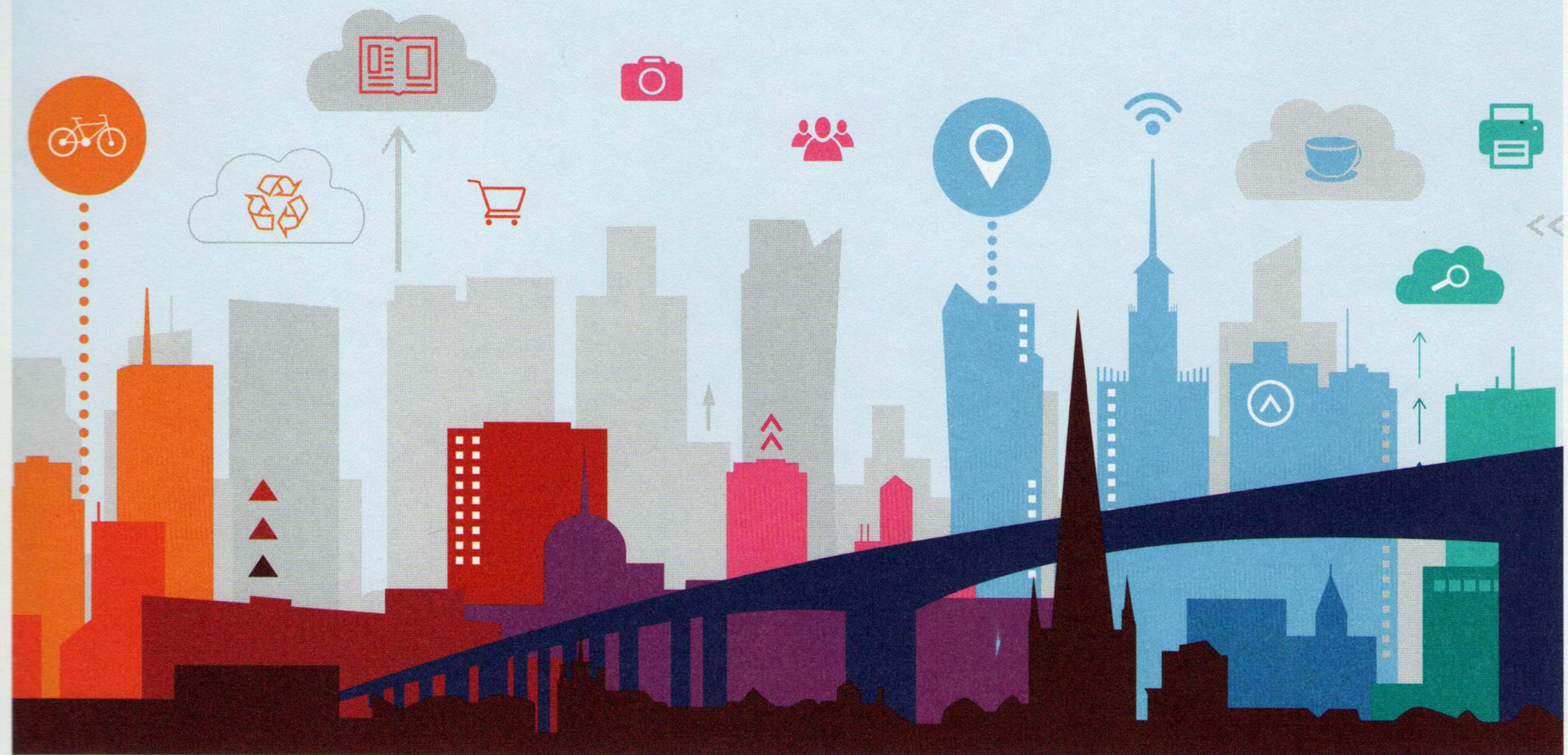


# Aspire

THE MAGAZINE FOR ENTREPRENEURS AND INNOVATORS

## The cities of the future



### MR JUXTAPOSITION

THE NORFOLK-BASED ARTISAN COMBINING TRADITIONAL HOROLOGY WITH CUTTING-EDGE DESIGN

### CAREER MODE

YOUNG, AMBITIOUS AND DRIVEN; MEET LOUISE LEOLIN, GAMING'S LATEST INNOVATOR

### BUSINESS BOOTCAMPS

FALL IN, STAND TO ATTENTION AND BE PREPARED TO LEAD YOUR TEAM TO SUCCESS



# GAARREEA WOOOE

**Louise Leolin** is an innovator. Young, ambitious and driven, she is the brains behind pioneering gaming company DinoByte Labs







Inspiring people is one of the main reasons I do what I do. I want to show young people that the games industry is a realistic dream and to inspire young girls in particular, to make them realise they have a place in the industry." It's a bold statement, but then Louise Leolin isn't your average entrepreneur.

At just 26, Louise's 'CV' can boast web and games designer, actor, social media starlet, actor and host of her own YouTube channel, Louibyte. She has also founded, and now runs DinoByte Labs, an innovative, forward-thinking London-based games company that creates apps and games with players' experiences as their focus.

Impressed? You should be. In little over a year and a half Louise and her business partner, Christian Løvdal, have taken DinoByte from initial concept to a company that works with clients worldwide consulting on user experience (UX), design and branding both for games and general interactive media. "We've put in countless hours of work, often leading to 12+ hour long days and little sleep," she says. "But it's incredibly rewarding as we are doing it all for ourselves."

It helps, of course, that DinoByte is the culmination of a lifelong passion for games and gaming, which started with Louise being given her very first games console at the age of five. "It was a Sega Mega Drive, and I loved it," she says. "When young I'd play Pokemon, Crash Bandicoot, Spyro and Sonic, but it was games such as Zelda: Majora's Mask and Harvest Moon: Back to Nature that I truly fell in love with and obsessed over."

"I'd spend my time reading gaming magazines, which is where I first became aware of 'game design' as an actual job," she continues. "I was fascinated by people like Will Wright [US game designer responsible for Maxis, Electronic Arts and The Sims], who made working in the industry seem such fun.

"Later in life gaming became a true passion. Through games like The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion I realised that it could be so much more than just a linear story. Open world RPGs sparked my interest in creating my own characters and immersing myself in detailed worlds. I finally felt I could express myself through these characters, which was a huge tipping point in understanding the importance of representation in games."

Indeed, it is user experience and character representation – developed further during Louise's time at university – that is the basis for DinoByte's business model. "During my dissertation I analysed and read the opinions of more than 5,000 gamers and found something lacking in the industry," she says.

"Gamers were calling for change, not only in terms of diversity and representation of characters, but in many other issues. Getting to know gamers and their needs really made me realise the importance of bringing UX and player research to the games industry.

It was this inspiration that ultimately led to the establishment of DinoByte Labs, which Louise notes as one of the few companies in the UK today offering such resources to game studios.

But how does one take an idea, a moment of





inspiration, and make it a success in a notoriously difficult industry to access?

“It really can be such a tough market to break in to,” says Louise. “For us it was about creating our

own space and platform. We had some prototypes and design ideas and wanted to release something on our terms as a way of getting our names out there. It proved much more challenging than we thought, and I owe a lot to Christian for doing the research and putting in the hours while I was still working as a UX designer.”

Many entrepreneurs will vividly remember the early stages of their business, recounting stories of sleepless nights, long days and nagging doubts. For Louise, it was a case of playing her cards close to her chest. “I felt strangely secretive about the whole endeavour,” she says. “I was worried that those close to us may try and dissuade us from doing it, so we didn’t tell anyone our plans! Importantly, we knew we wanted it and had total trust in ourselves.”

Such confidence is even more remarkable when considering the gender inequality that has been prevalent throughout the gaming industry. While it may seem remarkable today, the notion of a ‘female gamer’ – certainly a female developer – is still something of an anomaly.

Louise attributes this issue to a period in the 80s when games were marketed exclusively to boys, thus creating the misconception it is a boys’ industry. The

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saturation of ‘boy’ games made young men more technically literate earlier than girls, and resulted in them becoming the industry’s leaders and pioneers. While, today, technology is

ubiquitous, this male domination has made it hard for women to break in and find a space to feel safe and comfortable.

“Even at university, when I had the chance to study games design I didn’t,” she adds. “It was partly because the vast majority of teachers and students were male – it’s hard to be one of two or three girls in a group of 40 boys. Today, however, I see it as a challenge that’s truly worth overcoming. If anything it drives me to work even harder and to prove there is a space for women in games.”

It’s often said that actions speak louder than words and, in the case of Louise, it’s entirely true – she’s certainly proved her point. Between herself and Løvdal, DinoByte was created entirely through their own means – no business loans, no assistance and working other jobs to fund development. While Løvdal spent countless hours researching legal issues, accounting and other such business minutiae, Louise focused on efficient project management, marketing and building a social media presence.

Interestingly, despite this amount of work she lists one of the main challenges as being your own boss. “The flexibility is amazing,” she says, “but it’s hard to manage. I found that you really have to be well organised and





disciplined if you want to make it a success.”

But, as countless entrepreneurs will reaffirm, it's a challenge that is entirely worth it. “It was incredibly exciting landing our first real client for our

consultancy,” Louise explains. “It was the moment where we felt we could actually do it and would have funds to develop our games.”

Since that first contract the business has continued to go from strength to strength. Both DinoByte and Louise have received much recognition, including the small matter of appearing being lauded as one of the top 10 young female entrepreneurs to watch in the UK by *About Time Magazine* and contributing a feature on gaming in *Wired*.

“It's a huge honour, and frankly a little overwhelming,” Louise notes. “I'm ambitious and want to go far in the industry but I didn't start DinoByte thinking about awards or recognition. I did it for myself, to have a place to bring my ideas to life and make games with my incredibly talented group of developer friends. I honestly still can't wrap my head around it!”

Having achieved success – not to mention broken barriers – at such a young age, where does Louise see DinoByte heading? “We have a few games in the making and we really want to be uncompromising in sticking to our ideals for game design and story development.

“I have always loved everything Todd Howard does in his games. Bethesda are so uncompromising in the

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**The most important thing is to love what I do, and to have fun at work**  
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level of detail their games has and the quality, and that design ethic is something we try to stay true to even at a smaller indie games scale. I also really admire what DONTNOD has accomplished, from

starting as a small studio to creating the highly acclaimed *Life is Strange*. Seeing success stories like theirs really pushes us to want to achieve more.”

There's no doubting Louise's drive to succeed. Yet, for someone with such plans she is remarkably calm about life as an entrepreneur. “I've always wanted a varied work life that isn't too focused on only one thing,” she says. “Having my company, running my YouTube channel, designing T-shirts for Redbubble, and doing UX consultancy work is how I thrive. Starting DinoByte Labs has given me the freedom to push myself and try as much as possible while I can. I'd advise others to do the same – just go for it in life. It can be scary and difficult to break conventions and chase your dreams, but it's important to try if it's something you want.”

With that Louise perfectly summarises the entrepreneurial spirit. We regularly laud those that are successful, but what is it that makes them so? Simply, it's the desire to make a difference, to inspire others and to make a dream a reality. But it's also about having fun. Life, after all, is a game.

“The most important thing is to love what I do, and to have fun at work. I honestly think I'm more passionate than ever about working with games,” Louise concludes.



**DINOBYTE LABS**

DinoByte Labs, founded in 2015, is an interactive media company that specialises in games and apps. The company aspires to be known for its clever, UX focused and narrative driven games.

As well as making games DinoByte offers consultancy on various aspects of games design, UX services, design and reviews, user research and branding.

**FIND OUT MORE:**  
[dinobytelabs.com](http://dinobytelabs.com)