

top 50

small business leaders



2022
edition

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contents

- 7 Editor's foreword
- 8 Meet our judges
- 10 Previous Top 50 winner growth story
- 12 Top 50 Small Business Leaders 2022



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Inside Small Business acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



top 50 small business leaders

editor's foreword

It's time to meet our champions



Tim Ladhams
Editor, *Inside Small Business*



I am delighted to be able to present the 2022 *Inside Small Business* Top 50 Small Business Leaders Report, highlighting innovative leaders from a diverse spectrum of the business landscape who have taken their small business to extraordinary heights despite the well-known challenges – the pandemic, the related breakdown in supply chains and rising inflation – they have had to endure.

After a two-year hiatus of having to launch the Report “virtually” we are greatly looking forward to hosting a gala launch event in a beautiful space above the Melbourne GPO on Wednesday 17 August. As well as hearing from some of our winners, this will be an opportunity for the wider small-business community to come back together and celebrate the excellence, and resilience, of the sector.

Among the winners this year are Jessie Sadler, founder of adaptive fashion label Christina Stephens, who has brought renowned disability advocate Carol Taylor into her business as co-owner and lead designer, with the brand going on to headline the first-ever adaptive clothing runway at Afterpay Australian Fashion Week; Apiwraps founder Freyja Tasci, whose Beeswax wraps seal in the freshness and vitality of fresh food, and who has overcome the challenge of moving her business interstate and the staffing issues that presented by giving a host of young people their first experience in the workplace; and Jackson Yin, who arrived from China as postgraduate student with just \$700, subsequently building a construction business whose “green” approach to building has been given the highest possible rating by the

Infrastructure Sustainability Council of Australia.

I’d like to thank Businesscom, Prospa and IKEA for their generous sponsorship of the Top 50 Report, enabling us to host the launch event in such a prestigious location. A special thank you also to the judges Kate, Marie, Nick and Nina for their diligence in working their way through a very competitive, high-level plethora of submissions – you can find out more about our panel overleaf. And thanks to my colleague Karl Aguilar in helping me bring the achievements of our small-business leaders together in the profiles that follow.

I hope as many of you who can will join us at the launch event on 17 August – come and say “hi” if you do – and enjoy reading about the exploits of our small-business champions. ■

meet our judges

Judges' Profiles



Kate Engler

Founder,
The Publicity Princess

In a nutshell, Kate breaks the rules of how businesses get publicity. Her Meet The Press MasterClass links journos directly with hand-selected business owners. By disrupting the way publicity is harnessed by businesses, Kate gives them access to thousands of dollars of free media exposure without using the traditional PR agency model or needing her assistance beyond her highly-regarded MasterClass.



Nick Heuzenroeder

BA (PoliSci), AdDip FS, MAICD,
CEO and managing director,
Haven Wealth Partners

Driven by the increasing demand for truly ethical and responsible investment products and frustrated by the absence of products with strong conviction, Nick founded Haven Wealth Partners.

He is currently building venture capital funds focused on supporting female entrepreneurs, first nations owned and run businesses, and will soon launch one of Australia's largest renewable energy funds.



Nina Nguyen

Founder,
Pakko

Nina Nguyen is the Founder and CEO of Pakko, an Australian owned and operated manufacturing company, where a box is never just a box. Nina's mission is to create cardboard packaging solutions that increase product value, customer satisfaction and revenue for businesses.

In 2022 Nina was awarded the Telstra Best of Business Award, for her dedication to Australian business and community.



Tim Ladhams

Editor,
Inside Small Business

Tim brings a passion for start-ups and small businesses to his journalism after a long career – including management roles – in hospitality, insurance and credit management. His working highlight every year is the enthusiasm with which the *Inside Small Business* Top 50 Small Business Leaders Report is received by the small-business communities around the country.



Marie Robertson-King

Founder, Empress of Order and
Co-Owner,
Digital Mums Directory

Marie has built an enviable reputation as the "Empress" of systems and processes. She's a certified award-winning VA, drawing on her corporate background to support business owners to bring order to their lives.

Marie facilitates monthly coworking days in Perth, and this year became co-owner of The Digital Mums Directory, an online membership community and directory for female digital experts in Australia.



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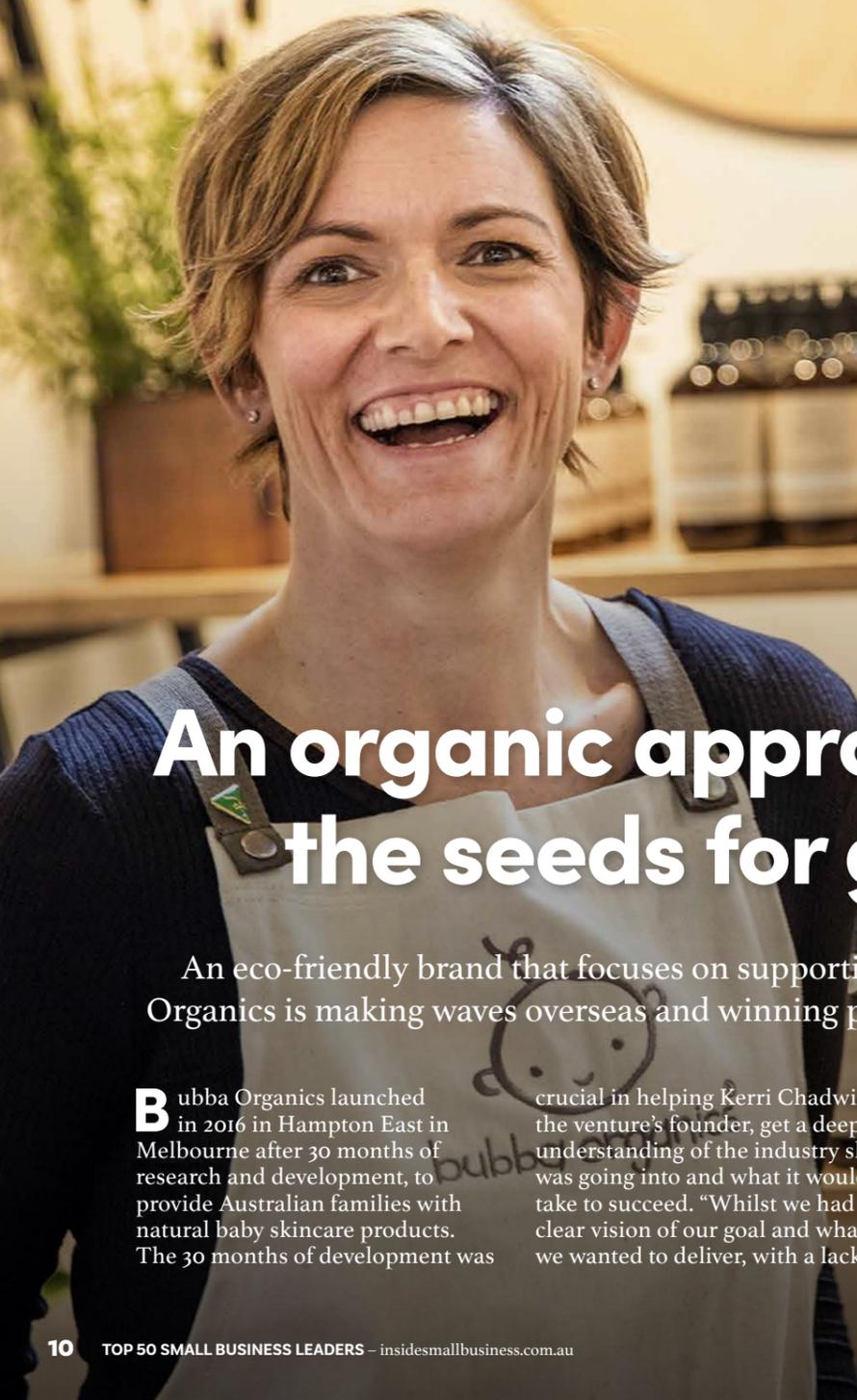


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An organic approach sows the seeds for growth

An eco-friendly brand that focuses on supporting local businesses, Bubba Organics is making waves overseas and winning plenty of recognition at home.

Bubba Organics launched in 2016 in Hampton East in Melbourne after 30 months of research and development, to provide Australian families with natural baby skincare products. The 30 months of development was

crucial in helping Kerri Chadwick, the venture's founder, get a deep understanding of the industry she was going into and what it would take to succeed. "Whilst we had a clear vision of our goal and what we wanted to deliver, with a lack

of first-hand skincare knowledge beyond online research, it was time to dive deeper into it all," Kerri explains. "I undertook a private course to learn about cosmetic formulation and what works and doesn't work from an



efficacy perspective."

Kerri researched not only the cosmetic formulators that would take the products in the direction she wanted to go, in consultation with an expert of 30 years' experience to ensure they found the right balance between nature and science, but also how to position that formulation in the market and communicate the benefits to the end user – concerned parents. "From day one, we have remained committed to being a premium life-style brand that parents could trust – an ethically produced, all Australian-made skincare line that was genuine about transparency," Kerri says. "No cheap fillers and nothing hidden or harmful – just the very finest nature-sourced ingredients chosen for their proven effectiveness and suitability for extra-sensitive skin."

Though originally developed with little babies in mind, Bubba Organics' products have become essential care for the whole family – particularly those with eczema, skin sensitivities and extra-dry skin conditions. Proudly Australian, the company is committed to supporting local businesses, with all its products designed, developed and packaged in Melbourne. Always on the lookout for environmentally and socially 'better' options for her products and for the user experience, Kerri introduced compostable parcel bags for her direct orders a few years ago.

At the time Kerri featured in our 2020 Top 50 Small Business Leaders, the business had just moved into a purpose-built facility in Dandenong South. However, when the pandemic-induced lockdowns and associated staffing issues made the facility unviable Kerri moved all the enterprise's picking, packing and shipping offsite to a local third-party logistics company. "And since we made that move we haven't looked back, they [the third-party provider] have been nothing short of amazing," she enthuses.

Having gone into this period with the brand already in over 200 stockists nationally – as well as being available instore and online with David Jones – and on the market internationally through partners in New Zealand and Hong Kong,



Kerri has achieved year-on-year growth since 2000. "We have many internationals knocking on our door and are involved in long-term ongoing discussions about launching in new regions," Kerri says. "We have engaged in testing for registration in the EU and the UK, and we have a fantastic consultant based in the UK working alongside us in this pursuit."

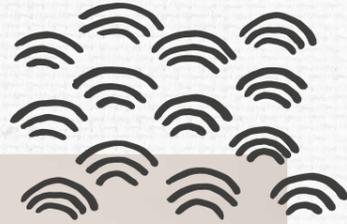
Furthermore, after months of back and forth with what Kerri describes as "a fantastic and very supportive new partner" Bubba Organics has secured entry into the Taiwanese market. The brand's products are stocked in over 70 organic food stores in that country already, and Kerri expects to increase that number over the coming months to have a presence in a total of 80 stores by the end of the year.

Kerri's fastidious approach and commitment to locally sourced, natural, environmentally-friendly ingredients in her products has seen Bubba Organics win a raft of awards, both locally and abroad. They have recently taken two gongs in the Think Clean Safe Cosmetics Australia Organic Beauty Awards, the Gold Award for their Mother & Baby Bodycare and Silver for the Family Skincare range. "Our Earth-conscious range made an impact on reviewers and this is a particularly special honour because we strive to be planet-safe and eco-friendly at every point in the creation of our premium mum and baby skincare products," Kerri avers.

In the Beauty Short List Mama & Baby Awards – one of the most prestigious and credible in the beauty industry – they took out the Editor's Choice award for their range of Australian goats' milk, lavender & chamomile and Kakadu plum & marshmallow moisturising lotions. They were also anointed as producer of the Best Tummy Oil at the same Awards.

Kerri's commitment to social responsibility and positively impacting local communities goes beyond the sourcing of ingredients and the production process. The business has become a partner of the Australian not-for-profit charity the Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife, whose mission is to safeguard Australian wilderness and wildlife for future generations. As part of that support Kerri and her team have planted over 100 trees to aid the recovery and restoration of the country's bushfire-ravished bushland and animal habitat.

On the current economic challenges related to the pandemic, supply chains and rising inflation, Kerri is sanguine. "We're facing the same challenges as most small businesses – staff, supply, IT and a slow retail market for both our online and our wholesale customer," she says. "However, we have great support from our local and international business community and will continue to keep the brand moving in a positive direction throughout this tumultuous time." ■



Jessie Sadler

Founder, *Christina Stephens, Qld*
“The adaptive fashion pioneer”

Jessie Sadler launched her business, named in honour of her parents, in March 2020 after her mother had a fall and damaged her elbows. “The injury prevented her from dressing with ease in her usual classy and understated style,” Jessie recalls. Realising that 20 per cent of the population lives with a disability, yet the proportion of beautiful, quality, and on-trend fashion available for them is vastly lacking, Jessie set up Christina Stephens to design and produce adaptive clothing.

The Brisbane-based company ships to all of Australia and New Zealand and also distributes through a retail partner in the UK. This April, Carol Taylor, the world’s first quadriplegic fashion designer, joined Jessie as lead designer and co-owner of the brand. “Carol mainly takes the fashion side of things now, while my new goals are around business growth and strategy,” Jessie explains. “Carol and I are full-time co-owners, and the rest of the team are part-time contractors.”

When Jessie launched the brand, she already knew what was stylish and fashionable but didn’t have anyone with a disability on the design team. She had to do a lot of research to make her garments truly adaptive and functional, relying on input from extensive focus groups, trusted advisers and customer feedback. When Carol came on board, Christina Stephens became the first and only adaptive clothing label in Australia led by a person with a disability.

“Carol is a mother, award-winning lawyer, artist, and disability advocate, and we’re so thrilled to have her,” Jessie enthuses. “Carol brings two decades of lived experience for the permanently seated consumer. Her input to our design functionality and brand growth is invaluable and respected greatly within our community.”

In May Christina Stephens headlined the first-ever adaptive clothing runway at Afterpay Australian Fashion Week, debuting the UNWRAPPED collection, which was born out of heart-warming necessity. “Carol was in an adaptive clothing conference with a quadriplegic groom soon to marry his able-bodied bride,” Jessie explains. “Some of the

guys were sharing a giggle with him about the upcoming wedding night but Carol says you could’ve heard a pin drop when the groom expressed his sadness at never knowing what it would feel like to ‘unwrap’ his bride.” Determined to find a solution, Carol set about designing a range of provocative, unexpected and industry-disrupting garments. “With the disabled partner in mind, this lingerie set featuring Swarovski crystal-embroidered loops can easily be navigated with a thumb or teeth,” Jessie explains. “The hope is to also shine a light on the often-misunderstood issues of intimacy and sexuality within the disability community.” Other garments in the collection include leather pants with zip access to colostomy and leg bags, with soft bamboo panels on the rear to avoid pressure sores, and an emerald wedding gown made specifically for the girl who cannot stand up, so she can be ‘wrapped’ in the dress once in the chair.

Disability advocates with a range of lived experiences modelled selected pieces from

“ In May, Christina Stephens headlined the first-ever adaptive clothing runway in Afterpay Australian Fashion week. ”

the collection at the Fashion Week event, receiving a standing ovation with tears aplenty. “The overwhelming comments and messages on social media finally showed our community felt represented in mainstream fashion and media,” Jessie avers. “The biggest positive impact we’ve seen is breaking adaptive clothing away from the ‘medical’ model into fun, sexy, colourful clothing that’s seen in ‘mainstream fashion’. We want to narrow this gap, just as any other category of clothing has – like plus-size and maternity wear has over the past 10 years.”

Alita Harvey-Rodriguez

Founder, MI Academy, Vic

Alita Harvey-Rodriguez launched MI Academy in Melbourne in 2013 after noticing a gap in the training market for something that helped teams align systems and capabilities to achieve their business goals.

In the past 12 months, Alita has redefined her role, after coming to what she describes as a crossroads. "I found myself in a position where I needed to work on the business, rather than in it," Alita explains. "Bootstrapping MI required a lot of effort, love and hard work, and led to me facing burnout for the first time. I remember standing in a client workshop when everything around me shut down and I couldn't hear or think anymore. This was my cue to change."

Trusting in her team and adopting a more strategic mindset enabled Alita to curate MI's signature Hackgames as a hybrid event. "After two incredibly tough years for our industry, I was desperate to bring the retail community together physically to collaborate and create something that made a difference," Alita says. The event brought together 15 industry solution providers, 40 retailers from across APAC and a thriving virtual audience of 200-plus. "This is the first time a retail hackathon has been hosted in Australia, and one of few examples of an event that has been successfully played in person and online, and broadcast across APAC as a fully integrated event," Alita enthuses.



Anita Aherne

Founder, Living on the Spectrum, Vic

Living on the Spectrum was originally launched as Kids on the Spectrum in 2019, as Australia's first directory of services created especially for children with autism. The venture was rebranded in February this year to reflect its evolution into also providing services for adults with the condition. With the rebrand and new website, it is also Australia's first and only dedicated neurodiversity hub.

Founder Anita Aherne admits the rebrand was a challenge, as she had to meet the growth of the directory and the demand for it. "I had seen such an enormous growth of individuals using our directory, I had to act quickly," Anita recalls. "I tackled this challenge by ensuring I surrounded myself with individuals and organisations that shared our vision. I engaged with individuals who understood the challenges that needed to be met and listened to what our community wanted."

Living on the Spectrum aims to make a positive impact in every aspect of dealing with autism, from providing free resources for carers and educators to providing assistance to small businesses serving this community. "This goes a long way in changing perceptions around autism and neurodiversity," Anita says. The program is now assisting over 6000 individuals monthly through its online platform and over 19,000 on its social-media platforms.

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Ned Scholfield

Co-Founder & CEO of McIntyre



Freyja Tasci

Founder, *Apiwraps*, SA
 “The Queen Bee”

The idea behind Apiwraps began at the kitchen table of its founder, Freyja Tasci, in November 2012. Freyja started out as a sole trader, selling her beeswax food wraps at markets. Once she had gained considerable traction with the product, she incorporated Apiwraps as a company in 2018. The business has grown to such an extent that it now has a warehouse in Somersby, NSW, as well as its main operating base at Modbury North on the outskirts of Adelaide.

“Apiwraps create a natural second skin on your fresh food with pure, chemical-free organic cotton coated with natural beeswax, gum resin and coconut oil,” Freyja says of her product. “Beeswax wraps make a natural waterproof barrier, sealing in freshness and breathing to maintain the natural vitality in fresh food. These natural products combine to provide the cleanest, natural food wrap for healthy eating and keep your foods fresh for longer. Fruit and vegetables, sandwiches, leftovers and cheeses are ready when you are.”

The wraps are free of any synthetic chemicals and plastics, and completely biodegradable. They can be washed with soap and cold water and reused for over a year.

A year before COVID-19 struck, Freyja decided to move from the Hunter Valley to Adelaide for lifestyle reasons. “The business didn’t come with me because our key business partners were located in the Hunter area and we had a strong team in place,” she says. This was fine, until travel restrictions started playing havoc with her ability to travel and oversee large orders and production runs. Then in 2021, with hard borders between the two states in place and a big production run imminent, her

operations manager resigned. “The only option at that point was the swift packing up and moving of our machinery and equipment to a new warehouse in Adelaide,” Freyja says.

Despite the challenges of finding a new location, hiring a new team and delivering on time with shipping delays endemic, Freyja saw the move to South Australia as a fresh slate for building a new operations team from scratch. “While we had previously hired mums of younger children who were happy to work shifts during school hours, we were pressed to deliver an order for which most of the work was condensed in the school holidays,” Freyja explains. “We initiated a school holiday bootcamp-style work project that employed 25 high

school students over six weeks.” This was a first job for almost everyone in the team, giving them the opportunity to learn about work contracts and negotiate rosters and teammates, training processes and incentives. “It created a great opportunity to get real work experience and a reference letter,

along with some school holiday spending money, and created an excellent resource for me to draw on when we have busy times,” Freyja says. “We’ll definitely continue using this system in the future, as it met all of our internal goals as well as being a positive experience for the students.”

Freyja is an active member of her local business association SA Woman, and is involved in mentoring and helping women who are starting out or needing advice. “Five times a quarter, I host a Marketing Club that offers 10 female business owners a day to collaborate and work together on content marketing for their business, with the support of other women in business,” she says proudly.

“Beeswax wraps make a natural waterproof barrier, sealing in freshness and breathing to maintain the natural vitality in fresh food.”



Anita Brodian

Co-owner, *Dark City Foundry, Vic*

Together with her husband, Gavin, Anita Brodian has been running the cold drip coffee business Dark City Foundry in Melbourne since 2018. As people passionate about coffee, they seek the highest standards for their products. “We are very particular about getting the right flavour and will only release products that fit our high standards,” Anita avers.

While many small and independent retailers stick with tried and tested products to avoid the risk of failure, Dark City Foundry took a risk in introducing new products, including a decaf cold drip coffee, the first and only commercial product of its kind in the Australian market. She is also passionate in educating the

public about her products’ benefits, rather than just marketing them, so customers can appreciate the product more. “The aim is to humanise our brand and in turn make us approachable and knowledgeable in the coffee space,” she explains.

Dark City Foundry has made a conscious effort to be a sustainable business. “Our coffee grounds either end up in composting or we give them away for our customers to use in their gardens,” Anita says. This also extends to packaging. Outside work, Anita supports a Victorian dog charity, fostering abandoned dogs until the rescue group finds the best home for them, a process in which she is also involved.

Arjun Paliwal

Founder/Head of Research, *InvestorKit, WA*

After a disappointing experience he had with an agent in purchasing properties, Arjun Paliwal determined to create a data-driven property research and buyers’ agency to better service the needs of property buyers. InvestorKit was launched in 2018. Since then, Arjun has made the transition from solopreneur to business leader – the business now has 11 employees.

Arjun takes pride in the level of research they do at InvestorKit, from looking at market data to checking the properties in person to ensuring that their clients make a sound decision in their property purchase. Even with the satisfaction the clients have with the approach, Arjun continuously tweaks the research process to ensure greater accuracy. “While most of Australia saw capital growth of 24-28 per cent over the past 12 months, many of our clients saw 35-45 per cent growth, based on our approach to research and buying,” he enthuses.

Insistent that team members who have been instrumental in the company’s growth benefit from their efforts, Arjun has adopted a hybrid work model to give them more flexibility and offers them the use of InvestorKit’s services at no cost. “I do it to help them set up for future passive income and see first-hand what our clients experience,” he explains. “We’ve purchased properties for two employees so far.”



Carol Hanlon

CEO, *Belmont Business Enterprise Centre, WA*

Belmont Business Enterprise Centre is a not-for-profit association specialising in virtual incubation and helping people start or improve their respective small businesses. This has put the centre in a unique position in the last two years, as many small businesses have struggled with lockdowns, supply-chain issues and rising costs.

The centre’s CEO, Carol Hanlon, has stepped in to help local small businesses overcome these challenges. The Belmont BEC has conducted various programs, including the designedge Innovation Festival, the My Business Incubator Cyber Security Training & Mentoring Project, and the BEC National Export Project and TCF Australia Export Project, which provide national export training and mentoring to assist small businesses participating in the Export Markets Development Grants program. These projects sit alongside the annual Belmont & Western Australian Small Business Awards, which have recognised and encouraged the achievements of small businesses in the state since 1994.

“Small businesses provide character and individuality to any community. Their commitment to innovation and making ‘every customer count’ is impressive. Proudly, our business is no exception to this rule,” Carol says. To date, the association has assisted over 35,000 entrepreneurs, work that has won Carol a number of awards, including the 2019 Women of the Decade Award in Entrepreneurship & Innovation at the Women Economic Forum in Perth.

Cindy Lüken

Founder/CEO, *Lük Beautifood, NSW*

Launched in 2012, Lük Beautifood creates beauty products made from natural foods and botanicals that contain vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that nourish, soothe and protect the skin. Cindy Lüken started the brand from her home but subsequently moved to an office and warehouse on Sydney’s Northern Beaches as she outgrew the local market.

With the onset of the pandemic, Lük lost nearly all its export business and had difficulties with replenishing supplies of its products. This necessitated formulating new products impervious to supply-chain challenges. “All the new products I have created and the clever ways I have been able to shorten the new-product development

lead time have paid dividends,” Cindy enthuses. After moving production to Queensland, which didn’t have the same restrictions on manufacturing as NSW and Victoria, Lük launched nine new products for lips, face and body in just five months, on the back of which sales instantly grew 30 per cent.

Cindy’s determination to rise above challenges is also present in her personal life. “One month after I raised \$2 million in 2016 to scale the company, my husband was diagnosed with younger-onset Alzheimer’s,” she explains. With two children under 10 at that time, things were tough, but she is proud to have built a home to care for her husband and where her children are happy.



Claudia North

Founder, *With Small Business, NSW*

Claudia North founded her first eCommerce business over 15 years ago. The product she ideated and designed is sold today in over 30 countries. Claudia sold that company and in 2019 founded With Small Business, developing Australia’s first eCommerce advice software platform for small-business owners that provides cost-effective, independent marketing advice.

Being in the early stages of growth and with a mortgage and six kids, Claudia and her husband have had to balance consulting jobs to stay afloat. “Yet we still have enough time, energy and motivation to move the needle on our business,” Claudia says, buoyed by what she calls the “phenomenal” feedback she’s had from small-business owners using the platform. Claudia is also in final negotiation with a number of parties

looking to partner with her in supporting the small-business community.

“We are now looking at office space and our first hire,” Claudia says. “Every milestone matters when you’re a small-business owner – it’s important to celebrate the wins, no matter how big or small.”

Claudia is a certified partner of MyGreenerPlanet, which helps businesses offset their consumption of electricity from fossil fuels with renewable energy from solar farms.

“MyGreenerPlanet’s direct carbon offsetting program allows small-business owners to generate their own carbon credits, providing direct solar-farm ownership to achieve carbon neutrality, rather than purchasing costly third-party credits,” Claudia explains.



Colleen Callander

Founder, *Callander & Co, Vic*

After 30 years in fashion retail, including 13 at the helm of two iconic fashion brands – Sportsgirl and Sussan – Colleen Callander launched Callander & Co in Melbourne in 2020 as a vehicle for inspiring and empowering women and leaders.

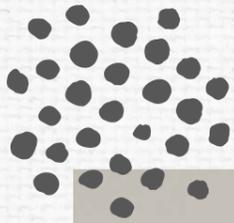
Having experienced burnout herself during her corporate career, Colleen has spent a lot of time coaching people and businesses out of the condition over the past year, helping them prioritise what’s important and build self-care in their lives so they can ‘keep their tanks full’ and live a life without burnout.

Colleen is equally proud of her ‘Mentor Me Women’ program. “Less than 20 per cent of women in Australia hold CEO

roles,” Colleen explains. “It’s time to change those leadership numbers. We need a more balanced leadership landscape and that starts with building confidence in ourselves and in each other.”

Colleen believes leadership is changing, and that it is now about kindness, compassion, authenticity, collaboration, trust and humility, and being a leader people choose to follow. “In this new era of leadership, organisations that thrive will be those that cultivate a culture of openness, mentoring and inclusivity, build human connections and empower their people to lead with kindness,” Colleen avers. “I believe people with purpose and passion equals profit.”





Laura Conti

Co-founder, #GoKindly, Vic
"The giver of comfort"

GoKindly is a social enterprise bedding brand supporting women who are experiencing homelessness and housing stress. It was launched in December 2018 in a studio/office in Coburg, in Melbourne's inner north. "We have an eCommerce brand, and our studio and operations are run by women from deliberately marginalised backgrounds," co-founder Laura Conti explains. "We offer fair wages, secure employment and respectful working conditions."

Focusing on both environmental and social sustainability, Laura and co-founder David Conti, design products created with modern families in mind that are long-lasting and Australian made, with no single-use plastic packaging. "Our pillows, duvets and mattresses are sourced from suppliers who pay fair wages, and work closely with us to improve sustainability and the lives of the people who work in their operations," Laura says.

Laura and David juggle operations and strategy between them. "Together, we are a strong team, bouncing ideas and problems off each other," Laura says. "We rely heavily on our operations staff day to day, and we love watching them grow and thrive inside a respectful workplace."

Recent times have presented significant challenges to Laura. Firstly, she has been

experiencing chronic pain, which is as yet undiagnosed. She has also been affected by two court cases, one involving a childhood friend and the other her family. But has shown the resilience to keep moving forward with product innovation and operations at #GoKindly. She chooses to believe the world can be kinder and that her brand can drive change. "I am, at heart, a positive person, who believes in the goodness of humanity and the power of business to change the world," she avers.

This resilience has borne fruit. #GoKindly recently released Australia's first pillow recycling program, to enable a

“

Our customers care about the world, and offering closed loop is important to their buying decisions.

'closed loop' pillow that doesn't contribute to landfill. "I have always been passionate about closed loop and sustainability and have been searching for ways to offer a recycling program since our inception three years ago," Laura explains. "It isn't easy or cheap to offer closed loop in fabrics, as much as I wanted it to be part of our initial product offering. But I was determined that I would bring this program to reality." Laura and David are now proudly able to say they run the first pillow recycling

program in Australia, and the feedback from their customers makes it all worthwhile. "Our customers care about the world, and offering closed loop is important to their buying decisions. I'm proud we kept working on making this a reality, even when affordable and trustworthy programs were hard to track down," she says.

As a social enterprise [certified by both B Corp and Social Traders] set up with the explicit goal of supporting women experiencing homelessness, #GoKindly directs half of its profits towards programs providing housing – both emergency and long-term

– through charity partnerships. The company has donated \$80,000 to partners in their first three years of operation, and #GoKindly hires women from deliberately marginalised backgrounds to ensure they have the

employment stability and fair wages to get out of housing instability. "We offer two shift options per day, to allow women who work with us to select shifts that suit their lives," Laura says. "We believe strongly in providing opportunities for women trapped outside the 'mainstream' and watching them thrive validates our belief in them. We also don't exist without our customers – people who care about the world and where their bedding comes from, they're our heroes."

”

Cristiana Waismann

Founder, Tapioca & Co, NSW

Cristiana Waismann launched her gluten-free snacks business, Tapioca & Co, from her home kitchen in Bondi in 2016, moving into a small factory within a few months as demand outstripped her supply capacity at home.

When the global pandemic hit, Cristiana reinvented the business, shifting from wholesaling to food-services businesses with a direct-to-consumer retail focus. "This required me to change the product, create a brand, source sustainable packaging and continue to produce, pack and distribute the product," Cristiana recalls. Another big roadblock soon appeared when the factory owner she leased her premises from sold up. Rather than looking for a new base,

Cristiana established and trained a manufacturing partner, and engaged a third-party provider to conduct frozen storage, logistics and distribution. "It was relentless but it allowed me to increase efficiencies and scale the business," she explains. "Looking back, I'm grateful, as this has allowed me to grow quicker."

Cristiana takes pride in the fact that Tapioca & Co, renowned particularly for its additive- and preservative-free cheese bread, is one of the very few brands with fully recyclable packaging for the freezer. "I hope to serve as an example to others to lead the way towards minimising waste at consumers' houses and the environmental impact of single-use plastic packaging," she says.



Danielle Holden

Founder, dk active, Qld

Danielle Holden launched luxury activewear label dk active in 2017, with the aim of celebrating individuality, circular fashion and sustainability. "I am most proud that almost our entire range of clothing is now made from recycled or organic materials," Danielle says. "Not only have I eliminated the use of unsustainable fabrics and trims, we also now have completely compostable packaging – from the mail satchels down to the sticky tape and the printed labels that are stuck onto them."

dk active's production is a circular model, with textile unused after products are made being sent to a recycling centre where they are broken down and woven into new yarn to be repurposed into new fabrics. The label also donates samples of unused clothing to not-for-profit Thread Together, which supplies clothing to other charities.

Danielle is an advocate for a number of causes, including the protection of women from domestic violence. To this end, dk active has partnered with the Women's Legal Service Queensland on running an activation called #BreakTheBias, through which the label donated an amount for each participant. The legal service provides support for 30,000 women suffering from domestic violence. She also offered warehousing space free of charge to businesses that needed to relocate their salvaged stock as a result of the floods earlier this year.

Deyana Salib

Co-founder, Bundle and Me, WA

Bundle and Me offers bulk-billed pregnancy care services for women in the Perth community, through its four clinics and also through home visits if the patient prefers. Post-partum home visits have become a popular service in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as women with new babies can be cared for in their own homes.

Bundle's innovative model means that patients come and see a midwife when they're pregnant, and the clinic then takes care of all their scripts – in collaboration with a number of pharmacies in the Perth area – and diagnostic services, such as blood tests, check-ups and ultrasounds. "This new service takes pressure off the hospitals and provides women with continuity of care," Co-founder Deyana Salib explains.

In addition to these services, Bundle and Me, co-founded by Deyana and Cheryl Brown, has branched out into conceiving and developing an affordable breast pump for new mothers who wish to breastfeed their baby. "These portable breast pumps allow women to express on the go," Deyana says. "We ensured the pumps are a perfect size to fit in her handbag and easy to use."

The business has been through its growing pains – Deyana says that opening new midwifery clinics does not come without challenges – but has survived them primarily because of what she describes as "the support and encouragement of our staff members".

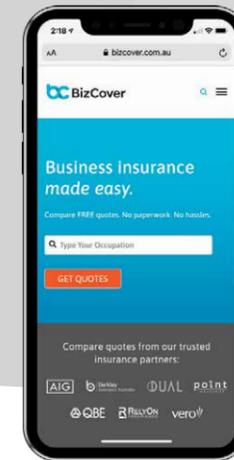


Deyana Salib, right, and Cheryl Brown

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Rochelle Courtenay

Founder, *Share the Dignity, Qld*
"The dignified donor"

Share the Dignity was founded in 2015 in Sandgate in Brisbane's northern suburbs. Since then, the venture has grown into a national charity. "Share the Dignity began after I discovered there was a genuine need to provide vulnerable women in my community with period products so they could have the dignity they deserved," founder Rochelle Courtenay explains. "We assist those in need by collecting hundreds of thousands of period products each year through collection drives and campaigns. These products are distributed directly to charities across Australia."

Rochelle is a fierce advocate for the eradication of period poverty; she helped persuade the government to axe the tampon tax in 2018. "Currently, we are focused on ensuring all public hospitals offer free sanitary items to those who need them, through #PadUpPublicHealth," she says. Under the venture's education pillar, her team is working on ending the shame and stigma around periods through its Period Pride campaign. There is a schools competition to create Period Pride media and campaign assets to encourage conversations among young people. "In 2022, our Reconciliation Action Plan was endorsed by Reconciliation Australia and we are increasing our knowledge, awareness and understanding for the support we provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through our Indigenous Menstrual Health program," Rochelle adds.

This year, Share the Dignity has extended its brief, through the launch of what it calls Australia's first online fashion marketplace for good, Dress for Dignity, with 100 per cent of the proceeds going towards helping Rochelle and her team of 15 employees – nine of whom are full-time – and 6000 volunteers fund their mission. "In 2015, I cleaned out my bathroom cupboard and filled bags that I donated to

charity, creating what is now one of Australia's most loved Christmas giving campaigns," Rochelle explains. "Unfortunately, the demand is growing larger than the amount of donations we can provide, so we knew we needed another income-generating program to help us fill this demand." During another clean out, it occurred to Rochelle that there was surely something she could do with the dresses she loves but will never wear again. This was the germ of the idea that became Dress for Dignity.

Whilst cleaning out cupboards and building momentum to do good in the community was something she and her team excelled at, Rochelle knew IT and development of software was not. So she brought together a project team of about 10 skilled professionals to realise the vision. "To help us launch, we have partnered with some of Australia's most iconic fashion brands and through collaborations we are now spreading the word," Rochelle adds. Motivated by the alarming statistic that the average Australian

buys 27kg of clothing each year and disposes of 23kg of it within the first year – collectively enough landfill to cover Tasmania – Rochelle and her team are bringing zero-waste fashion choices to the mainstream and trying to make it easier for everyone to shop and still have a positive impact by contributing to a circular economy. "No waste, no landfill, just recycle, reuse, re-love," Rochelle avers. "When people donate or shop at Dress for Dignity, they are shopping with purpose while making an impact. When people buy or sell pre-loved fashion items, 100 per cent of the funds are donated to Share the Dignity, so we can continue making a real difference in the lives of those experiencing homelessness, fleeing domestic violence, or otherwise doing it tough. This will enable us to fill the gap we have for our Christmas giving campaign."

“ When people donate or shop at Dress for Dignity, they are shopping with purpose while making an impact. ”

Di Van der Walt

Managing Director/Principal Speech Pathologist,
Perth Hills Allied Health, WA

As a speech pathologist, Di Van der Walt is passionate about helping children with their speech and language problems. "I strongly believe that all children have the right to communicate – it is a basic human necessity. This is what drives my passion daily," Di avers.

Founded in 2017, Perth Hills Allied Health remained in operation through the height of the pandemic, servicing a surge in demand from children being homeschooled. Incorporating a telehealth operation helped reduce waiting periods for patients and increased revenue because providing services over the phone allowed the business to look after more clients.

Di has extended the use of videoconferencing into her role

as chairperson of the Private Speech Pathologists Association of Western Australia (PSPA). "By moving our monthly clinical forums online, we have been able to provide our members with a far greater range of speakers, including those who reside in the Eastern States who would not usually be able to attend our meetings in person," Di explains. "Additionally, where our clinical forums were previously capped to 12 attendees, we now have no cap on numbers."

Di and her staff are currently supporting 50 children in their communication skills, relieving the children's families' stress, anxiety, and concern for their children's communication challenges and overall wellbeing.



Frances Szmark

Founder, Intelligent Health Systems, Vic

Frances Szmark started Intelligent Health Systems in 2003 with an innovative product, Mozzigear – an insect repellent injected into a wristband rather than applied onto the skin. She formulated the product after both her daughters had allergic reactions to standard repellents.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused Intelligent Health's sales to plummet, as its products were marketed as discretionary and people were forced to stay home. Determined to continue supporting her staff, Frances decided to focus on the essentials and pivoted her strategy towards a new product – AcquaBoss, a lightweight, inflatable water hammock that was marketed as a stay-at-home vacation treat. "It enabled me to keep staff and business afloat, literally," Frances says. "We have identified a gap in the market that no one else knew existed."

Frances is proud of the fact that she has been able to overcome the challenges of the last two years without letting anyone go. "Even when it was really tough, we kept all our employees and contractors on the books and continued to pay 100 per cent of our commitments," she says. The team came out stronger from the experience, now further innovating and planning to launch new products onto the market in late 2022.



Ellen Powell

CEO, The Somewhere Co., Qld

As CEO of The Somewhere Co., Ellen Powell takes pride in the fact that her company is founded on curiosity, which is also one of its key values, enabling her to come up with bold products and designs for home, work, baby and play.

This spirit of curiosity and innovation is also present through the company's operations. "When it comes to better ways to do things, we are always at the forefront," Ellen avers. "I'd like to think that the way we present ourselves on social media, as very raw and wholesome, encourages other business owners on their own business journey." In the last 12 months, Ellen has implemented several novel solutions to help streamline aspects of her business, such as retail store management, inventory management and employee satisfaction.

Despite the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on global retail operations, The Somewhere Co. – which rebranded in 2020, having previously been Blushing Confetti and Livvy & Harry – was able to weather the challenges, thanks to having embraced an omnichannel strategy. "It was critical that we were nimble enough to pivot to very targeted marketing to our online and wholesaling arms of the business, particularly when our retail stores were underperforming," Ellen explains.



Jay Bonaretti

CEO, Amino Z, NSW

Launched as a personal training website in 2006, Amino Z added the retailing of sports supplements to its offering in 2008. It further evolved in 2017, becoming a manufacturer of its own line of sport supplements out of its home base in Caringbah.

"Supplements are expensive and it has been my mission to create a cost-effective product so more people can use supplements to help them achieve their health and fitness goals," CEO Jay Bonaretti explains.

Pandemic-related supply-chain issues were a challenge Jay overcame by working off a just-in-time model when it came to raw materials and finished goods. He bolstered his manufacturing capabilities by building key partnerships with a diversified supplier portfolio, to ensure an increased purchasing power and a continual supply of goods. Jay also helped the community during COVID-19 by managing to source a large volume of RAT tests. "This was as a result of countless phone calls and late nights trying to find anything we could possibly get our hands on," Jay says.

Conscious of the need to operate sustainably, Jay's best-selling brand now uses 87 per cent less plastic than most other products in the supplement industry, and all plastics Amino Z does use in its products are recyclable.



Julia Ewert

Director, *Julia Ewert Pty Ltd*, WA

Julia Ewert started her own eponymous venture in 2020, teaching businesses a process designed to help them convert more contracts, increase their margins and win more negotiations.

Scaling the business was initially a challenge, with two children at home and a husband working away in the mines. "I just wasn't getting anywhere with the constant 'stop-start' I was experiencing," Julia recalls. To overcome this, she structured a plan to grow the business to the extent that her husband could semi-retire by 2025. "It only took me 18 months and my husband is now officially semi-retired and I work full-time, helping my clients increase their revenue through my Infinite Sales System," Julia enthuses. "I also am now in a position to draw a market-rate salary from my company."

Julia stands by the effectiveness of the process she is teaching, guaranteeing her work. If clients don't get the results they're after, she commits to refunding her fees in full. "My program has never not worked for a client," she says. "So no one has needed to take me up on the refund offer."

Julia's program has helped some of her biggest clients experience upwards of 73 per cent revenue growth and enjoy solid pipelines of projects for the first time, giving them a predictable and sustainable revenue stream.



Kate Toon

Founder, *Stay Tooned*, NSW

Kate Toon began forging her own path as a copywriter with the launch of her copywriting business Stay Tooned in 2009. Since then, she has grown her brand with the launch of her DIY SEO course in 2016, the first of its kind in Australia, The Clever Copywriting School, which she opened the same year, and the Digital Masterchefs digital marketing group, launched in 2018.

Kate takes pride in the fact that her business – which she runs from her backyard shed in Umina Beach on the Central Coast – is built on creativity and innovation, despite the naysayers. "Sometimes my natural disposition for coming up with new ideas means I'm a sucker for 'shiny object syndrome'," Kate says. "But this isn't a bad thing, it leads to discoveries and improvements and keeps me excited about my business."

Over the last decade or so, almost 30,000 people have become part of Kate's free membership communities, alongside 647 businesses in her paid membership communities. She makes a point of consistently showing up and answering questions in her communities, through Facebook Live and other online events, and mini-mentoring sessions. She also constantly improves her content. "As Google moves the goalposts and changes its algorithms, I need to refresh my course content to stay relevant and useful to my students," Kate explains.



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Jackson Yin

Co-founder/CEO, iBuild, Vic
“The new-age builder”

Since its launch in 2014, iBuild has been designing and constructing affordable prefabricated structures, including kit homes, granny flats and modular buildings. The company headquarters are in the Eastern Innovation Business Centre in Mulgrave, south-east of Melbourne, and its manufacturing plant in Campbellfield, to the city's north. iBuild has 10 employees.

COVID-19 hit the company hard. “So much of our business had been carried out in person. We ran open-for-inspection events where potential buyers would view our display home and make purchases,” CEO Jackson Yin recalls. “As this was no longer a possibility under Melbourne's lockdowns, we saw our sales plummet by more than 70 per cent, threatening the very survival of our business.” As a countermeasure, Jackson initiated a strategy review that resulted in a digital shift and the development of virtual 3D showrooms. “In times of uncertainty, a business leader plays a particularly important role in setting directions and strategies,” Jackson avers.

Realising there was a shift away from offices to working from home – where distractions are plenty, separation of space is difficult, and a healthy work-life balance is diminished – Jackson mentored and led a group of

engineering, IT and marketing interns from Melbourne, Monash and Swinburne universities to design and successfully launch a home office pod that provides a dedicated space for people working at home. The pods were conceived with careful consideration of aesthetics, ergonomics, built environment, COVID safety and network connectivity.

That initiative led to a massive spike in Google search traffic to iBuild's website. And

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In times of uncertainty, a business leader plays a particularly important role in setting directions and strategies.

one of those searchers was an organisation working on a German foreign aid project in Senegal. That group placed a \$2 million order for 11 prefabricated homes to be shipped to West Africa. This contract was one of the biggest contributing factors to iBuild winning at the 2021 Australian Export Awards, as well as the 2021 Governor of Victoria Export Awards.

Alongside innovation, iBuild is also a leader when it comes to sustainability in the construction industry. In partnership with John Holland, the team designed, manufactured, delivered and installed over 700sqm of modular buildings for the new Reservoir Railway Station, which has become the first train station

in Australia to be awarded a 5-Star Green Star As Built rating by the Green Building Council of Australia, and a ‘Leading’ rating, the highest level awarded by the Infrastructure Sustainability Council of Australia.

Furthermore, in a bid to achieve net-zero emissions targets by 2050, Jackson championed a project to use innovation and cutting-edge sustainability technologies to develop circular building modules with optimal

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performance, durability, reusability and recyclability. “In conjunction with Monash University and Western Sydney University, we have been developing building modules manufactured largely from construction

and demolition waste that are designed for straightforward disassembly and reassembly, using advanced structural joints. They can be recycled and re-produced as new modules when approaching their end-of-life,” Jackson explains proudly.

“When I arrived in Australia in 1996 from Guilin in South China as a 24-year-old postgraduate engineering student, all I had was \$700 and a suitcase and I struggled to find affordable accommodation,” Jackson recalls. “I'm proud to have built a business from absolute zero – that now competes – and wins – on the global stage, generating employment opportunities for the community and helping improve housing affordability.”

Linda Goldspink-Lord

Founder, *Poseidon Animal Health, NSW*

Linda Goldspink-Lord launched Poseidon Animal Health, a family-owned business that provides gut-health supplements for horses and dogs, in Wollongong in 2017.

She launched at a time of prolonged drought. Horse owners were looking for help and Poseidon's products quickly became Australia's fastest-growing equine gut-health supplement. Last year brought a decline in sales, however, as heaps of rain led to lush pastures and COVID-19 lockdowns denied Linda the opportunity to meet with customers and retailers in-store and at events. Linda has addressed this situation through innovation. "We invested in creating new content to educate and engage our community," Linda explains. "Expert webinars, offering a free online feed program and showing up creatively online and through EDMs have helped us create value as we build back our strong market share."

The most recent highlight for Linda has been launching a world-first digestive product for dogs – Digestive K9. "After the success of our horse gut-health supplements, we decided to expand our offering. We worked with animal nutritionists, microbiologists and veterinarians to create a dog gut-health supplement that boosts their overall health and immunity," Linda enthuses.

Poseidon has switched from plastic buckets to sachets in its product delivery, reducing its plastic footprint by 80 per cent. The business supports neighbouring small businesses in giving back to the local economy. It is also working with the racing industry to provide education around best practices for horse feeding and care.



Kaye Lirio

Founder, *Oh How Kind, WA*

Kaye Lirio established Oh How Kind in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, to promote the importance of self-care through uniquely designed earrings and other accessories. Balancing her new business with her full-time work as a medical graphic designer has been a challenge. "Every day, I wake up at 5:30am, get ready for my day job, and as I drive, I listen to podcasts to upskill myself in the areas of sales, business management and finance," she says.

Of all her designs, Kaye is most proud of the Cheer Squad Collection, launched during Mental Health Awareness Month in 2021. "I created this collection so that anyone wearing them will feel that they are not alone wherever they may be in the world," she explains. "This collection is a reminder that they are loved, beautiful, appreciated and valued in every way." Her long hours and hard work were rewarded, with the collection being nominated as a finalist for Product of the Year 2021 by the Small Business Chain's Instagram page.

"With resilience, resourcefulness, efficient time-management skills and determination, I am committed to building Oh How Kind through any obstacle," declares Kaye, who is developing a sustainable range in consultation with Carbon Positive Australia to reduce plastic in packaging and our overall carbon footprint.



Lisa Cox

Founder, *Lisa Cox, Qld*

Lisa Cox started working in the media in 1998. In 2005, Lisa acquired multiple disabilities. Since then, she has been an outspoken disability advocate, working with the media and the fashion industry to change social attitudes and public perceptions about disability.

Lisa spent over a decade struggling to persuade businesses and society about the importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) for the 20 per cent of the population who live with a disability. "For a long time, none of them thought it was important enough, but I was persistent because I believed in what I was doing," she says. "Now society is evolving, and brands and businesses are approaching me to consult about D&I."

As the inaugural Disability Affairs Officer at Media Diversity Australia, Lisa was honoured to launch the *Disability Reporting Handbook* late last year. In the first couple of months after the launch, the handbook was downloaded by over 5,000 journalists. "Being part of a team that is changing the national media landscape for millions of Australians is something I am very proud of," Lisa says.

In what she describes as another leap forward, this year's Afterpay Australian Fashion Week – an event for which Lisa is a disability consultant – included adaptive fashion, the first such event in the world to do so.



Linden Toll

CEO, *Apricity Finance, NSW*

Linden Toll co-founded Apricity Finance, alongside Andrew Meakin, in Bowral in 2013, to provide flexible invoice finance with a focus on SMEs. As the company's CEO, Linden is a strong advocate for the welfare of Australia's small-business community.

One notable example of this advocacy is the matter of the government's procurement practices and how they have adversely affected SMEs. "Our clients faced an extremely challenging government procurement process for large infrastructure projects," he explains. "SMEs needed to provide guarantees or surety bonds worth 10 per cent of the contract, often on top of 10 per cent retention clauses, not to mention the fact that the provisions invariably favoured larger companies." Linden lobbied federal and state governments to review the policies and also spoke on the subject in Parliament. "The end result was having our recommendation to review market conditions for insurances and their impact on SMEs endorsed – a huge win," he avers.

Apricity Finance has been refining its finance system constantly, ensuring that the information it presents to its customers is relevant, easy to understand, and accessible from anywhere. "We look at ways to drive efficiency," Linden says. "These innovations are incrementally improving our clients' experience, as well as making invoice finance a more reliable and accessible option in the alternative business finance space."



Litsa Adamou

Director, House Inspect Australia, SA

Established in 2020, House Inspect Australia offers various building and pest inspection services across South Australia. The business has experienced rapid growth in the last couple of years, in line with the boom in Australia's construction industry.

The workload that came with this growth proved to be a challenge to House Inspect's founder, Litsa Adamou, a scenario that supply-chain and workforce issues didn't help. However, in addressing these challenges, Litsa chose a novel approach. "I promoted our culture of inclusivity, flexibility and support and established our company values," she explains. "By working on the values of my business, I overcame the workload issues." She also used virtual systems and processes to ensure greater work efficiency.

Litsa is an advocate of skill set-based recruitment, which focuses on finding the right people to do the work, based on passion and skill set. "I strongly believe that for change to occur, we need to focus on educating the younger generation on breaking the stereotypes," she explains. To this end, Litsa is involved in Speakers in Schools, a program that encourages such outcomes.

Winning at the 2022 Telstra Best of Business Awards for South Australia gave Litsa the platform to encourage women to follow their dreams by explaining how she broke gender norms to become the first female building inspector in SA.



Michael Clark

Co-founder/Principal Consultant, CXTT Consulting, NSW

Michael Clark launched his business consulting and coaching business CXTT Consulting in February 2021 as a sole trader, before restructuring it in November that year as a company, with his wife as a business partner.

The waves of COVID-19 lockdowns – Michael's prospective clients, contacts and network were primarily in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra – prompted him to build greater awareness of his business and to provide value for others during a challenging period by creating as much thought leadership content as possible in technology, customer experience and transformation. The result was a surge in interest as soon as conditions improved. "I engaged four new clients within 30 days of lockdowns ending, three from referrals," he enthuses.

Michael engages in sustainability initiatives locally to promote re-use and reduced waste, taking on administration of a local group on Facebook called Northern Beaches Freebies, which has 45,000+ members who pass on items they no longer need or want to those who do, to avoid those items going to landfill. He also provides administrative support for his local junior rugby club – leveraging his business knowledge and IP in support of the club – and ran the community's local Instagram page, which shares content from local small businesses and community groups, highlighting local events and helping other businesses remain active during lockdowns.

Michelle Kvello

Founder, Lantern Partners, NSW

Michelle Kvello started Lantern Partners in 2011 out of a desire to create a job that gave her a better lifestyle than her corporate gig. "I wanted a job with purpose and one which didn't involve a 60-hour week...at least not every week," she explains. "I've managed to create an environment where the whole team at Lantern Partners is able to work both flexibly and purposefully and of that, I'm really proud."

Lantern Partners specialises in providing strategic and financial advice for start-ups and scale-ups through understanding their financial position, and provides support to ensure they achieve their goals. In addition, Michelle has developed a course to help those in the corporate world transition successfully as consultants. The course is borne out of her own experience and a desire to help others.

In the last 12 months, the business has undergone what Michelle calls an "awkward adolescent" stage. "It's always hard to take your own advice and make business decisions and investments that are different to the ones that have propelled the business in the past," she admits. That realisation has enabled Michelle to make the necessary adjustments to become stronger than ever.

A mentor with Worldwide Sheroes and Inspiring Rare Birds, Michelle was recently named among the Top 50 Women in Accounting.

Michael Tutek

Founder/CEO, preezie, Vic

Michael Tutek had an idea for a digital service that would act as a sales consultant for online shoppers so they could make the right purchase decisions. The result was preezie, an online platform that makes use of a guided shopping experience, providing retailers a virtual consultant.

Michael officially launched preezie in 2018-19 in Melbourne after a few years in development. Since then, the business has rapidly adapted to a changing environment, helping retailers get through the third-party cookie ban that has been enforced by the likes of Apple. "Lots of businesses are hurting from the changes Apple has made and Google is planning, and it feels amazing to help brands thrive through those changes," Michael says.

He owes the success of preezie to his talented team. "We work in technology and eCommerce and in that industry, you are only as strong as your people," he says. "We believe that you hire the best people and empower them to grow. We hired an experienced head of people and culture when we were just 19 people; this is much earlier than most businesses, and we haven't regretted it for a second."

Michael is keen to promote sustainability in the retail sector and preezie's software shines a light on sustainably-made products.



Michelle Maynard

Partner, *Carbon Group, WA*

Michelle Maynard joined accounting and bookkeeping firm Carbon Group in 2017, eventually rising to become one of the firm's partners in its Swan Valley office in Ellenbrook. Michelle has taken on the role of financial expert in the community, explaining issues and concepts from small-business grants to tax time and the Federal Budget to local businesses.

"Being able to break down financial concepts in a manner that the wider public can understand is a privilege and a responsibility I take seriously," Michelle says. "Being able to present this information in an easy-to-understand, engaging and even entertaining way has meant I have been able to educate many, hopefully having a positive impact on their ability to make informed decisions."

Michelle is proud of the fact that she has been able to provide assistance to many small businesses throughout the pandemic, helping them maintain their cashflow and ability to continue operating, while balancing the wellbeing of her team. "We needed to ensure we were available for our clients whilst navigating working from home and isolating periods, but also ensuring we protected the mental health and wellbeing of our staff," she says. "The majority not only survived but thrived. And that is something I will be forever proud of."



Naomi Derrick

Director, *Acting Performance Studio, Vic*

Acting Performance Studio opened over 10 years ago, serving not only as an acting school but also as a drama academy and talent agency.

The school's director, Naomi Derrick, has faced a tough few years. After her husband died three years ago, the pandemic forced the school to close and her staff, students and the talent the business manages were unable to work. "If there's a problem, I love trying to find solutions," Naomi says defiantly. "Supporting my staff, our talent and students through this time was difficult but very rewarding, especially knowing that even just an email or a card can make a big difference to someone's day."

The Acting Performance Studio is currently piloting an all-abilities program that will help ensure that everyone is given an opportunity to express themselves through film and television, as well as a dedicated program for people with disabilities run by specialist teachers, to nurture, encourage, and teach acting in a safe and welcoming environment.

As a personal endeavour, Naomi set up a charity named Creating the Magic, in honour of her husband's memory. The charity supports The Sixth Child organisation, which is based in Melbourne's outer suburbs. Creating the Magic raises funds to support the needs of disadvantaged children and teens by providing school uniforms, computers, books, everyday clothing and Christmas gifts.

Nathan Schokker and Sandy Lokas

Co-founders, *SafeCo, Qld*

SafeCo launched in May 2020 in Brisbane as a contact-tracing initiative during COVID-19. It has since grown into a digital-solutions company specialising in events, digital transformation and custom software development.

Co-founders Nathan Schokker, and Sandy Lokas have spent the last 12 months managing growth and balancing innovations. "In that time, we've launched a ticketing platform, a digital business card, a smart wristband and messaging platform, a digital insurance platform and competition campaigns across Brisbane and Perth," Sandy explains. The latest of those initiatives brought almost 4500 people into each CBD, rejuvenating foot traffic and, therefore, the small businesses that had suffered through pandemic lockdowns.

They have achieved all this through having complete confidence and trust in their team and by following the old adage 'fail fast and learn fast', getting 80 per cent clarity on a problem, then pursuing the solution with constant assessment along the way.

Nathan is proudest of their latest innovation – MODC, a digital business card designed to help people connect and network more easily and sustainably, thereby getting more value out of trade expos. "Developing MODC made us actively think about, and embrace, sustainability in a way we hadn't done before," Nathan explains. "From small things like reusing boxes and packages for other purposes, we are taking positive steps towards reducing our need for resources and unnecessary wastage."



Nathan Schokker, left, and Sandy Lokas



Nikki Kelly

Founder, *Kollective by Nikki, Qld*

Launched in 2016 in the Brisbane suburb of Banyo, eCommerce brand Kollective by Nikki crafts personalised gold and silver jewellery by hand. Having started the business in her garage, Nikki Kelly now works out of what she describes as a "shiny new building" with 10 employees.

Determined to maintain the same rigorous standards she set when she started the business as it scales up, Nikki has implemented a stringent manufacturing process for each and every product. "I have focused a lot on the onboarding and training process so that each new employee to our business can be at our benchmark level for two of our products within two weeks of starting," she explains. In support of this, Nikki is hands-on in developing products and conducts process reviews to ensure the team's efficiency.

Nikki's efforts to reduce waste have led to the creation of new products. About one-in-five pendants she gets from her supplier come with small defects. Rather than reject them, she created a range of hand-drawn stamps representing each month's birth flower and the small marks are covered up with a bouquet of each customer's birth flowers. "Since the launch of this range in April 2022, we've sold over 300 of these necklaces, turning something unusable into a personalised piece of jewellery," Nikki says proudly.



Ellie Degraeve

Founder, *Go For Zero, Qld*
“The sustainability crusader”

Go For Zero started out as a pop-up store in November 2018 in Caloundra on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast. On the back of a career in international retail and an education in workplace and team psychology, the venture’s founder, Ellie Degraeve, started the business with the mission to help Australians put an end to wasteful consumption cycles by offering products and education that stop waste creation at its source.

Ellie makes sustainable, non-toxic and plastic-free products in the beauty, cleaning, pet-care and baby-care sectors, among others. The business has grown exceptionally quickly. “We have shipped over 42,000 orders to Australian families who have joined us to fight for a cleaner world,” Ellie says proudly. “We currently have more than 2000 plastic-free and toxin-free products from 101 Australian-owned brands, through our online store and our network of retail outlets – our own stores plus wholesalers.” The brand’s store has turned over more than \$2 million to date, and Ellie has donated \$17,000 to Australian causes in the last financial year.

Go for Zero is a firmly female business – female owned and female run. Ellie employs six women, three of whom are undertaking their Certificate III in Business through a traineeship program. Furthermore, Ellie sources from female suppliers. Over 90 per cent of her current suppliers are female owned and run.

Ellie’s proudest achievement in the last 12 months is the development of an educational pathway. “I recognised a lack of knowledge from customers on how to read labels, recycle, use plastic-free products, etc.,” she explains. “With the belief that when we know better, we do better, I needed to do more than offer people zero-waste, toxin-free products to make a difference in our planet’s health.” To this end, Go for Zero harnessed digital tools to create a free education

platform for those looking to make meaningful change. “By utilising our social media channels as an educational platform, rather than purely an eCommerce one, I have created a new and innovative approach to sustainability education,” Ellie explains. “We reach over 500,000 viewers weekly, providing information on how to reduce our waste and toxins in our lives.”

As a non-native speaker, Ellie has worked through her fear of presenting in English to develop a loyal following and passionate community. “I am proud to connect with an audience that is making a difference in the health of their lives and the planet we all share,” she adds. “We are leading the way in customer

“ By utilising our social media channels as an educational platform, rather than purely an eCommerce one, I have created a new and innovative approach to sustainability education. ”

awareness and education by proving more than just a marketplace for sustainable products.”

Sustainability is at the heart of the business. All its suppliers are Australian, to reduce

freight emissions and stimulate local economies. Ellie has removed plastics entirely from her shipping process – she encourages her suppliers to do the same – and offsets freight and staff travel emissions.

“Our goal is to become Australia’s first zero-waste warehouse and office and secure more local and national business awards [this year, Go for Zero was announced as the Queensland winner of the Promoting Sustainability category at the Telstra Best of Business Awards], to share our journey with others and help more businesses make the change to a more sustainable working environment.”

Through her education campaign and speaking engagements, Ellie is taking that message beyond business to the wider community. “I truly believe that providing people with the information they need creates a ripple effect that extends to their family, friends and colleagues – helping to increase the adoption of a more sustainable way of living in our community,” she avers.

Nicole Davidson

Founder, *Nicole Davidson Negotiation, Vic*

After a long legal career specialising in commercial law, Nicole Davidson set up her own venture in 2017 to provide mediation services, negotiation advice and training to businesses looking to develop their skills in handling negotiations and other difficult decisions.

Nicole runs the enterprise as a solopreneur, which in itself provides a unique set of challenges. “Balancing getting the work done with making sure more will come in the door is always tough,” she explains. “My ability to contribute is limited by the amount of time and the small size of my business so I have a strategy of focusing on contributions that can make the biggest difference.”

One such successful example of this is her

Negotiation in Real Life podcast, on which Nicole talks to senior business leaders about their real-life experiences of negotiation that others can learn from and replicate in their own negotiations. The podcast is considered an invaluable learning resource among Australian businesses, as there are so few books available that discuss negotiations in the Australian business context. “I’m proud of this, as I have achieved this alone, developing the skills I needed,” she says.

Keen to share her experience, Nicole often presents to organisations, as she did recently on the ways solicitors and accountants can assist small businesses in resolving disputes faster and more cost effectively.



Pauline Ceddia

Owner, *Crystal Healthcare, Vic*

Pauline Ceddia has served as the owner of Crystal Healthcare for eight years, though the business itself has been around for over 35 years, providing solutions for those suffering from incontinence. It is a registered NDIS provider, making its products easily accessible to eligible people with disabilities.

As a healthcare-based business, Crystal Healthcare has endured a challenging period during the COVID-19 pandemic, Pauline admits. “One of the biggest challenges was our inability to get face-to-face with continence nurses and healthcare practitioners due to lockdown but also because many nurses had been pulled away from their continence consulting to assist

with the massive load of COVID testing and administering vaccinations,” Pauline recalls. To overcome this challenge, she created a virtual training program that allowed the business to establish links with clinicians who are crucial to its service.

Pauline takes pride in the sustainable approach the business takes. “Our whole range is reusable and our products will last many years and hundreds of washes, as opposed to disposable products, which are prolific in our industry,” she says. Crystal also sources raw materials from local suppliers wherever possible – its wool is sourced locally from Gippsland – meaning a decrease in emissions for the whole process, from end to end.



Peter Buckingham

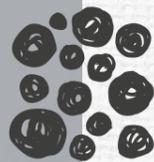
Co-founder/Managing Director, *Spectrum Analysis Australia, Vic*

Peter Buckingham launched Spectrum Analysis alongside Bruce Waddington in 1996. He has since bought out his co-founder, built the business up to what is now a team of 10, and won a number of awards, including being named Franchise Council of Australia Supplier of the Year for 2021.

Spectrum offers geodemographic modelling and analysis for clients across Australia and internationally. Its work is based on verifiable data and statistics for site selection, territory planning, marketing strategy, and business forecasting.

Among its myriad projects, the work it has been doing for schools for the past year – analysis of where student enrolments are, where growth is occurring, and whether they need support with bus routes – has been a highlight for Peter. “Many schools are engaging us because they are seeing falling enrolment numbers and see our tools and products as ways to make better business decisions,” he explains. “We have also developed a product schools use to help nominate where to open new schools or new campuses, based on demographics.”

Through the business, Peter supports a range of charities, including The Male Bag Foundation which raises money for transperineal biopsy machines to boost prostate cancer survival in the regional areas of Australia.



Peter Kordupel

Director, *White Paper Associates, Vic*

Peter Kordupel launched White Paper Associates in 2019 to help businesses in Melbourne navigate and deliver shopper-centric strategy and execution.

“The current market dynamic – an increase in costs and a tight market for finding knowledgeable employees to help navigate the current market pressures – has put a large strain on SMEs,” Peter explains. “My challenge has been to ensure all businesses, no matter if they are retailers or suppliers, are successful in navigating the current dynamic.”

The highlight of the last 12 months has been being involved in the launch of UK-based baby brand Kit & Kin, co-owned by former Spice Girl Emma Bunton. Peter took a unique approach

to bringing the brand to Australia, working with a number of local retailers and distributors and putting together a strategy that enabled a long-term sustainable model. “This has been a long-term project and a very rewarding one in one of the toughest and most commoditised categories within retail,” Peter says. “We are currently finalising the launch event in Melbourne and I look forward to the success this brand brings to the local market.”

Recently, Peter has been helping Ukrainian refugees, and has partnered with a local SME to donate products to a silent-auction charity based in Frankston that helps create a safe space for vulnerable women to access perinatal support.



Phoebe Netto

Founder, *Pure Public Relations, NSW*

Phoebe Netto was frustrated seeing that small and medium-sized businesses and not-for-profits were not getting the level of expertise big brands could afford when it comes to public relations. So, she established Pure Public Relations in 2010 to support businesses that deserve some time in the spotlight for the work they do.

“We choose to work with businesses that are passionate about making meaningful differences and benefiting the people around them,” Phoebe says. “Even our more product- or lifestyle-based consumer clients operate in a way that leaves people better off than they found them.” Pure is always working with at least one pro-bono client and offers reduced rates for not-for-profit and charity organisations.

Phoebe is proud of the fact that her company has thus far avoided the current skills shortage crisis by keeping positions flexible, being open to hires from all around the country, and being sure to hire people based on specific strengths and specialties, rather than just seeking generalists. “This ensures the business is always bigger than me, and I am not limiting its growth and longevity,” she explains.

Phoebe invites each team member to identify a charity they would like to support, with either a commitment of time or via hands on the ground. She also sits on multiple boards and helps manage several charities.



Pulkit Agrawal

Managing Director, *UR Digital, NSW*

When he started UR Digital in 2021, Pulkit Agrawal made it his mission to deliver high SEO rankings for his clients, providing a positive impact for their businesses. “It is the joy of receiving emails in the middle of the night when customers are ecstatic with the results I have delivered,” Pulkit says. “Over the course of a professional relationship, clients become friends, but it is our work that speaks.

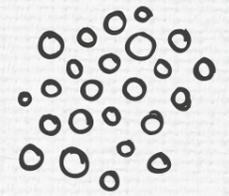
That’s the impact.”

UR’s success has not all been plain sailing, with Pulkit having to deal with the distrust many businesses have

of SEO. “Most of the businesses I interact with have little to no faith in SEO, as they have burned their hands too many times,” he explains. Honesty, hard work and implementing monthly pricing – after establishing that many prospective customers shy away from a single, large project price – have helped him win many people over.

Having started out taking any business he could, much of which proved unprofitable, Pulkit introduced a minimum-commitment agreement to ensure a decent revenue stream for his business.

Given the ever-changing nature of SEO, Pulkit encourages his team to embark on continued personal growth and learning, something he does himself. “I like to put myself in my employees’ shoes to think how an idea or proposal might be received by them,” Pulkit explains.





Katarina Rosa, left, and Sarah Cleaton

Katarina Rosa

Co-founder, *Embedded Blooms, NSW*
“The preserver of memories”

Katarina Rosa and Sarah Cleaton launched Embedded Blooms in July 2020 when COVID-19 lockdowns brought both of their wedding floristry businesses to a standstill. “Someone we knew couldn’t hold a full funeral for their loved one, so we came up with the idea of creating a beautiful cast of the funeral flowers that could be shared and treasured by people who couldn’t attend the event,” Katarina recalls. This was the starting point for their new business – located in Camden, south-west of Sydney – which solves the problem of how to capture and preserve beautiful flowers from life’s big moments so they can be treasured for years to come.

“Through a process of drying and preserving flowers in a custom resin 3D cast, we turn flowers into beautiful pieces of art, to be treasured and displayed for a lifetime,” Katarina explains. “Whether this is chosen blooms from a wedding bouquet, or a memorial cast featuring flowers and mementos to remember a loved one.”

Leaning on their extensive floristry experience, Katarina and Sarah have developed a fresh box postal system that solves the problem of geography. “It means customers anywhere in Australia can

send us their flowers, and we’ve perfected the process to make it as easy and successful as possible to transport delicate floral arrangements to our workshop,” Katarina explains. “We’ve also focused on educating our audience on how to use the fresh box system properly, with online tutorials, videos and social posts.”

Further innovation comes in the form of their Australian-made custom moulds, which extend Embedded Blooms’ product range, offer customers more choice and keep the business from being reliant on importing moulds from overseas

“Through a process of drying and preserving flowers in a custom resin 3D cast, we turn flowers into beautiful pieces of art.”

– a big advantage given the current international supply-chain issues.

Katarina is keen to champion sustainability at every step of product processing. The business reuses the packaging peanuts the resin arrives in to pack customer orders. Embedded Blooms also dries only the flowers required for each order, to use less silica – silica has to be cooked, which involves electricity – and ensures that all flower by-products go into green waste. The business separates all its green waste from recycling and landfill rubbish,

and its innovative moulds have a longer life than the cheaper silicone moulds imported from overseas, enabling more use out of each mould.

Katarina and Sarah have come to appreciate the power of supporting local suppliers. “COVID lockdowns trickling on to world trade have slowed the lead time significantly, and this has forced us to really zero in on local vendors where possible,” Katarina says. “All of our inner workings are dependent on local vendors; for example, we ship exclusively from Narellan Post Office and have our timber products made by a small

business in Thirlmere.” The commitment to the community extends beyond the business itself, through local donations, such as giving

200 keychains to a Mater Dei Ladies Lipstick Luncheon when it was raising money to help babies, children and young adults with an intellectual disability or developmental delay.

The business makes a point of prioritising women with children in hiring, on the basis that they are often overlooked by traditional workplaces. “We want to create a flexible and inclusive work environment,” Katarina avers. “Our team members are local women who were looking for flexible and rewarding employment.”

Sam Trattles

Founder, *Other Side of the Table*, NSW

Sam Trattles considers *Other Side of the Table* a purpose-driven enterprise that helps businesses become empowered to achieve better outcomes in their negotiations. “We need to say ‘no, thank you’ to people or projects that don’t bring us joy,” she explains. “This approach creates space to look up, think strategically and drive greater outcomes.”

As an entrepreneur, Sam is driven by innovation in everything she does, even if it means discarding work already done if it doesn’t feel right. This is exemplified in her latest book, *Negotiate Your Worth*, in which she discarded her original drafts to make the subject, which is negotiating as a business skill, more interesting. “I explored many angles until I landed on aligning the characteristics of powerful business negotiators to traits of Aussie animals,” Sam explains. “Bang! I knew I was onto something then.” To ensure the parallels were authentic, Sam worked with Nick Boyle, the director of welfare, conservation and science at the Taronga Conservation Society.

Having recently realigned her business to include advocacy as one of its pillars, Sam has partnered with the Taronga Conservation Society so that it receives \$1 for every sale of that new book. She also provides skills-based pro-bono work to the charity *Feel the Magic*, Australia’s largest provider of childhood grief support programs.



Sean Wilson

CEO, *BetterHR*, NSW

BetterHR was founded in 2006 in Sydney with the aim of providing the essential HR software and expert advice that businesses require to manage people.

Many businesses have relied heavily on Sean and his team of five for HR tools and advice to help them manage extraordinary challenges over the last few years – the pandemic, bushfires, floods, international workers being locked out, the Great Resignation and rising inflation.

“Quickly designing and delivering new HR solutions to meet our clients’ rapidly changing needs – such as lawfully standing down a workforce during COVID lockdowns and accessing government support to maintain cashflow – has been a hell of a ride, but it’s great to know the work you do makes such a positive impact,” Sean says.

Sean has evolved the COVID-19 Toolkit he developed to deal with the pandemic. It’s now a ‘Disasters Toolkit’ to help employers overcome a broader range of ongoing workplace challenges. Sean also continues to share free information publicly to help Australian business owners and managers. “Feedback from our clients, and non-clients, shows the huge positive impact these resources have had in helping employers, including saving many businesses from closing and reducing the number of employees terminated,” says Sean, whose efforts have been recognised with the Best HR & Employment Law CEO in Australia award at the 2022 Global CEO Excellence Awards.



Sophie Doyle

CEO/Creative Director, *Alf the Label*, WA

As an expectant mother in 2016, Sophie Doyle set out to find a baby bag that was both stylish and functional. Unable to find a suitable solution, Sophie designed one herself at her kitchen table. Her brand, *Alf the Label*, has subsequently grown in terms of product range and reach, developing what she calls a community of parents and supporters.

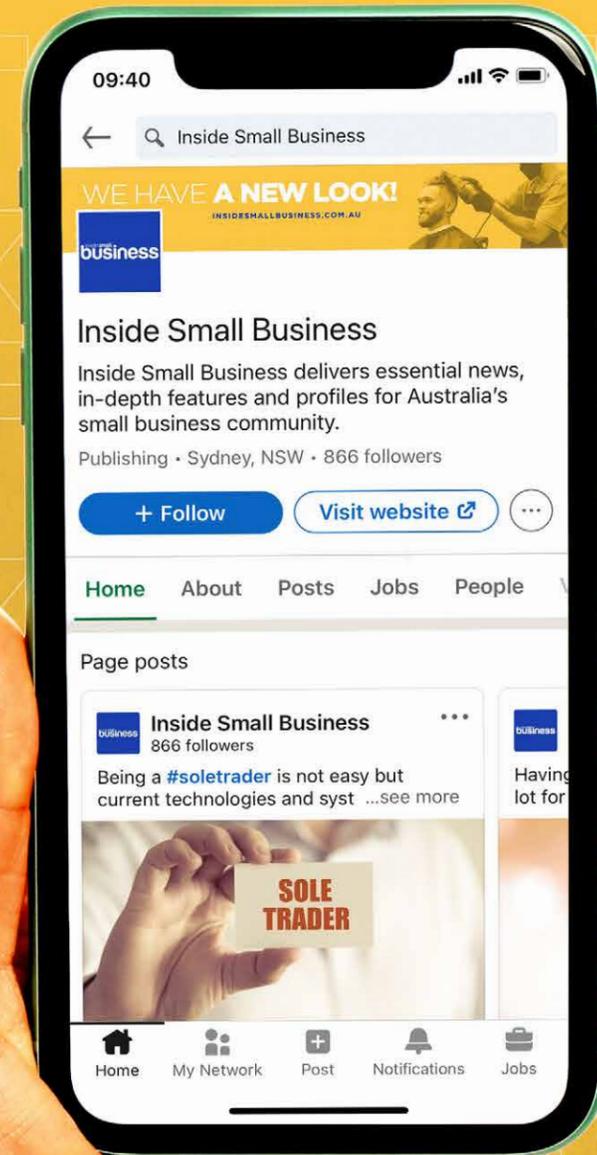
“My own journey and the journey of Alf’s community have inspired me to evolve and curate innovative collections for our ever-changing parenting needs,” Sophie says. From her experiences and the feedback she has received on *Alf the Label*’s product line, she has conceived a number of innovative products, from the brand’s first sustainable and gender-neutral athleisure collection – developed in consultation with her husband – to a product range specially designed for return-to-work mums.

Sophie is dedicated to giving back to the community. She donates \$1 from every sale to women in need through charity partner *Dress for Success*. She has set up the *Alf Exchange*, where bags can be donated to benefit at-risk women, and has also developed a program dubbed *Alf ROAK* (random acts of kindness), a series of initiatives designed to cheer up parents stuck in lockdown.



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Susan Martin

Founder/CEO, *Smart in Planning, NSW*

Focused on field merchandise planning, Smart In Planning helps retail and wholesale businesses maximise their sales and profit through optimisation of their inventory. “The retail landscape has been thrown into disarray these past couple of years,” founder and CEO Susan Martin says. “The retail industry’s pain is our pain, their challenges are our challenges, as we exist purely to help them.” To that end, in late 2020 Susan launched a free resource centre – The Planning POD – containing tools, calculators, tips and videos to help planners and anyone else in retail.

Founded in 2014, the business has in the past year reached the milestone of working with over 100 businesses and brands, with a combined annual turnover in excess of \$25 billion, since its launch. Smart in Planning is in the process of expanding overseas into South Africa.

Susan is proud that she contributes to improved sustainability in the fashion industry. “Through careful planning at the source, we can help avoid wasted resources on making goods that will not sell at the start of the retail cycle and write-offs that would ultimately end in landfill,” she explains.

This year, Smart in Planning was awarded Best Retail Consultancy at the NORA Awards, the third consecutive year the business has picked up a gong at these awards.

Susie White

Founder/CEO, *Eat Drink Innovate, Vic*

With years of experience in food innovation, Susie White spent the last 12 months developing an ice cream that is plant-based and allergen-friendly that she and others with specific dietary needs can enjoy. After a lengthy product-development period and having to bootstrap the building and fitting out of a dedicated allergen-free kitchen with commercial gelato-making equipment, Susie launched SuperSeed ‘ice creme’ into the market in February 2022.

Susie chose hemp as its main ingredient because of its sustainability. “Hemp is one of the most sustainable and versatile crops grown in Australia,” she explains. “It requires less land and water, and no fertilisers or pesticides, while absorbing 22 tonnes of carbon dioxide per hectare.”

Within the \$1.6 billion Australian ice cream market, plant-based products account for 13 per cent of sales, yet are growing at five times the rate of dairy ice cream, a fact that has helped SuperSeed attract the attention of retailers.

In support of her goal to make SuperSeed the sustainable future of ice cream, Susie actively supports the regeneration of Australian rainforest by Rainforest Rescue with every ice creme purchase made. “To date, we’ve saved 834 metres of Australian rainforest in the Daintree National Park,” she enthuses. “This priceless habitat is home to native animals like the rare southern cassowary, spotted-tail quoll and nursery frogs.”



Yong-Li Zhou

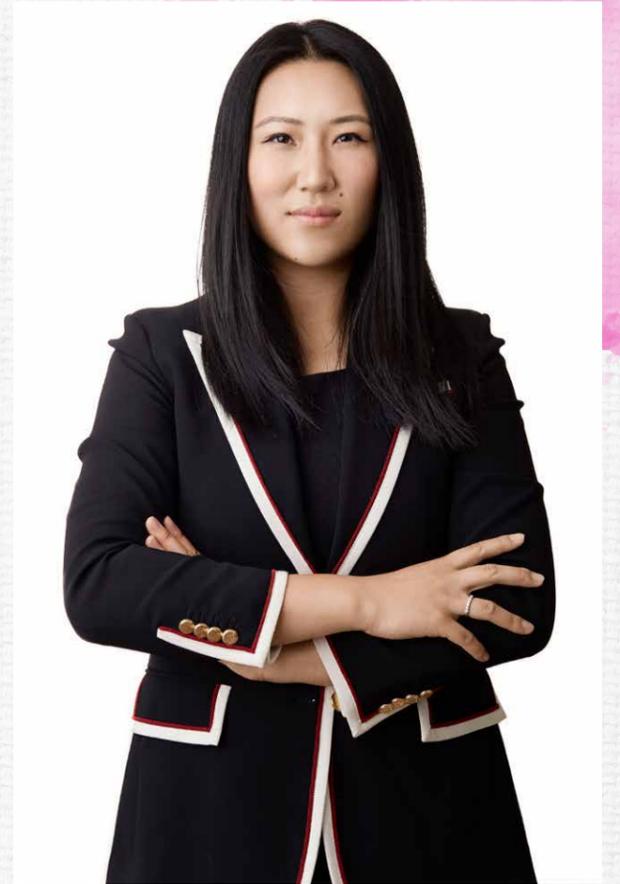
Director, *Enbacci, Vic*

Yong-Li Zhou started Enbacci with her mum in Prahran, Melbourne in 2012, with the vision of creating innovative and Australia-made luxury skincare. She has turned to the power of storytelling, not only to grow the brand but also to deliver a message beyond just selling the product.

“I didn’t want Enbacci to be another high-end skincare brand that sells you a solution to a problem we made you believe you have,” Yong-Li explains. “Rather, we want people to embrace themselves and have healthy skin function while doing so.” To achieve this, Enbacci’s marketing campaigns are centred around cultural and identity diversity, and body inclusivity.

Aside from the recognition Enbacci is gaining at home, Yong-Li has been proud to see the brand gain a foothold in China in the last year, despite the ongoing pandemic and her pregnancy. “Over the past 12 months, I have experienced major ‘work guilt,’” she admits. But Yong-Li learnt to change the guilt mindset and look at things as ‘glass half full’. “Feeling guilty for not having the time or space to build my business is futile when I don’t have any options to change the position I am in,” she says.

Conscious of making the distinction between effective change and green-washing, the business has converted from plastic mailing bags to recyclable boxes for mailing out orders.



Yovanka Loria

Founder/CEO, *Yovanka Loria Extensions, SA*

Yovanka Loria opened what began as a boutique, home-based hair salon in Seaton, South Australia in 2017. She had started out working in salons on weekends at the age of 12 and gone on to work in Los Angeles and New York. In 2018, Yovanka introduced a luxury line of hand-tied hair extensions, and she has subsequently added an education arm to her business.

“The salon, extensions and education are all vital parts of our business model,” Yovanka explains. “My husband joined the business in 2018, helping me grow our team from two to 10 full-time employees in just over a year.”

During the pandemic, supply of the extensions was unaffected and the business continued to thrive. Yovanka used the time she would have normally spent delivering training interstate to finalise a collaboration she had been working on in the US, enabling her to launch her brand there.

Yovanka’s hard work has led to her winning SA Woman’s The Innovator Award and a gong at the APAC Australian Enterprise Awards, but she is most proud of her work helping stylists create sustainable schedules and teaching them how to achieve their full potential. “I love that our business model creates the opportunity for my staff and our community to earn a higher income, have work-life balance, and work smarter, not harder,” Yovanka avers.





Michael Vidor

Founder and CEO, *Urban Ethos*, Vic
“The ethical ‘city-zen’”

Michael Vidor launched Urban Ethos in November 2018 in Moorabbin in south-east Melbourne. His aim was to create a new ethos for urban living. “This ethos is a focus on sustainable choices through the use of renewables that have a low carbon footprint and recycled materials that would normally end up in landfill,” Michael explains.

Pandemic-related global logistics and supply-chain challenges continue to be an issue for Urban Ethos, as the business imports products from different parts of the world. Michael and his dedicated team of five have addressed this by focusing on their supplier relationships, keeping the business “at the front of the queue” for supply. “This has helped increase our local inventory levels and ensure ‘out-of-stocks’ are kept to a minimum so we continue to deliver our customer orders on time and maintain the highest possible levels of service,” he says.

The company’s most recent innovation has been its Eco Turtles range of household cleaning products, which came onto the market in August 2021. This range of dissolvable cleaning tablets removes the need for single-use spray bottles, reduces the carbon footprint by removing the need for transport of heavy liquids, and is the only domestic cleaning range of dissolvable tablets to have Ecocert certification – an international organic and ecological benchmark that highlights the best environmentally friendly and socially conscious practices.

“Our products use only natural ingredients that are biodegradable, won’t harm our environment or waterways and are all safe for consumers who have allergies to chemical-based cleaners,” Michael says. “All that’s needed is to fill our reusable spray bottles with water, drop one of our cleaning tablets into the water, wait for it to dissolve and start cleaning.” The range includes glass, multipurpose, bathroom, floor,

degreaser and sanitiser cleaners. It is currently sold in selected Woolworths supermarkets and Michael is anticipating that the range will also be stocked in Bunnings Warehouse stores in the very near future.

With sustainability at the very core of the business, every product the brand sells is designed to meet the highest level of eco-sustainability in its respective category. “All our products use either renewable or recycled materials and all products are fully certified,” Michael asserts. “For example, our bamboo toilet papers are FSC certified [the Forest Stewardship Council is an international, non-profit, multi-stakeholder organisation established in 1993 that promotes responsible management of the

“ Our entire focus is on changing consumer habits by replacing everyday household consumables with eco-sustainable alternatives. ”

world’s forests via timber certification]. They don’t contain any chemical bleach, scents or dyes and use no plastic packaging.”

Urban Ethos’ kitchen plastics are all made from renewable sugarcane, its kitchen storage containers are all made from ocean-bound plastics, which are materials deemed at risk of ending up as ocean pollution if not re-purposed. The company’s reusable coffee cups are made from repurposed coffee husk material. “Our entire focus is on changing consumer habits by replacing everyday household consumables with eco-sustainable alternatives,” Michael avers.

By selling its products online and in major supermarkets and large retailers, Urban Ethos is pushing to gain the highest possible reach to as many consumers as possible. The idea is that making the switch to a sustainable alternative helps the planet in meaningful ways. “We consume massive quantities of everyday household products in Australia and changing to sustainable alternatives that are often priced the same, or only slightly more than, their non-sustainable versions, leads to meaningful change on a large scale,” Michael says.

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