

# A formidable force

As *Insider* publishes the annual Top 500 companies we meet some of the #formidable500 to find out the secret of their success

Every January, *Insider* champions companies at the heart of job and wealth creation in the region. This year, as well as publishing the list, we highlight some businesses that have been in it the longest and will have seen some of the biggest changes, and some that are fairly new.

What is it about some businesses that has got them into the Top 500 so quickly? Which are the disruptors and how? Which brands are putting the North West on the map, not just in the UK but overseas?

We identify some of the region's most successful companies, giving readers insider knowledge on the successes of the #formidable500.

## BEAVERBROOKS

Beaverbrooks, which celebrates its centenary in 2019, sets the gold standard in giving back. Since 2000, the company has donated £12m to more than 700 charities.

The family-owned jeweller's charitable trust hands out 20 per cent of post-tax profits to charities every year. It's one of a host of schemes the Lytham St Annes-headquartered business operates, including a fund where workers can apply for support for a charity of their choice.

Chairman Mark Adlestone believes that this "community engagement" is a pillar of Beaverbrooks' success.

The business, which operates 71 stores and has a 940-strong staff, also works hard on building relationships with its suppliers and customers. The result is turnover heading to the £130m mark.

He also points to strategies introduced by Anna Blackburn, the first non-family chief executive in Beaverbrooks' history, who joined as a graduate trainee in 1998.

Adlestone says: "She has introduced greater collaboration and accountability, giving our people a greater sense of achievement."

## SEDDON

Fourth-generation family business Seddon has 60 projects across the north, Midlands and Wales. Made up of four businesses – construction, property services, engineering services installations and housing partnerships – the Bolton-headquartered group employs almost 600 people and has a turnover of £150m.

Managing director Peter Jackson says: "We approach every job the same, whether its £20,000 or £30m, because they all matter and we care about what we deliver and who delivers it. We have a lot of passionate people who take huge pride in being builders."

Jackson says the foundations of Seddon's success lie in building relationships between staff and with customers, the supply chain and designers. Plans focus around managing relationships better and looking after customers through the suite of services. "We don't need a lot of growth, we need to ensure our customers keep returning." Seddon dubs its approach "sticking to the knitting".

## JAMES CROPPER

Kendal-based James Cropper works with brands such as Costa, Selfridges and



Peter Jackson



Phil Wild

McDonald's to drive value from waste through innovation. The company also creates 100 per cent plastic-free packaging and is taking strides to embed "circular economy" principles into business practice.

Its global-leading technology removes the polyethylene coating that makes take-away cups waterproof, while preserving their paper fibres. They are then turned into papers and consumer packaging.

Chief executive Phil Wild says: "We have recycled 30 million coffee cups at our world-first CupCycling facility in the North West, and have the capacity to convert 500 million coffee cups per year into papers for packaging."

The 173-year-old, sixth-generation family business is known for supplying distinct, custom-made paper products to leading luxury brands, art galleries and designers.

At the 2018 Waste to Wealth Summit in London, James Cropper pledged to continue work as a key innovator in the packaging and recycling industry.

Wild says: "Our latest innovation takes paper fibre from renewable forests, as well as used coffee cups, and moulds it to create plastic-free packaging. The moulded packaging is recyclable in the standard

paper waste stream and biodegradable; even if it is not recycled, it breaks down without any harm to the environment.”

## BOOHOO GROUP

Founded in Manchester in 2006, Boohoo Group has grown into a leading online fashion retailer. It says the key to its success is the disruptive nature of its business model. Its brands boohoo, boohooMAN, PrettyLittleThing and Nasty Gal target fashion conscious 16 to 30-year-olds in the UK and internationally.

The group sells its fashion to customers in almost every country. Listed on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) in 2014, it continues to deliver impressive growth. In the year ending February 2018 it reported group revenues of £579.8m, up 428 per cent from the £109.8m in 2014.

A lean online model ensures speed and agility. Products are designed and sourced largely in the UK and distributed globally from central UK warehouses. Its ‘test and repeat’ model, which involves making small quantities of a wide array of clothes, quickly ramps up production of those that sell best, ensuring the group can quickly respond to changing tastes and trends.

The group will be extending its distribution centre to provide capacity for an operation of some £1bn net sales.

## AJ BELL

Manchester-headquartered AJ Bell launched the UK’s first online Self Invested Personal Pension (SIPP) in 2000, taking on traditional providers and helping reduce the costs of personal pensions.

It is one of the UK’s largest investment platforms, administering some £46bn of assets for its customers, and has now floated on the London Stock Exchange. Its latest target is the asset management sector, which it sees as “ripe for change”.

Kevin Doran has been appointed chief investment officer to spearhead its new investment business. He says: “Ten years on from the financial crisis, the need for the investment management industry to adapt has never been so important.

“The idea of charging customers over 1 per cent for managing their portfolios is



over. You can’t ask customers to take that risk and then charge them over 20 per cent of the return for your services.”

The business has a team of data scientists and big-data techniques to analyse and assess and create investment ideas and portfolios. Doran adds: “Since data doesn’t ask for a pay rise, we’re able to offer customers and advisers access to a wide choice of investment options.”

## MANCHESTER AIRPORTS GROUP

In October 2018, Manchester Airport celebrated 28 million passengers passing through its three terminals for the first time.

Its 80th anniversary year also saw the addition of key long-haul routes to the likes of Mumbai, Addis Ababa and Seattle, as well as new European links.

Andrew Cowan, Manchester Airport chief executive, says: “Our growth means more choice for passengers, more jobs for people across the north and more economic and trade opportunities, as we connect

Manchester with key global destinations.”

The airport is undergoing a £1bn transformation that will see Terminal 2 more than double in size. The first pier is set to open to passengers in April with the terminal extension following in 2020. The group also includes London Stansted and East Midlands airports

## BRUNTWOOD

Bruntwood is one of the UK’s leading regional property companies, with more than £1bn of assets under ownership and a £1.4bn development pipeline.

As a founding board member of both the Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Corridor Manchester and a shareholder in Manchester Science Partnerships, it is deeply embedded in the region.

In 2018, a 50-50 joint venture with Legal & General Capital created Bruntwood SciTech, the UK’s largest portfolio of science and technology assets – dedicated to driving sector growth in regional cities.

The partners invested £360m into the new company which will support the creation of more than 20,000 high-value jobs over the next decade.

It was the year’s largest sci-tech property deal in Europe and represented the biggest strategic move Bruntwood has made in the 42 years since it was founded.

Bruntwood also became the first commercial property developer in the UK to sign up to the Green Building Council’s ‘Net Zero Carbon Commitment’, committing to operate at net zero carbon by 2030.

Bruntwood donates around 10 per cent of annual profits to local good causes through the Oglesby Charitable Trust.

