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Article

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30 Years of Waterstons

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Throughout this milestone year, you can expect to see exciting content and celebrations honouring our 30-year journey. Just as in the past three decades, we are thrilled to have you join us on this adventure.

We're kicking off the celebrations with two interviews with our CEO, Michael Stirrup and Managing Director of APAC, Charlie Hales. They'll share their cherished moments, proudest achievements and anniversary messages to our people and our clients.





Michael and Charlie in the Sydney office, 2023

Michael Stirrup – CEO

Favourite professional/personal achievement with Waterstons?

"Becoming a director and subsequently CEO have been major achievements. But, there have been a few other highlights over the years.

One of those was convincing the Board we needed to move to a new Durham office and use external architects to create something special for our people. Seeing the look on everybody's faces when we moved in, was special and this helped us set a blueprint for future offices.

Setting up our Australian offices, visiting the team and seeing the team grow has also been an amazing experience and we look forward to seeing how our culture continues to grow in the APAC region."

What are some of the changes/ innovations have you witnessed in the company over the years?

"I've been with the company for a lot of years.. I've seen so much change. The depth and breadth of what we do has grown substantially and most importantly that change has been led by our excellent people. An example of this was a recommendation from one of our junior employees some years back that cyber security would be a 'big thing' and we should be prepared for it for our clients. Stewart Hogg is now heading up a 40+ person division - a business in its own right!"

How has the culture changed, if any in 30 years?

"One thing we've tried desperately hard to do is keep the culture that was put in place 30 years ago. That sense of freedom, empowerment and innovation remains strong in the business.

Growth though has brought its own changes to the business and whilst there's a bit more structure than there used to be, we've tried hard not to implement a bunch of unnecessary rules and policies and stick to our roots."

How has that culture impacted you and your development at Waterstons?

"When I started at Waterstons I'd only ever worked for big business, where I was a tiny cog in a huge machine. From the moment I started here, I felt much more empowered which in turn made me more dedicated to the company.

It made me realise that; if you treat people in the right way then they'll always respond well, give them the freedom and the power to express themselves and they'll take the company even further.

As I've progressed through the organisation, I've realised that I don't know anything and that I don't need to; I just need to help create the environment for others to flourish!"

If you could describe Waterstons in 3 words - What would they be and why?

Innovative - We have amazing people at Waterstons and they're constantly having amazing innovative ideas that will either help us internally or our clients.

Ambitious - We're ambitious, we've done a heck of a lot in the last 30 years, and we don't want to stop there!

Kind - To go with those two things, we're also kind – we treat our people well and we also treat our clients as people too!

What anniversary message would you like to share with the rest of Waterstons and our community?

"I want to extend a massive thank you to everybody who has helped us get us to where we are today. Thank you to our people, past and present – who have contributed to our growth and success. Thank you so our clients and partners, who have support us along our incredible journey.

Our people and clients are the centre of everything we do. It has been that way for 30 years and will for another 30. We will continue to work with and improve organisations across the world whilst supporting the community of people who deliver for those clients. We'll continue to achieve this by always doing right by people."

Who are your biggest inspirations at Waterstons and why?

"It's hard to pick one when you've got TWO inspirational founders of the company! Both Sally and Mike Waterston have brought different things to our foundation of Waterstons and equally helped shape the organisation to what it is today.

Somebody more junior who I also find inspiring is Chloe, our Procurement Officer. I remember her starting as an apprentice over 7 years ago and from the day she joined, it was obvious she'd have a positive impact on the business.

She has developed and progressed so well and is now an integral part of Waterstons. Helping both clients and colleagues everyday. Her confidence has grown to the point where she's now comfortable talking at companywide sessions and dealing with major suppliers. The community work that she does in her spare time is also an inspiration to us all!"

Looking ahead 30 years into the future, envisioning another milestone interview, what changes or accomplishments would you hope to have seen within Waterstons?

"We set out a vision recently of what we want the company to be.

That was less about numbers and more about how we take our clients and our people on an incredible journey and how we would take that journey round the world.

I'll hopefully be enjoying my retirement in 30 years' time and it would be great to be walking along a street in a far off land and stumbling across Waterstons' latest office opening (that's if offices are still a thing in 30 years!) and hearing about how we've changed and improved clients' businesses in key industry sectors in a new country just like we started to do in Durham 30 years ago."

Charlie Hales – Managing Director, APAC

Favourite professional/personal achievement with Waterstons?

"It's difficult to pinpoint one single thing... The biggest thing for me is helping clients improve their businesses, it brings me great joy! I always enjoy big transition programs too.

Of course, setting up the Australian business. From a personal level, my family and I moving across the world was a personal achievement and then professionally, setting the business up here and growing it, it's been a wonderful experience to see the Waterstons culture being embraced Down Under."

What are some of the changes/ innovations have you witnessed in the company over the years?

"Working in the tech/cyber industry – we're constantly evolving (and quickly). Something I'm very proud of is our innovation fund. Which is where we re-invest revenue back into the business and have a dedicated team who are focused on innovating better solutions for clients. It's important we embrace change in this industry."

How has the culture changed, if any in 30 years?

"When I started at Waterstons (11 years ago), we had around 70 people at the company. Now, we are a team of over 300 people, in two regions and six offices. Despite the rapid growth, the integrity of our values has very much remained the same.

Size, of course, comes with additional challenges. We're not a small family business anymore but all the leaders at Waterstons, including myself, hold great importance in maintaining the values Sally and Mike instilled in the organisation 30 years ago."

How has that culture impacted you and your development at Waterstons?

"The culture has impacted me greatly! It's why I'm still here, 11 years later. The culture has impacted me because I'm able to work flexibly with my young children (I was even promoted whilst pregnant), I'm able to lead with empowerment being at the forefront of everything I do and I want to do right by my community!"

If you could describe Waterstons in 3 words - What would they be and why?

"Creative – We are a creative organisation! We have created an environment where opinions are welcomed and encouraged. So, we always have a wide range of creative ideas and solutions for each other and clients.

Proactive – During my time, proactivity has stuck out. Everyone is willing to help, chip in, provide a better solution, whether it is a client or a teammate. We're a bunch of proactive people!

Dependable – Dependability is certainly an important aspect for our clients. Further to that, dependability is essential within our teams. It is cyclical though, the more dependable we are for each other and in our teams, the better the solution for our clients. We've cultivated that culture over the years!"

What anniversary message would you like to share with the rest of Waterstons and our community?

"Just that I have the upmost appreciation and respect for our people. Ranging from our clients to our partners and team.

30 years in business is momentous, it is a milestone that we didn't get to alone. The commitment, passion, expertise and other attributes that helped us get to where we are. I'm proud of every single person at Waterstons and their fantastic contributions to the organisation and to our clients. Whether you have been with the organisation for 30 years or 3 months – you contribute to our culture and you contribute to our clients and the betterment of their organisations.

So, I think everyone in our communities, and we should all be very proud of our accomplishments!"

Who are your biggest inspirations at Waterstons and why?

"Both Mike and Sally Waterston have of course been an inspiration. Mike for his tenacity and drive to consult to what the business needs and not just the technology has always set us apart. Of course, Sallys unwavering commitment to doing the right thing by clients and people. The blend of both is why Waterstons is where it is, and I've learnt so much from them both.

Also, Marcus Perera, based with me in our Sydney office.

He joined the day we opened our doors in Australia, initially on our service desk. He was here when COVID hit less than a month after opening, and we had to ship all our people back to the UK who were not emigrating. It was a very tricky time, indeed!

Marcus showed exemplary values and commitment to the business, we took the chance on him and promoted him to take over the team, a fantastic decision. He's driven it forward, looking after clients, collaborating globally and always puts his people first.

Marcus also engages in community activities like regular blood donations and other great causes. He also wants my job.. Maybe one day, Marcus!"

Looking ahead 30 years into the future, envisioning another milestone interview, what changes or accomplishments would you hope to have seen within Waterstons?

"On our 60th birthday, I hope that Waterstons has spread across Europe, the APAC region, the Americas and wherever else we don't have offices yet!

I hope that our culture permeates throughout each office and I hope that culture encourages and influences other big business to make big changes for their people, like we have done for the past 30 years."

What fantastic insights from Charlie and Michael, thanks to them both for taking a stroll down memory lane and also looking to the future. We will posting lots more fantastic content to celebrate our birthday year, keep your eyes peeled!