

# Ascend Global Media, facilitating equality and progress for a global community of women

*As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Michaela Jeffery-Morrison CEO and founder of Ascend Global Media about diversity, supporting and supercharging careers in technology and the need for constant adaptation.*

Temps de lecture : minute

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I wanted to build a company that would give women the tools both to progress professionally and to take charge of their own futures. While female representation in STEM roles has increased in recent years, there is still a lack of information and skill-sharing available to support women to do their best work. That's why I founded the world's first multi-touch platform for women working in the technology sector, curated to support and supercharge a career in technology.

## Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

*Ascend Global Media* was founded with one clear mission: to facilitate equality and progress for our global community of women. Diversity is woven into the fabric of our company and shines through in everything we do and create.

We have designed a global 360-degree experience, including digital and

on-site events, conferences, workshops, master classes, talks, and guidance for women working in technology or aspiring to enter the sector. Many women entering STEM careers start without peers or role models with similar experiences and interests. We want to create that sturdy foundation in an inclusive environment that offers many different ways of support and opportunities needed to improve the equality and progress of our community of women.

## How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

Founded in 2015 with a cohort of 300 attendees at our functions, we now attract over 5,000 people to our events all over the world. We have built a community of over 250,000 people in over 100 countries. Today, we're a truly global company, hosting events in London, Amsterdam, San Francisco, Texas, and Boston, with a plan to launch in other major cities worldwide.

We have created a series of virtual and physical events including the Women in Technology Online Festival and Women of Silicon Roundabout - the largest gathering of female technology professionals in Europe.

Our events attract some of the most inspiring speakers, experts and thought leaders, including senior executives from global companies including Google, IBM, Deloitte, Deliveroo, TikTok, Trainline, and Spotify. At the 2021 Women in Technology World Series event, we were pleased to host the former First Lady, Michelle Obama. It underscored the importance of the work and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the Q&A with Michelle really resonated with our audiences.

In recent years, Ascend Global Media has been recognised with a number of awards, including the Best Tech Event in the 2020 Conference Awards, Best Tech Event and Best UK Event at the 2020 Eventex Global Awards.

We've also been listed on the Sunday Times Fast Track Ones to Watch.

## Tell us about the working culture at Ascend Global Media.

We are a small team operating globally, building events both in cyberspace and in the real world, and we always intend to lead by example and practice what we preach. In practice, that means promoting honest communication in the team, a lot of collaboration, and empowering everyone and ourselves to do our best work.

## What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Covid-19 was a real challenge as our business is built mainly around in-person events. Understandably, we noticed some initial resistance when we returned to in-person events once the lockdowns were over. Rolling out hybrid events has been a learning curve for everybody.

Also, hybrid and remote working have fundamentally changed many of the roles in tech and among our audiences, so we've had to adapt our master classes, talks and workshops to reflect that. It was tough at times, but we rose to the challenge and we've grown from the experience. I think it's made us a more resilient, more rounded organisation.

Because the conversation on work and on women in STEM is always evolving, we've continued to adapt by partnering with companies and staying grounded so we can continue to empower ordinary women in all kinds of technology roles.

# How does Ascend Global Media answer an unmet need?

A woman today has the freedom to choose her school, job and career path. But the culture is still catching up. For women to have the same outcomes as men, they need the same opportunities. While businesses and universities can provide the education and training to upskill, women need the networks, the experience and the confidence to navigate the workplace successfully. Ascend is responding to that need, enabling conversations around the issues that matter to women in technology today.

Something that our audiences have always said they like about our events is having the opportunity to hear from women at the thin end of the wedge in their fields. People don't always appreciate the fact that an absence of role models can be a huge barrier. If you're interested in getting into a STEM field, but you can see only a handful of people succeeding in that field who look like you, then your confidence can take a hit. We're changing that. We're exposing women in technology to loads of brilliant and incredibly inspiring female professionals, and that means that more and more women are walking away from our events thinking to themselves that they can rise to the highest positions in their space.

## What's in store for the future?

The move online means that businesses can hire from further afield. This means that companies will become increasingly more diverse. This is massively beneficial for businesses, who can bring together many more perspectives into their decision-making - but there's a challenge there, too. Businesses will need to understand the differing needs and priorities of their workforce and different work laws across different borders.

This is why we are focusing on the topic of 'New Frontiers' for this year's events, bridging communities and moving past thinking about traditional barriers; remote work will catalyse change - but it has to be approached with care.

## What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

In a word, listen. There is much to be said for investing in the hard skills needed for women to grow in their careers and climb the corporate ladder. But it is as important for founders and future founders to pay attention to the more abstract variables holding women back: stereotypes and microaggressions are harder to pick up on than overt misogyny but require the same attention to stamp out. A lack of role models in the workplace may not be your fault as a leader, but it's something that you can redress by progressing your female staff internally and encouraging conference attendance.

Above all, listen to what the women in your office are saying and look to redress more than just their material needs. Seek out the wisdom and experience of others where possible.

## And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I'd like to say that my daily routine and rules are centred entirely around my own self-care and well-being but they are not. I have a toddler and a household to take care of before I start work, during my lunch break and after work. I do what I have to do to manage my day, which is to attempt to stick as close to a routine for my toddler as possible, and manage my own needs like having breakfast as soon as I get up. I also make sure to

celebrate any little wins I possibly can. My biggest rule at the moment whilst my life is fairly hectic is to be kind to myself.

Michaela Jeffery-Morrison is CEO and founder of *Ascend Global Media*.

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