

THE NEXT STEP

HOW AMBITIOUS BUSINESSES CAN
ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL



HOW TO CREATE THE REAL 'A' TEAM

Interview with Anthony Young, Founder Director
Bridewell Consulting

COMMISSIONED BY



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A report commissioned by SAS Specialist Accounting Solutions considers the biggest challenge for any independently-owned company which has the potential to go further.

The ability of the owners to scale the business.

In their own words, directors talk about the issues they are having to address and how they want to achieve their goals.

The interviews will be brought together as a report to be published by DECISION magazine and then as a digital book.



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One of the reasons why Anthony Young set up a cyber security business is that he didn't think others were doing it properly - or with the right intentions.

“The driver was an increasing frustration with the fly-by-night cowboys attracted to the sector because they saw a money-making opportunity, and those who were jumping on the bandwagon with IT knowledge but little cyber security experience or even understanding,” he explains.

“Companies would send out their ‘A’ team to sell a prospective client the world, but then graduates straight out of university would be expected to deliver it, learning on the job. We decided that everyone joining our company would already have the right qualifications.”

Actually, for Bridewell Consulting, that's just the starting point. A minimum of £5000 a year investment in training is made in each employee. Here's the rationale. “Everyone would have been right for the job when they came on board, but how else are they going to learn anything new, and remember this is a fast-moving sector,” says Young.

“It's also important if we are to meet the expectations of our people, who are passionate about cyber security, and their ability to deliver is



Anthony Young



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professionally important to them as it is to the company. I probably shouldn't say this from a business perspective, but if something takes three days instead of the two we quoted for because we want to smash it out of the park, then rather than trying to increase the fee, we consider the extra work to be part of relationship building."

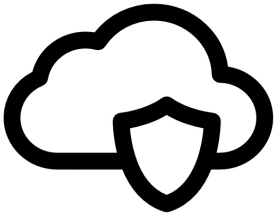
As it happens, Young has actually been involved in this work man and boy. His step- father ran a cyber security company which Young did some work for while he was at school, then university, before joining full time.

"But we didn't see eye-to-eye about the approach a cyber security company should adopt going forward," he explains. "The old school way was focused on locking everything down, but that can result in a blocker to business, so it can't function in the way it needs to. I wanted to see cyber security as an enabler, the means of making things happen."

So he left and took a lateral step into cyber security recruitment, where he enjoyed meeting up with chief information officers to discuss their specific problems and then identifying a consultant who could best address them. How ironic that IT should then put an end to that way of working. "Everything became online and portal based, which wasn't where I could add value," says Young, "so I decided to start a cyber security business instead."

Five years in recruitment had taught him how to sell - usually a missing piece of the jigsaw for technology start-ups. "I also had five years of building up a network of contacts, so as soon as I started Bridewell Consulting I could pick up the phone," Young explains.

With a permanent staff complement now of some fifty-five, Bridewell Consulting also provide penetration testing (where they are paid to see if



they can hack into a client’s system), data privacy, and managed security (monitoring a network 24/7 and shutting down any attacks). Then there’s their red team assessment work, where Bridewell Consulting try to gain access to some specific data, such as customer records but without any information from the client - they aren’t even told the location of the data centres or how many there are of them. “We start with reconnaissance, finding out what buildings they have and where, if third-party contractors have access, or students are employed in holiday periods, and what CCTV systems are in place,” says Young. “The last part is gaining access to place a device on their internal network. We’ve never been caught.”

In terms of the requirement for their services being taken more seriously, Young is pushing at an open door, so to speak. “For years companies would see cyber security as a distress-purchase, and in any case, this was something which happened to others, not them,” he explains. “Then breaches began to be publicised in the media, which damaged a company’s share price and reputation, and then legislation kicked in, with GDPR and colossal fines.”

What helped Young scale the company so quickly in just three years was discovering a business partner from within the ranks - and discovering that he could in fact take his hands off the operational wheel.



Now a co-owner, Scott Nicholson started as a contractor. “We hit it off really well; you know when someone is on the same wavelength,” says Young. “And I realised that for the company, he was the missing link, the person I needed to really fuel the growth of the business.”

“At the beginning I found it difficult letting go - most founders are something of a control freak - but I worked out that if I carried on trying to do everything, the business couldn’t continue to grow,” says Young. “Of course it’s difficult to delegate, but I realised, for example, that there are more important things for me to do than update Twitter - and that someone else could do it better as they would have more time. If we fast-forward to now, I’ll check up on things if I need to, but I’m focusing on what’s ahead, not looking over anyone’s shoulder. And then you realise that people are coming up with ideas that you’d never have thought of when you were doing those tasks.

At the end of 2019, Young and Nicholson decided to build in a layer of management. “When there are fifteen or twenty people, it’s possible for us to give everyone the time they need,” Young explains. “But beyond that number, there have to be managers in place to provide everyone

Scott Nicholson



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with the right support, not just for ensuring the quality of work but for their personal development.”

The plan was to head-hunt senior, experienced managers who could make an instant impression. It doesn't necessarily work out that way, muses Young. “Even though we explained at the interviews that they had to deliver work as well as manage, once they started they saw their role as solely managerial, and that is too much of an overhead for an SME at that point of its development.

“The other problem is that if they have a big company background, you can be sold on their track-record, but when they are disconnected from their corporate support network they find it difficult to put their hand to the different tasks necessary in a smaller business. So now we appoint internally. Our fifth, or was it our sixth employee who joined as a consultant is now our head of security operations. We made - and continue to make - the necessary investment in his training, and he has the respect of the team because he's had the experience of dealing with and addressing their day-to-day challenges.

Which brings Young onto what he describes as “the secret sauce” of someone at the company. “They also pass the ‘beer’ test; they know how to converse and interact with the client,” he explains. “I don't think that should be underestimated. A consultant can be brilliant at what they do, but can they put everything across in a way which the client understands?

“That ethos has to come from the top, and you can't afford to hire anyone who will damage that. Someone can be really good technically but they have to pass the test for the values we hold dear; If they are going to



deliver for the client, they have to live and breathe them. We want them to be personally ambitious and to be passionate about learning new things, rather than thinking this is a sector where they can make more money quickly.”

Which is why, extraordinarily for a company of its size, Bridewell Consulting have a full-time in-house recruiter, as well as someone from admin who was funded to gain the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) qualification and is now their HR advisor. Even when Young illustrates how the maths stack up, it’s still a demonstration of intent when it comes to scaling the business while at the same time sustaining its ethos. “It was a no-brainer,” he says. “We were spending £120,000 a year on recruitment agency fees, so it makes financial sense to have someone who knows implicitly about our company and the way we work.”

That is reflected in Bridewell Consulting only ever having lost one person they wanted to retain. “He was offered a great opportunity elsewhere, but twelve months later he re-joined us,” says Young. “The grass might have been greener but he wasn’t getting the personal development and camaraderie from them.”

The latter requirement isn't taken for granted. "We've got people delivering work in other parts of the country so we started having quarterly company days at the office where we'd talk strategy, hold team meetings, and then have pizza in the evening," says Young. "It's about people feeling this is a business they are actually part of; you can't take that as a given. Lockdown meant we had to use video conferencing, but a virtual session isn't the same as having personal interaction.

"If we keep going with our plans we can become a global business and in the top five in our sector, with 500 employees and pushing into North America where we are already servicing some of our UK clients which have operations there."

That is going to require a couple of gear changes. "Most of our growth has come from referrals, but you need to invest in marketing if you are serious about scaling the business," says Young. "And to scale internationally means we will need to look at acquisitions, which will be a learning curve for us."

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