success will bring a whole new set of challenges, many of which you'll never see coming. There's advice on that here, as well. First, though, try to take a moment to be proud of all you've accomplished. And pass the champagne.



Streamlining Fresh Fruit Sales

Forever Fresh, LLC connects its commercial fruit growers in Chile and Peru with major retailers in the U.S.

When you reach for a juicy, ripe peach or a fragrant orange, you might not think of the journey it took to get to you. But that's the focus of Forever Fresh, LLC, a Wilmington, Delaware-based, grower-owned, fresh fruit sales and marketing company. While most fresh fruit exporters collaborate with transnational companies, which then act as a "middleman" to U.S. retailers, Forever Fresh operates differently by shortening the connection between growers and retailers, explains Managing Director Victor Arriagada.

Using company-owned commercial growers based in Chile and Peru, the company ships during the harvesting season in the Southern Hemisphere directly to ports in the U.S., including Philadelphia/Wilmington, Miami, and Los Angeles. That reduces the number of handlers involved in getting fruit to major retailers, including Aldi, Costco, Walmart, Kroger, Albertson's, and others. The result? Retailers always receive fresh and tasty fruit.

GETTING CLOSER TO THE CUSTOMER

Founded in 2009, the founders' goal was to ensure customer feedback reached the growers who could do something about it, says Arriagada, who shares managing director responsibilities with Evan Myers. During the past two years, the company's growth has been "impressive," Myers says, increasing sales to roughly 3 million cartons per year. Myers says that Forever Fresh is one of the biggest importers of cherries in the U.S.

"Layers and layers of supply chain communication can hinder real-time conversations about quality and delivery," Arriagada says. Direct-from-the-source feedback helps Forever Fresh growers improve fruit characteristics, as well as delivery timing.

The result, says Myers, is the growers' ability to pivot as necessary in response to retailer feedback. Because of the growers' streamlined hierarchy, "there aren't many layers to go through to make a decision, so they are made very fast," he says.

For example, during the last couple of years, the window for sales of particular products has been shifting. Changes regarding the fruits themselves are also possible. Color, size, flavor, and pack style can be modified for each Forever Fresh customer based on their feedback.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS THE KEY TO GROWTH

By using technology to increase efficiency during packing and to automate much of its storage process, Forever Fresh reduces opportunities for produce damage. That helps ensure its customers are always satisfied.

This contributes to the company's long-term approach to customer relationships, Arriagada says. The company's growth is fueled by providing customers with the exact type of fruit they want and need. "We have a common goal with our customers: sell more tasty and healthy fruits, by ensuring the final customer has a good eating experience," he says. "We depend on them, and they depend on us, which is a winwin for both of us."

FOREVERFRESHLLC.COM

Victor Arriagada (left) and Evan M managing directors, Forever Fresh





Innovative Partnerships Drive Growth

XenoPsi's three-part formula challenges industry norms and scales brands.







14 Countries

11 Equity Positions **M** ichaelAaron Flicker and a high school classmate started XenoPsi—which means "discovery of the unknown" in Latin—as an internet computer programming company in 1997. Bankrolled with a \$100 check from Flicker's grandmother, the business evolved into a privately held brand incubator and venture capital firm. It has provided marketing expertise to more than 100 client partners across a diverse set of industries.

Flicker attributes the success of XenoPsi, which makes its debut on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies this year, to three key business strategies. First, the company's business model aligns its financial success with that of its clients. Second, it employs behavioral science in its brand building. And third, it has launched multiple independent operating companies to better serve individual industries.

INNOVATIONS IN COMPENSATION

Flicker says the idea of hourly billing by businesses like marketing and advertising agencies never made sense to him. Doing so incentivizes padding hours or working slower to earn more.



XenoPsi has opted instead for arrangements that build true partnership with clients, such as revenue-shares, equity-based agreements, and other innovative payment models.

"We put skin in the game," Flicker says. "Which means we win only when our clients are successful."

XenoPsi also launches and operates its own brands, such as a compression sock company called Wellow, which is a prime example of its behavioral science expertise. For instance, the name choice applies sound symbolism: Wellow evokes likeability and ease. The company has used dozens of behavioral science insights to spur its growth, resulting in more than \$1 million in sock sales in its first seven months. In August 2022, XenoPsi also launched the Consumer Behavior Lab to further bring behavioral science into the United States to help brands make their marketing and media more effective.

STARTUPS TO MEET DEMAND

The third ingredient in XenoPsi's recipe for success is launching a portfolio of wholly owned companies doing business in areas ranging from alcoholic beverage marketing to political campaign consulting.

With headquarters in New York City and a second office in Washington, D.C., XenoPsi has just over 100 team members spread throughout 14 countries and 35 cities. Flicker notes that the company's international makeup is also central to its success.

"Having people connect from all over the world makes us a stronger, smarter, more agile firm that builds brands and sells products for our clients," he says.

XENOPSI.COM



A Leader in Men's Health Care Solutions

Limitless Male Medical Clinic is filling the health care void for men on issues that are difficult for men to discuss.

When Dan Molloy runs into patients and their wives around town, they usually want to thank him for revitalizing their marriage. Molloy is founder and CEO of Limitless Male Medical Clinic, a leading provider of comprehensive therapies to support men's well- being, including testosterone replacement, anti-aging therapies, and sexual performance treatments. Since its launch in 2016, Limitless has expanded from a single 800-square-foot clinic in Omaha, Nebraska, to 12 clinics in five states.



ALWAYS PATIENT-FIRST

The benefits of treating low testosterone extend beyond the bedroom and could include restored confidence, greater energy, better concentration, weight loss, enhanced mood, improved muscle mass, better relationships, and overall well-being. Not everyone knows that. Nor do they know that men's testosterone levels begin to decline around age 30.

Molloy, a serial entrepreneur who has run an ad agency since 2001, understands the importance of educating the market. Smart marketing has helped Limitless build a name for itself. Marketing is for naught, though, if you don't deliver exceptional service and results. "Our motto in all of our buildings, including our corporate office, is 'Patient First," Molloy says. "Patient First means respecting our patients' time. You'd be hard pressed to find a patient who waits more than a few minutes in our waiting room. We're adding customer service back into health care."

CHANGING THE GAME

Limitless hopes to raise the bar for all of health care by emphasizing personalized treatment, patient education, and patient safety. Testosterone therapy patients get blood work done monthly and receive medicine to protect the testes' natural production of the hormone. And the company is not afraid to go to bat for men's well-being. As the company increases its footprint and influence, Molloy will double down on his fight to drive positive regulatory changes through research, clinical trials, and relevant and up-to-date clinical data.

Another factor behind the growth that led the company's inaugural Inc. 5000 badge is innovation. One of the reasons Molloy started the business was to ensure the Midwest had access to the same innovative treatments as coastal cities. Limitless's offerings include a shockwave procedure for erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation in addition to comprehensive peptide treatments, a fast-growing arm of regenerative medicine. The best part of the job, Molloy says, is seeing these innovations improve people's lives right before your eyes. "We are impacting men's lives, which then impacts their family's life and their significant other's. That's the real story," he says.

LIMITLESSMALE.COM



LIMITLESS MALE Medical Clinic



12 Clinics in 5 States

Founded In **2016**



When Software Provides Value Tenfold

SRS Web Solutions is making the health care industry more efficient, one office at a time.





475% 3-Year Growth



130 Employees When Samad Syed notices inefficiencies, he does something about them. That's why a health care billing snafu became inspiration for a business.

In 2014, after an outpatient surgery, Syed received the same bill from three different departments. "I made the payment three times thinking they were for something else. That was when I realized, 'Oh my goodness, they need help here."

The more he researched health care, the more he saw room for improvement. "If we can improve the health care system, we can improve the lives of so many people. That was the biggest motivation for me to start the business," he says.

START NICHE

In 2015, with the help of investors, he founded SRS Web Solutions, a Minneapolis-based health care technology company. Today, more than 5,000 health care practices use its solutions mConsent and Caretap to digitize and streamline processes, improve the patient and employee experience, and grow their business.



Syed began by digitizing the patient intake process for dental offices. The cloud-based tool cuts practice paper use by about 80 percent and saves front offices the time and headache of deciphering, scanning, and printing forms. Next, the company addressed other dental industry pain points based on customer feedback, including billing processes and appointment scheduling. It also expanded its customer base to include other medical practices, including veterinarians and optometrists.

ONWARD AND UPWARD

Despite the pandemic, SRS Web Solutions has grown by 475 percent over the past three years, earning the business its first ranking on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies. People didn't want to sit in waiting rooms or even touch office pens because of Covid concerns, so health care practices needed to digitize quickly. SRS Web Solutions' reputation as a high-value partner has led to referrals from industry solution-providers, like dental supplies companies, credit card, services, and electronic medical records (EMR) systems. Syed believes every innovation should deliver 10 times more value than what it costs a customer, so a client advisory board tests features to be sure.

SRS Web Solutions's goal is to serve 50,000 practices within the next five years. Given Syed's background in operational excellence, it is no surprise he is investing in internal processes to support the growth. Process, a strong team, and strategic partnerships will ensure SRS Web Solutions makes good on its promise: to make health care more efficient, one practice at a time.

SRSWEBSOLUTIONS.COM

Inc. 5000 company spotlight

Meeting White-Hot Demand for Cold Chain Logistics

Cold Chain Consult's growth is driven by rising demand in the cold chain logistics sector.

C arli Derifield's personal mission is to ensure you receive your life-saving medication in optimal condition. The founder and CEO of Cold Chain Consult knows first-hand how critical timely delivery of medicines and treatments is. In fact, her two children would not be here if not for the cold chain packaging containers that delivered her in vitro fertilization (IVF) medication.

Until the pandemic, many people never thought about the need to transport temperature-sensitive medical treatments and devices, she says. However, once the supply chain was disrupted, it became a top priority.

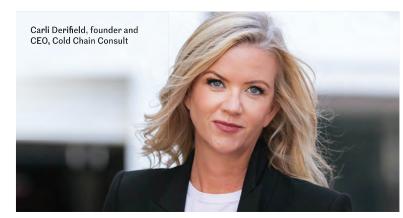
EXPERIENCED TALENT LOCKED IN

Five years ago, Cold Chain Consult was launched to fill the talent gap in cold chain compliance and operational expertise. It serves a wide range of enterprises, including suppliers, carriers, integrators, and enterprises of all sizes.

Finding experienced talent to solve the emerging logistical challenges became a serious industry challenge. Many large pharmaceutical and health care device companies struggled to find professionals who could do this work to U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standards.

Derifield worked to recruit and retain global industry experts and develop the talent within her team so that they can grow as a company, she explains. And she predicts that demand for such expertise is only going to increase.

The company has another advantage in the race for talent: Cold Chain Consult has always operated virtually, putting it ahead of the game when Covid hit. With subject matter experts available to cover all time zones, its virtual team was well-positioned to support its client base.



A FUTURE OF EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

Innovation within biologics and medical devices is driving up demand for cold chain logistics and expertise. The result is "an exponential increase in products that are all going to require some temperature control during distribution," Derifield says.

Rising demand for in-home health services is another significant area of growth, she says. She expects health care products to be shipped to homes more frequently, rather than requiring a doctor office visit. Those products will need to be protected by both cold chain packaging and services. "With temperatures rising, this is only going to become more of a challenge and more critical to manufacturers and patients alike," she says.

Fortunately, Cold Chain Consult's solid reputation for performance as well as trusted partnerships and stellar client relationships have established it as the source of leading-edge cold chain logistics advice and expertise around the world.

COLDCHAINCONSULT.COM













Carrie Charles *Owner and CEO* **BROADSTAFF**

"Instead of setting our revenue goal for 2022 as a leadership team, as we traditionally have, we set it together with all of our team members. Our team chose \$33.3 million. This was a massive stretch, but each person was engaged with this long-shot goal and ready to make it a reality. Soon, our team started a game of texting one another when we saw the number 33. Seeing 33 in the wild kept the goal alive. We even created fun, incentivizing games each month to keep pushing us closer to 33.3. As of today, we are on track to hit it!"

Tampa-based telecom and tech staffing firm Broadstaff made the Inc. 5000 list in 2020 and 2021.

Vishal Sunak Co-founder and CEO LINKSQUARES

"With a big company milestone like beating our annual revenue goal or raising a new round of capital, we typically throw a party to gather the team and celebrate. Everyone feels the energy that comes from a huge win together, and I find that to be the most powerful motivation. A big milestone like a capital raise also can trigger us to reexamine our operating plan as an executive team and look for opportunities to accelerate hiring, innovation, and revenue."

In 2022, Sunak's Boston-based software company raised a \$100 million funding round and earned a spot on the Inc. 5000 for the second straight year.

38% of fast-growing companies surveyed focus their innovation on activities that increase revenue, with the goal of developing new products that change how the

business operates. Source: Deloitte



Donie Yamamoto Founder and CEO **VITAL PET LIFE**

"To set new business goals, we had to redefine our brand strengths so as not to be everything to everyone. We took steps to go deep rather than wide, such as focusing on our strongest products and adding an industry expert to directly engage with our customers."

In 2021, just four years after its founding, Yamamoto's Los Angeles-based pet care startup made the Inc. 5000.



Leah Caplanis Founder and CEO SOCIAL SPARKLING WINE

"What's most important is to take the time to celebrate your successes, and that means slowing down and spending some time with the team doing something fun, whether that's a barbecue or pizza party or going bowling or horseback riding. This gives everyone a break to relax and socialize with one another in a personal way and refreshes people to go back to the job renewed."

5 er

Caplanis founded her Chicago-based organic wine company in 2013. It was an Inc. 5000 honoree in 2019.



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When Others Pulled Back, This Founder Went Full Throttle

By taking risks and always putting clients first, Vape Guys, a wholesale vape distributor, achieved exponential growth amid a global crisis.

n 2020, travel came to a halt, the U.S. economy shrank, and Vape Guys, a global distributor of vape and hemp-derived products, experienced its first revenue drop since its founding in 2014. Rather than playing it safe and tightening spending as many competitors did, founder and CEO and Yan Gleyzer took a gamble: he purchased an additional \$1 million-worth of inventory in a matter of weeks. "I realized everybody else was scaling back, so there was not enough supply. Somebody had to fill that void. I wanted to be that somebody."

The risk paid off. In 2021, Vape Guys increased revenue by nearly 100 percent. This year, the company earns a place on the Inc. 5000 for the fourth time. Gleyzer credits the achievement to strategic risk, a steadfast focus on nurturing client relationships during challenging times, and a strong and resilient team.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Gleyzer's clients are small business retailers, and he invests in their success. "Clients are more than a revenue line item," he says. Each store owner is appointed a dedicated account rep. Gleyzer acts as a mentor, making product recommendations and advising on "how to operate their retail stores to drive revenue and profitability." Before Covid-19, he traveled the world to meet clients and observe their operations. When the pandemic made travel impossible, he stayed connected through email, phone calls, and video chats, ensuring store owners still felt supported.

"A key factor in recovering from 2020 was staying in contact with clients experiencing state and country lockdowns, which essentially halted all their sales. I personally traveled to visit key clients once borders opened to revitalize and strengthen our personal relationships," he says.

A STRONG TEAM MITIGATES RISK

Glevzer felt comfortable increasing spending in a down market because he anticipated customer demand and believed in the strength of his client relationships. Another factor that mitigated the risk was the strength of his employees. "I owe everything to my team," he says. "My employees are my greatest investment." Vape Guys attracts and retains talented people by creating an exciting work environment that includes opportunities to attend industry events worldwide. These events allow employees to network and keep up with a heavily regulated, ever-evolving space. Vape Guys also participates in industry trade associations to ensure the company understands evolving guidelines and to work with other companies to impact regulations and lobby for consumer safety protections, particularly for the safety of children.

When you understand your space and believe in your employees and clients, betting on your business doesn't seem so risky. Besides, without risk, there is no growth, Gleyzer says. "If you don't take risks, your company is not going to grow. If you don't try, you won't ever succeed."

VAPEGUYSINC.COM







4x Inc. 5000 Honoree







Carmen Tapio Founder and CEO NORTH END TELESERVICES (NET)

"When opportunity presents itself, you don't get what you don't ask for. While accepting the Business Excellence award from our chamber of commerce, I had access to at least a hundred CEOs of the top businesses in our community. So I used that opportunity to tell them that we had prepared proposals for every single one of them. From the podium, I called them out and handed them a proposal, and we were able to close several."

This year marks the third straight appearance on the Inc. 5000 list by Tapio's Omaha-based business-process outsourcing provider.

Karthik Reddy Founder and CEO ARCHER REVIEW

"Especially in bootstrapped companies with limited access to funds. I believe that any significant funds spent on marketing are taken away from further innovating the product or from the customer fulfillment budget. In certain B2C businesses, having great products and customer fulfillment certainly trumps marketing. Focusing on those led to our exceptionally high net promoter score, so our marketing costs are less than 2 percent of revenue. Our mantra has always been 'Take care of the customer well and with honesty, make a great product, and the growth will follow.'"

Archer Review is a medical edtech company based in Dallas. It makes its first appearance on the Inc. 5000 list this year.



David Glickman Founder and CEO MINT MOBILE

"Hypergrowth is possible only by having the flexibility to swiftly respond to opportunities. Instead of seeking reasons to reject an opportunity outright, assume it will work and focus on how to effectively implement it. In one instance, we were able to secure a coveted contract with a carrier partner by saying yes. The contract's rates were not particularly attractive, but, by being flexible, we negotiated volume-based discounts that made everyone happy. Most important, having a reputation for saying yes meant other potential partners knew that any proposal they might present would be given serious thought."

Glickman has founded two telecom businesses that reached the top spot on the Inc. 5000, Justice Technology (1998) and Ultra Mobile (2015). 87%

of high-growth companies analyzed over 50 years in a 2008 study experienced at least one sudden and lasting drop in revenue growth.

Source: Harvard Business Review

Ron Jumper CEO RON SHERMAN ADVERTISING

"We wanted to parlay making the Inc. 5000 into changing the narrative about Ron Sherman Advertising. We have now built a state-of-the-art, 20x20-foot booth to use at industry expos. It has prospective clients saying, 'We aren't sure if we can afford you, but here is what we need,' instead of their having no idea about our size or capabilities. It has been powerful."

Jumper's Little Rock based company, a marketing firm for the home improvement industry, was an Inc. 5000 honoree in 2021.



Brandon Pena *Co-founder and CEO* **787 COFFEE**

"When Hurricane Maria put the livelihood of the team at the farm in jeopardy, we opened our first brick-and-mortar shop in the hopes of selling what little coffee we could. As our shops grew, I took notice of who went above and beyond to tell our story. As companies, we need to be storytellers. Consumers have more choices than ever before, which puts them in a position to want to connect with the businesses they support. By communicating why we did what we did to our customers, they in turn wanted to help."

Pena's sustainable coffee company, a 2021 Inc. 5000 honoree, now has more than two dozen stores in New York City and Puerto Rico.

ß

Valerie Freeman Founder and CEO BRAVOTECH

"Since we have been on the Inc. 5000 list four times, we have added that recognition to our emails, website, and introductions when we speak or sponsor events. The recognition has motivated us to greater accomplishments that we can share with our clients and prospects as well as applicants for our positions."

Dallas-based workforce solutions company BravoTech, one of two Inc. 5000 companies Freeman has founded, most recently made the list in 2020.





Entrepreneurial Spirit and Disciplined Framework

Combining organic growth and blue-chip acquisitions helps interior finishing solutions provider Artisan Design Group build an industry-leading company.











A rtisan Design Group (ADG), a provider of interior finishing solutions to single- and multi-family home builders, has earned its second consecutive placement on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies. The company's growth rate has even outpaced the residential construction industry boom. Sustained exceptional growth is the result of "a robust entrepreneurial spirit coupled with a disciplined framework—each focused on unsurpassed customer service," says CEO Steven Margolius.

ACQUIRING THE INDUSTRY'S BEST

ADG was formed in 2016 with the merger of Floors Inc. and Malibu Floors. A team of entrepreneurs backed by private equity investment spearheaded the company's expansion strategy. A significant driver of growth has been the acquisition of the top providers of flooring, cabinetry, and countertop products to residential homebuilders across the country. One key ingredient to ADG's success, Margolius says, was the appreciation of the brand equity of each acquired company.

"ADG companies retain their unique identity and the strong foothold in the market, which enables them to continue to expand their customer and supplier relationships. The goal is to provide ongoing support and a framework for improving back-office processes to power



sustained, profitable growth for each operating division," he says.

LEVERAGING A COMMON OPERATING PLATFORM

ADG's 22 divisions, operating across 25 states, use a common platform for payroll, inventory tracking, and HR, as well as financial reporting processes which drive efficiencies throughout the company.

The ADG expansion benefits the company's customers, too, by creating access to additional products and services. "Supply chain issues are a tremendous bottleneck for homebuilders. ADG provides multiple product sources and a national network of installation labor so builders can deliver high quality homes—on time and within budget," Margolius says.

A CLEAR PATH TO CAREER GROWTH

ADG is dedicated to becoming a destination of choice for all employees at any career stage across multiple disciplines. Access to new jobs and career advancement opportunities is bolstered by a focus on employee well-being, including workplace safety and health and wellness initiatives. ADG's continued expansion creates exciting opportunities for current and new employees to have options to live and work at varied locations throughout the country.

"Our formula is powerful: a focus on organic growth initiatives, continued acquisitions, and entrepreneur-driven divisions with energized employees operating in a high-integrity, disciplined manner," Margolius says. "We are on a mission, not just to grow, but to create an exceptional, enduring company."

ARTISANDESIGNGROUP.US



Company Culture That Focuses on Growth

Northpoint Asset Management sees its culture as a crucial factor to its success.

When the real estate market crashed in 2008, John Laviter, chairman and CEO of Northpoint Asset Management, wasn't surprised. Before the financial crisis, he was a general manager at a private equity firm and had raised the alarm about real estate market risk well before the Great Recession. But his supervisor wanted to stick to the firm's strategy. That experience set Laviter on the path to start his own real estate firm.

"I didn't want to be placed in that situation again," Laviter recalls. So, in 2006, he and co-founder Adam Haleck launched Northpoint. The real estate investment firm soon added property management and sales to the mix. That diversification was a good call. When the housing crash happened two years later, Northpoint served the surging demand for property management, as people who couldn't sell their homes decided to rent the properties instead.

CULTIVATING CULTURE

Macro conditions are important to a company's success, but culture is the real growth engine, Laviter says. "In the beginning, it's the hard skills that get you somewhere, but much like an individual's career, as the company matures, it's the soft skills that really get you ahead," he says. Laviter is serious about company culture. While executive bios often focus on qualifications and experience, Laviter's has a heavy focus on factors like mindset, honesty, fairness, and unbiased strategic decision making.

At a time when companies in all industries are being asked to weigh in on social and cultural issues, Laviter finds that focusing on shared purpose helps to unite. "Businesses should concentrate on the end goal of maximizing shareholder value by providing the best product or service," he says.



The hiring process backs that culture. Laviter reviews every new hire—no small feat in a company trending toward 500 people—and compensation is based on performance.

MANAGING GROWTH

Many companies strive for growth, but it comes with its own challenges. Northpoint is taking things in stride. Hiring has been tough for some companies in the tight labor market, yet Northpoint ramped up hiring tenfold while keeping turnover near zero.

Laviter is still focused on maintaining company culture. "It's tough to establish and delicate to change," he says. He's proud to set an example, noting that all four of Northpoint's original partners have remained in place for more than 17 years. "It is hard to keep a long partnership like that. It requires an enormous amount of loyalty, willingness to roll with each other's eccentricities, and appreciation for their strengths," he says.

NORTHPOINTAM.COM













A Win-Win IT Solution for Staff and Clients

SnapIT Solutions[®] addresses the lack of tech career access for underrepresented students.











When Neelima Parasker left her corporate information technology (IT) career to start a tech firm, she knew she could be successful in the public sector. But financial success was not her primary motivator. Instead, Parasker asked herself, what impact could her business create that would be both innovative and human-centric, even if it was small? The answers to those questions led Parasker to found SnapIT Solutions in 2016. So far, the firm's impact has been anything but small.

FINDING PURPOSE IN HER BACKYARD

Parasker found her company's purpose after volunteering at a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) event at a local school just miles from her suburban Kansas City home. When she asked the students about college plans and tech mentors in their community, they said they didn't have any. By the time Parasker left, the students told her they wanted to work in the high-tech industry like she had. "I was truly living in a bubble," Parasker says. "At that event, I realized that not every child in the United States has the access to education and resources that my kids have."



Parasker devised a plan to attract diverse and underrepresented talent from marginalized communities, starting in Kansas City. She also knew from her experience in the field that the tech industry frequently lost millions because companies couldn't find the right talent at the right time.

WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS

SnapIT Solutions uses a unique patentpending three-phase business model called SPRNT, where participants progress from student to trainee to employee. The company partners with local workforce development agencies to tap candidates from marginalized communities who typically lack access to generational wealth, higher education, or career connections. The workforce agencies cover the cost of training. In exchange, companies seeking IT services get highly skilled talent at competitive rates via fixed-bid contracts or direct placements.

With a few years of professional work experience under their belts, many from the first SnapIT cohort have been hired by clients and are now earning six-figure or higher salaries. They also have no college debt. While they also lack four-year degrees, Parasker says firms are eager to snap up her expertly trained talent, waiving corporate degree requirements in favor of proven experience in the field.

As for future plans, the sky's the limit for SnapIT. "We are growing constantly, because we're not seeking talent in the same places that every other tech company uses," says Parasker. The firm plans to open branches in cities in all 50 states.

SNAPIT.SOLUTIONS

Inc. 5000 company spotlight

Tax Education for Small Businesses

Karla Dennis and Associates has grown from a local accounting firm to an online operation serving a national client base.

K arla Dennis grew her accounting firm, Karla Dennis and Associates, through grit and hard work. A sole proprietor when she started in 2014, she relied on grassroots marketing techniques to build her client base, regularly speaking at trade shows and attending local networking meetings to make face-to-face connections with potential small and midsize business clients. However, she credits the firm's recent growth trajectory to the addition of a new generation of employees, including her four sons.

Following Kenneth, Karlton, Kameron, and Karrington's entrée into the business, Dennis has taken a step back, she says, and the results speak for themselves. The infusion of a "youthful, different thought process" has changed the business.

"A lot of the success that our firm has had is a result of leveraging the knowledge of younger business people," she says. She has surrounded herself with top talent "who could go anywhere," she says.

NEXT GENERATION GUIDANCE

Not only did the next generation help propel the firm forward technology-wise, but "they took our processes and systematized them, to be able to put them online. They modernized us," Dennis says.

In the last three years, the firm has evolved from a small local venture to a national accounting leader. The growth has been "incredible," Dennis says. As a result of that success, "other firms reached out to us, asking for help in serving their clients."

HELPING ACCOUNTANTS GROW THEIR FIRMS

Karla Dennis and Associates "held town hall meetings for other accounting firms, to educate them on how they could modernize their businesses and continue to be successful," Dennis



explains. That led to allowing other accounting firms to outsource their back-office processes to Karla Dennis and Associates, which created an entirely new business-to-business profit center.

"It opened up so many opportunities for us," she says, including realizing that the firm's mission was to be educators. "People think accountants just drive numbers, but we come from the perspective that if we educate you, you're going to know how to better manage your business," Dennis says.

On top of teaching accountants how to develop systems and processes to be more efficient, Karla Dennis and Associates set up coaching calls and a Facebook group, where other firm principals could connect and share information. Handing off lead generation to Dennis and her team is another option now available to accounting firms.

In 2023, the firm will launch a subscriptionbased educational platform for the general public, to answer their tax and accounting-related questions. "Our goal is to become the Google of the tax industry," Dennis says.

KARLADENNIS.COM





130% 3-Year Growth

> 28 Employees

2014 Year Founded



Co-founder, president, and COO **ARLO SOLUTIONS**

"When it was two of us, we were still able to have a handle on major deliverables going out to the client. Now that we're at 58 employees, that's impossible. So how do we build teams of the right people at different levels, from our program managers to our project managers, to support our clients? That's what we're working on now—figuring out how to grow smart, and not mess up the reputation we have on delivering excellent service."

This year marks the second straight appearance on the Inc. 5000 list for Arlo Solutions, a Washington, D.C.-based IT services and consulting firm founded in 2014.





Suman Akula Founder and CEO STACKNEXUS

"Scaling problems always will be there. When you scale, you need to make sure there is cash flowing and things like that. But if you look at the problems and say, 'What the hell is happening?' I don't think you'll really ever be happy. Because every day there's going to be chaos, and chaos should be your oxygen. It's just what you have to expect. If you don't take it that way, you'll just get burned out."

Schenectady, New York-based no-code technology services company StackNexus, which is on the Inc. 5000 for the first time this year, is one of several tech businesses Akula has founded. Rudy Larsen Founder and CEO SMART RAIN

"One thing I learned that I could not believe is how much people will hate you for your success. We saw this in our company and I personally saw this in my life. It was really pretty amazing and really sad. I think you have to take a step back and create a close group of people who can keep you balanced and somewhat protected from other bad influencers. This helped me reposition myself and know that my success was not truly damaging other people."

Larsen's water conservation technology company, Smart Rain, made the Inc. 5000 in 2021. A commercial landscaping business he founded, Lawn Butler, has appeared on the list four times, most recently in 2016. Both are based in Centerville, Utah.



The Billion-Dollar Company With a Startup Spirit

Channel Partners Capital unique approach to small business financing has laid the foundation for massive expansion.

Three years ago, Brad Peterson didn't think his company would break the \$600 million annual revenue mark. Now, the CEO of Channel Partners Capital, which helps small businesses capitalize on growth opportunities by providing easy access to financing, sees a billion-dollar year on the horizon.

Peterson founded the business in 2009 with a unique approach. He and a team of five employees—including his son, Adam, who made sales calls from his college dormitory room reached out to equipment finance companies and offered to provide working capital loans to their small business customers. The strategy worked. Adam later joined the company and is co-founder and senior vice president of sales.

BUILDING A BRAND

From the beginning, Channel emphasized a pleasant, transparent customer experience so equipment finance companies would feel comfortable referring their customers. By 2015, Channel was generating \$4.5 million in monthly revenue. Its financial success and strong reputation attracted interest from a venture capital firm. In 2018, the company closed a significant equity investment from funds advised by Elliot Management Corporation, helping it expand lending capabilities and invest in technology and people. By June 2022, Channel generated \$52 million per month, offering both working capital and equipment financing products.

Channel's growth has earned the company its 10th consecutive spot on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies. But Peterson still feels like he is running a startup. The company regularly rolls out new specialty finance products, and the culture he created 13 years ago still permeates the business. He wants the Channel logo to be synonymous with integrity and trust. "We built the business on our reputations, our brand, and our culture of transparency and respect." Recently, Channel invested heavily in marketing, "formalizing the brand" that has existed since day one.

TECH-ENABLED ACUMEN

Channel has also always benefited from strong financial acumen, says Peterson, who describes himself as a "recovering accountant." The company has built a robust data analytics team and a proprietary technology solution to enable advanced financial modeling. In addition to data scientists, Channel recently invested in experienced industry salespeople who have been driving meaningful growth. It also opened a new office in New England and is planning for additional products.

While Channel's balance sheet will continue to grow and change, Peterson's recipe for success remains the same. A strong brand built on integrity by talented people, coupled with financial prowess and bolstered by tech, should position Channel for another 10 years of astronomical growth.

CHANNELPARTNERSCAPITAL.COM



10x Inc. 5000 Honoree











No Debt, No Investors, Plenty of Patience

MarketOnce, a collection of complementary consulting, research, and marketing companies, takes a patient approach to stellar growth.

marketonce



147% 3-Year Growth

2x Inc. 5000 Honoree

9+ years Average Customer Duration **M** arketOnce's clients include small and midsize businesses (SMBs), prestigious consulting firms, and global corporations, but they have one thing in common: ambitious plans for growth. Each counts on MarketOnce for consulting, research, marketing, and custom software solutions.

MarketOnce has three divisions: ROI Rocket, eAccountable, and DME Delivers. Together, they help businesses identify, understand, land, and retain their ideal customers. CEO David McGrath has built a leadership team with deep industry experience. ROI consultancy services is led by Senior Partner Noah Seton; ROI Research Services by Senior Partner Tim Wilson; and ROI Research by Senior Partner Patti Fries. President Mike McFadden leads eAccountable, and DME Delivers is led by Founder Mike Panaggio.

Each business unit uses proprietary software, ranging from SaaS offerings to customer solutions to fuel data analytics, drive efficiencies, and improve results for clients. Customers may choose to work with one division, but most work with multiple divisions.

"It's the aggregation of thought and expertise of the business unit leaders mentioned above that differentiates us," McGrath explains.

WHEN PATIENCE MEETS HUNGER

While MarketOnce clients seek exponential scale, the robust solutions-provider takes a slow and steady approach to its own growth, expanding organically at a compound rate of around 25 percent or greater. This year marks its second consecutive ranking on the Inc. 5000.

"We don't like debt, and to date we haven't needed outside investment," he explains. "We grow organically, and we're pretty patient folks patient, but hungry."



McGrath says employees are ready and able to do whatever it takes to deliver for clients. "I think we care more deeply about our customers than our competitors do. We can supply the products and services on an equal-to, or better-than basis," he says. "We care more, and we probably work harder."

BUILDING THE FUTURE

At MarketOnce, almost all new customers are referrals. McGrath believes client satisfaction and steady business growth will continue if the business "keeps doing what it's doing."

More innovation is on the horizon, too. Recent offerings include Amazon agency services and the AskMom.com community. The biggest challenge is recruiting employees to support the continued growth. His team looks for whip-smart industry experts. Ideal candidates share the teams' obsession with helping businesses achieve their next phase of growth.

"A long time ago, somebody said to me, businesses that aren't growing are dying," McGrath says. "We want to help organizations find opportunities for improvement and guide them to achieve more."

MARKETONCE.COM



Rapid Response Spurs Growth

Pulse Clinical Alliance grew its traveling nurse service and increased revenue tenfold.

W inning a government contract can be lucrative, but only if you deliver on what you promised. Pulse Clinical Alliance, a medical recruitment firm, is an example of doing so. The company won several large health services government contracts in 2021. It used the profits from those contracts to revive its lagging traveling nurse division. The reinvestment grew that service line from \$2.5 million last year to an anticipated \$23 million in 2022, propelling Pulse onto the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing companies.

REINVESTING FOR GROWTH

Founder and Chairman Ricky Caplin started Pulse in 2016 as a spinoff from the HCI Group, a health care information technology (IT) and consulting company which had previously made the Inc. 5000 list three times. When Garrett Caplin joined the company in 2021 as CEO, the company's traveling nurse service line was faltering, with just three clients and \$100,000 in booked revenue for the first quarter.

With the pandemic in full swing, Garrett Caplin saw the need for traveling nurses, but there was heavy competition. "We really needed more clients," he says. Using its government contract profits, Pulse hired more sales staff and increased recruiter hiring. A big secret to Pulse's success is a proprietary recruitment model that allowed the company to quadruple its recruitment force for a fraction of the cost, he says.

RAMPING UP OVERNIGHT

Having the right staffing levels also allows Pulse to ramp up quickly, Garrett says. The company was able to quickly establish pop-up COVID-19 testing and vaccination administration sites in Florida. Within five months, clinicians administered 50,000 vaccine doses with a 95 percent second-dose success rate. As a result, Pulse won a second contract to continue its work.

Pulse also offers turnkey solutions including project creation and management. In one case, the company received a call on New Year's Eve 2021—a Friday night—from the Florida governor's office. The request: establish a fully staffed monoclonal antibody infusion site by the following Tuesday. In fewer than four days, including a holiday, the team found a location, partitions, infusion chairs, and supplies—and hired more than 80 staff members, including clinicians. The facility was fully staffed by Sunday and had procured half the needed supplies by Monday.

By the end of 2021, Pulse had 80 hospital clients and brought in \$19.5 million across all of its services lines. On just the traveling nurse business alone, at the current pace, Pulse will earn \$23 million in 2022.

PULSECA.COM









1370% 3-Year Growth

\$19.5 million 2021 Revenue MULTIPLYING YOUR SUCCESS. Continued from page 36





Jack Smith Founder, CEO, and president FORTUNA BMC

"I had to learn how to let go and lead through a series of generals rather than direct command and control. I went from entrepreneur to CEO virtually overnight. Having direct oversight in all operations and then transitioning to having multiple C-suite executives meant that I had to learn to lead through inspiration rather than influence."

Smith, an Air Force veteran, has led his McClellan Park, California-based IT services firm to Inc. 5000 honors each of the past two years.

Nick Woodman Founder and CEO GOPBO

"One of the big lessons is that when things are going really well, you can be lured into thinking that everything's easier than it is. Because you're doing a really good job, you think you must be smart and good at this stuff. So, why can't we go do this other thing? The reality is that you can't expect your experience in your core business to translate. Just because you're a World Series-winning pitcher, it doesn't mean you can go play quarterback."

GoPro, the San Mateo, California-based maker of action cameras and software, was on the Inc. 5000 in 2014 and went public the same year.



Suneera Madhani *Co-founder and CEO* **STAX**

"Stax recently received a valuation of \$1 billion, making us a unicorn in fintech. This was an incredible achievement that resulted in a lot of press and a lot of attention. Suddenly, we were very important because of our new title, and with that importance came a lot of noise. Everyone's trying to get your attention and wants to do business with you, and you have to cut through that added noise to see what's actually needle-moving for your business and not get distracted."

*Orlando-based payment tech*nology company Stax has made the Inc. 5000 each year since 2019.



How Fast-Growth Companies Refuse to Lose

The most successful businesses not only build quality into their products, but also tap their customers for help.

From the September 2022 Issue



In the classic comedy Planes, Trains and Automobiles, a man, played by Steve Martin, is at the end of his rope after enduring excruciatingly cheerful but uncooperative service at a car rental agency. His flight has been diverted. His train has broken down in a field. And now, unable to contain himself any longer, he informs the agent behind the counter that he needs "a f*cking car, right f*cking now!"

We've all been there, and one of the culprits, other than poor execution itself, can be rapid growth. Some companies expand so quickly that they outrun their customer service capabilities. When startups take off, it is all too often the customer who is left in the wake.

This is the downside of the kind of success it takes to make the Inc. 5000. But if fast-growing companies had their priorities straight, confrontations like these would never happen.

First of all, the problems that cause customers to need help—poorly manu-

factured products, inconsistent service delivery—would have been nipped in the bud before they became problems. Second, service reps would have been trained to treat customers like gold, because that can mean the difference between having ones who stand by you and having ones who scream obscenities about you into the World Wide Web.

So let's focus on how to deal with f*ckups and how to prevent your high-revving engine of a firm from blowing a gasket because you've promised customers more than you can deliver.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Problems are rarely simple to diagnose and fix. Often, they require asking a lot of questions, and founders can be reluctant to ask questions, either of customers or of potential contractors they're entrusting with their company's good name. But you can never have too much information when you're troubleshooting a problem. It's the only way you'll learn how to improve your product and the only way you'll know whether your suppliers deserve your trust.

I'm on the record as not being a proponent of using overseas contract manufacturers. To say the least, they are overseas, and you are not. That in itself is a qualitycontrol issue. But overseas manufacturers don't have a monopoly on these kinds of problems. They can crop up when you design and manufacture close to home,



too. Believe me, I know.

In the United States, too many founders think those self-proclaimed manufacturing experts, loaded with buzzwords, are people to be trusted. Quite the opposite—they are likely baffling with bullsh*t. Highly competent people should be able to explain things to you in simple terms that you can easily understand. If not—run! This is crucial stuff you're talking about.

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

There's a concept (and a classic business book) by the management consultant Philip B. Crosby around the idea that "quality is free." And this is true, as long as quality is integral to the initial manufacturing process. We learned this firsthand when we helped out a food and beverage maker.

The founders came to us with a great tasting beverage, and we were enthusiastically thinking that they were Inc. 5000 material. But their quality control went out the window after a company they contracted to package their product didn't understand their precise requirements, which were quite different from those for the typical product the contractor handled.



The problems began to mount. First, ingredients weren't maintained in a consistent environment, a situation that, in any food processing environment, inevitably leads to an inconsistent product the last thing anyone wants. Then, to make matters worse, the finished product sat for weeks in a warehouse where the fluctuating temperature and humidity added yet more variability.

All this took place in the depths of the pandemic, which did nothing to help the situation. Nevertheless, there were things the founders could have done to prevent some, if not all, of the problems they would encounter.

The most important thing to do is talk to people. That includes asking a potential contract manufacturer for references and then actually calling them, as well as talking to the people who clock in every day in the production facility—if they've been there a while, then they know a hell of a lot. Ask the hard but necessary questions and then find an objective source who'll verify the answers. These founders didn't do that. They entrusted their product to people who didn't care about it as much as they did and they paid the price.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Despite all that, let's face it: Sh*t happens, even when you're a control freak, like yours truly. No matter how careful you think you've been before launching a product, something's going to get overlooked, or a part won't perform as it did during testing, or any number of other problems will crop up. What did Tolstoy say about every unhappy family being unhappy in its own way? The same is true with products. And it's up to you to try to catch the problem before the customer becomes the unhappy one.

At Big Ass Fans, we were in our 13th year—and our fifth on the Inc. 5000 list and all set to launch an expansion of our residential fan line, one that we marketed as spectacularly silent. Just to be sure, I had one of these silent spinners installed in my home to confirm that it worked as promised, as I did with all our products. Sure enough, the damn thing made noise. So, in turn, did I. We delayed the launch while our engineers got to the bottom of the problem and designed a fix. A few tempers, ahem, may have flared in the process, but it was better to have one angry owner than hundreds of angry customers sending fans back.

Our attempts to head problems off at the pass took another form in 2012, when we decided to venture into the Wild West that was the internet of things and make the world's first smart ceiling fan. We knew we were asking for all kinds of new trouble. Internet connectivity with so many router variations would be our biggest pain point, and issues could develop at any hour. So we made a digital book of every available connective device and started both second and third shifts of customer service that would be available to solve problems day or night. I know our customers appreciated it.

Indeed, with all our products, the pri-



Big Ass Fans founder Carey Smith led the fan and light maker from \$0 to its \$500 million sale. Along the way, the company made the Inc. 5000 for 11 consecutive years. Today, his investment firm, Unorthodox Ventures, focuses on finding small companies with big potential.

Too many founders think those self-proclaimed manufacturing experts, loaded with buzzwords, are people to be trusted. Quite the opposite.

mary way we tried to nip disaster before it budded was to employ a team of customer advocates whose sole responsibility was gathering feedback and referring any problems to the appropriate person. Those advocates contacted every last one of our customers at regular intervals after a sale to see if they were happy. If they were, great. If they weren't, well, that was even better, because that was how we improved our fans.

Every month, the team would give me a printout of any problems that had been reported and how they'd been dealt with. That way, fingers crossed, we learned from our mistakes and didn't go on to repeat them. And I don't think the customers minded being asked, because we had a net promoter score that was about triple the manufacturing industry average.

Too often, founders are reluctant to contact their customers, and they certainly don't want to hear anything bad when their companies are flying high. Instead, they base decisions on what they'd like to hear, and that's a damn shame.

Because they're missing out on the best intel there is on how to improve their products and build their brands. And, in the immortal words of that car-rental agent after listening to Steve Martin's tirade, that means they're probably f*cked. —*Carey Smith*



A Corporate Culture That Powers Success

Through Covid's challenges, AFC Logistics grew by prioritizing both employees and customers.

or three years after AFC Logistics launched as a sister company of a Gary, Indianabased trucking business, sales were cruising. Investment in the new venture was minimal, and two or three people could handle its management. But the pandemic brought new logistics and supply chain challenges, and the team realized they could service their customers faster using third-party providers.

"Covid created an imbalance between capacity and demand," says Steven Maly, co-founder of AFC Logistics and the trucking company, AFC Transport.

Since 2019, AFC Logistics has hired 10 times more employees, tripled its customer base, and boosted sales growth by 3,000 percent. In 2021, Kyle Ingraham took the reins as president, bringing his vast industry experience helping teams streamline their processes and deliver top-notch customer service.

A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

AFC Logistics kept its staff through the pandemic's lockdown. "We told ourselves that this was a temporary thing," Maly says. "Our staff was fairly small, and I valued every person."

Employees enjoyed the flexibility of working from home whenever possible, using a list of key performance indicators to keep their progress on track. Monthly volume became a more important metric than sales in dollars since customers were focused on capacity to deliver goods.

For Maly, that "culture of accountability" at AFC Logistics is a point of pride. "Without any micromanagement, people feel responsible for staying on top of their work," he says. "We've built a team of extremely hardworking, passionate people, and that's one of the main factors in our growth," he says.



PLAYING FAIR

In April 2022, AFC Logistics relocated to Tampa, launched a plan to hire 150 more employees, and announced a goal to earn \$300 million in revenue during the next three years. The company added support staff and expanded its sales team.

AFC implemented efficiency enhancers like new transportation management systems and upgrades in HR software in its Tampa, Chicago, and Miami offices, to keep up with customer demand and offer competitive pricing. Even through the pandemic's challenges, the company's fair pricing has been critical to customer retention. "If you were price gouging, you're not a partner," Maly says. That commitment to fairness helps build strong relationships with both customers and the carrier companies.

"We've built a great reputation for being fair to both customers and carrier partners," Maly says. New business may come easily when demand soars, but for long-term growth, he insists, "you need to earn the respect and trust of customers."

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Inc. 5000 company spotlight

The Founder That Disrupted the Coaching Industry

Kelly Roach Coaching achieved nearly 2,000 percent revenue growth by sharing sustainable brand-building strategies.







60+ 7-Figure Clients



K elly Roach wants you to forget small business failure statistics. Her coaching and consulting business, Kelly Roach Coaching, is determined to turn thousands of entrepreneurs into millionaires. Her company teaches entrepreneurs how to leverage strategic growth strategies in their businesses while building an online brand. More than 60 of its clients have achieved seven-figure breakthroughs using the same methods Roach uses to fuel her own company's astounding growth.

HUMAN-CENTRIC, RESULTS-FOCUSED

How did Roach achieve a 1,943 percent threeyear growth rate and rank among the top 300 on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies? She "zigged when others zagged," she says. Rather than building an online coaching business focused on digitization and automation, Roach emphasized human connection. "I decided very early on that I was going to focus on disrupting the online coaching space by having real human beings—full-time, internal team members—to support, champion, and hold



our clients accountable every step of the way," she says. The approach has enabled clients to achieve "massively accelerated results."

The company teaches end-to-end business growth strategies, not hacks or hollow tactics. Roach draws on lessons learned from her own Fortune 500 career, where she rose the ranks to become the organization's youngest senior vice president, achieving the role before the age of 30. Teaching entrepreneurs to focus on five core areas—sales, marketing, operations, finance, and service delivery—makes scalability simple and exponential.

THE LIVE LAUNCH BREAKTHROUGH

Roach may be best known for her Live Launch Method, "the simplest method on the planet for understanding how to make millions online using the camera on your phone," she says. The team has used the method every six to eight weeks for the last eight years to teach business owners the methodology for free. Her clients, across hundreds of industries, have used the method to scale their sales by hundreds of thousands of dollars—sometimes in days. The technique is effective, she says, because it taps the power of human connection and allows business owners to reach many prospects at once.

Smart methods and ironclad systems are paramount, but you also need to have a vision. For Roach, a thriving business was a gateway to financial freedom and the family life she always wanted. She is determined to help more people achieve their version of success. "Our objective is to become the number-one business education and leadership development company in the world," she says, "by teaching entrepreneurs how to seize the opportunities at their fingertips."

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