

CAVENDISH WOMEN OF INFLUENCE PROGRAMME

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About Cavendish

Cavendish is a UK-based investment bank that works closely with ambitious businesses and their leaders to help shape what's next - whether that's raising capital, expanding internationally, or preparing for a sale.

We combine deep sector expertise with decades of dealmaking experience, supporting both private and public companies through every stage of growth. With teams in London, Edinburgh, Manchester and Birmingham - and a global reach through Oaklins, one of the world's leading mid-market advisory groups - we offer trusted advice across M&A, equity capital markets, debt, and private growth capital.

Women of Influence is our initiative for female founders, C-suite leaders and decision-makers across the UK. Through events, insight and connection, we support women navigating critical business decisions - sharing ideas, experience and expert guidance along the way.

Women of Influence exists to support business leaders who are preparing, not rushing. For those shaping what's next with intent.

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Mentoring and support networks are vital for women in business. They provide the guidance and encouragement needed to navigate challenges and seize opportunities."

SARA DAVIES MBE

FOUNDER OF CRAFTER'S COMPANION AND DRAGONS' DEN INVESTOR



Welcome to the first issue of Shaping Business

This update is part of the broader Cavendish Women of Influence programme which supports and connects women in senior business roles - founders, executives, investors and board members. It brings together perspectives on growth, leadership and decision-making, drawn from the experiences of women we may work with but always admire.

What we've created here is straightforward. Business-focused. It's to offer something useful to women leading in complex environments - with limited time and plenty to think about.

We'll share views, highlight challenges, and feature people making a difference. Some of them you may know. Others you might want to.

Thank you for reading.



Founder Focus

Founded in 2012 by Alie
Mackintosh with just £14 and a
box of fabric, AYM Studio has
evolved into a leading UK-based
womenswear brand known for its
sustainable practices and
functional designs. The brand
experienced a significant surge in
demand following a viral TikTok
video, leading to a temporary
website shutdown to manage
backorders.



AYM's commitment to ethical production, including paying living wages and using ecofriendly materials, has earned it the prestigious King's Award for Enterprise. With 70% of its £3.2 million revenue coming from international markets, AYM exemplifies how thoughtful design and strategic use of social media can propel a small startup to global recognition.

ALIE MACKINTOSH'S FASHION BRAND SCALED TO £3.2M EXPORTS, EARNING A KING'S AWARD FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE. 66

Don't invest in women because it's fair. Do it because it works."

BGF'S REPORT OUTLINES HOW IT HAS
INVESTED OVER £500 MILLION INTO
WOMEN-LED BUSINESSES SINCE
LAUNCH, AND ITS CONTINUED EFFORTS
TO CHAMPION INCLUSIVE
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE UK.

BGF (Business Growth Fund) is the UK's most active growth capital investor and has quietly become a major force in closing the gender funding gap.

Since 2011, it has backed over 90 female-led businesses, committing more than £500 million to women founders. Their approach is distinctive: long-term, minority investments and a focus on entrepreneurs leading scale-up businesses not just early-stage startups.

BGF's ongoing visibility in this space, including partnerships with the Investing in Women Code and initiatives across regional hubs, sends a clear message to the market: backing women-led businesses isn't niche, it's mainstream.

BGF'S £500M INVESTMENT IN WOMEN LED BUSINESSES

Read the full article



HAIR SYRUP: FROM STUDENT SIDE HUSTLE TO £6.5M BRAND LUCIE MACLEOD IS THE
FOUNDER OF HAIR SYRUP, A
BOLD AND UNAPOLOGETICALLY
INDIE BRAND THAT BEGAN LIFE
IN A UNIVERSITY KITCHEN WITH
NOTHING MORE THAN A FEW
NATURAL OILS AND A TIKTOK
ACCOUNT.

Still in her early twenties, Lucie turned a passion for haircare into a business that now pulls in millions. When she was rejected on Dragons' Den in 2023, she didn't pivot, she doubled down.

Her brand's vivid aesthetic and grassroots energy struck a chord with Gen Z customers, and within months Hair Syrup became a viral staple.

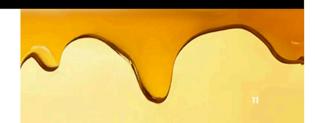
Today, the products are stocked by Boots, ASOS, and Sephora, and Lucie oversees a thriving company that has grown from a side hustle to a £6.5 million brand all while keeping full control. She is part of a new generation of founders building scalable businesses with strong ethics.



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Dragons' Den rejection was the best thing to happen to my company"

Read the full article



SOUND THINKING

Smart listening for women shaping what's next

We've chosen these episodes for the founders, board members and business leaders in our network - women making complex decisions, often without much time to spare.

Each one reflects the kinds of conversations we're having across the Women of Influence programme at Cavendish.

Focused, relevant, and worth a listen.







The Resilient Retail Game Plan

In this episode of the Resilient Retail Game Plan, Catherine Erdly and Mel Eilers explore how chatbots can help retailers boost sales, automate engagement, and stay ahead in the world of conversational marketing.



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The Midlife Entrepreneur

Jennifer Mo, co-founder of Pura Collagen, speaks about her journey from athlete to entrepreneur, building a science-led supplement brand in midlife while navigating PR, regulation, resilience, and the realities of business growth.



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Women's Business

Nicola Elliott, founder of NEOM Wellbeing, shares how burnout sparked her journey from journalism to entrepreneurship, reflecting on brand building, motherhood, flexibility, and the smart choices behind her success.



What we're seeing day to day: it's not just that health-conscious and purpose-led brands are being acquired - it's that they're changing what buyers are looking for."

REBECCA MCCREDIE DIRECTOR, CAVENDISH



THE WELLNESS SECTOR IS THRIVING, WITH FOUNDER-LED BRANDS – MANY LED BY WOMEN – ATTRACTING SIGNIFICANT ATTENTION FROM GLOBAL INVESTORS. IN THE PAST YEAR, A NUMBER OF UK WELLNESS BRANDS WERE ACQUIRED BY MAJOR PLAYERS LIKE UNILEVER AND YEO VALLEY ORGANIC, REFLECTING THE GROWING DEMAND FOR PURPOSE-DRIVEN BUSINESSES.

What's driving this shift?

A strong focus on health, sustainability, and authenticity.
 Founder-led, values-driven businesses have become the go-to choice for strategic buyers, with global companies increasingly looking to acquire high-growth brands that resonate with today's health-conscious consumer.

Whether it's Deliciously Ella creating plant-based food without ultra-processed ingredients or Wild leading the charge in sustainable personal care - these brands aren't just competing, they're creating new categories and new opportunities in the market.

The trend is clear: International investors are more eager than ever to acquire wellness-focused brands that are transforming industries.



Read the full article

Halfpenny London REDIFINING BRIDAL FASHION

FOUNDER KATE
HALFPENNY, WHO IS
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF
HER BRIDAL BUSINESS,
SPEAKS TO VOGUE
BUSINESS ABOUT HER
INNOVATIVE APPROACH
AND GLOBAL EXPANSION
PLANS.

Kate Halfpenny, once a celebrity stylist, launched Halfpenny London in 2005.

The brand offers bridal separates that allow mix-and-match outfits, revolutionising traditional bridal wear. Halfpenny London champions UK-based production and inclusive sizing (8-24).





After a 31% COVID-related revenue drop, it rebounded with a 9% CAGR and aims to expand into the US, Japan, and UAE markets. Halfpenny's vision is rooted in craftsmanship and accessibility. With more than 30 stockists worldwide, it' become one of the UK's leading bridal fashion labels.

Vogue Business details the brand's success in transforming bridalwear and its post-pandemic resurgence, highlighting strategic growth plans and commitment to ethical production.

Read the full article



I was thinking back then, I only need to sell one dress a month to cover make this shop work, little did I know how much running a shop actually costs."

WHY FUNDRAISING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A FOUNDER'S JOB.

That's the focus of one of the insights shared through the Cavendish Women of Influence programme – a practical guide for founders navigating capital raising while still running a business.





It's about how the right support helps you shape the story, protect your time, and stay focused on what really matters: growing your business.

Founders who join Women of Influence receive a programme of content just like this alongside private events, practical support, and a growing peer community.

Join our Women of Influence Programme



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