

25 SaaS INFLUENCERS TO WATCH IN 2021

2021's

Top 25 SaaS Practitioners to Watch

SaaS took a major step in 2020. As coronavirus kicked in and the business world struggled, software as a service went from strength to strength.

Spearheading it all was a set of top influencers already well known to the world of SaaS. Some have been around for decades working their magic.

And they're the ones who shape the way SaaS products function. They make game-changing innovations that keep the industry expanding rapidly with cutting-edge tech.

So, we went out to flag them up and celebrate their achievements.

How we chose our top practitioners

The 25 influencers were handpicked by our team at Future of SaaS.

The criteria for making the cut included an international presence, alongside a long-term influence, and innovations with the industry.

Anything that made us sit up and pay attention. The big "wow" moments that turned heads and had everyone talking about them.

Are the practitioners listed in order of importance?

No, they're not. We chose from a diverse selection of leaders, influencers, practitioners, founders to show the scale of talent in the SaaS industry.

The 25 picked were simply at the top of their game throughout 2020 and are clearly set to make waves in 2021.

David Skok

General Partner at Matrix Partners



matrix
PARTNERS



David Skok is the General Partner at Matrix Partners. He joined the business in May 2001 and remains an impressive force in the world of SaaS.

One of his passions is to help entrepreneurs and startups. He understands the pressures they face, having started his first business in 1977 at the age of 22—he's open about his successes (and failures) in the industry.

And it's this experience that leaves him perfectly poised to guide startups in their early phases.

What keeps you motivated day in, day out?

I am highly motivated by the enjoyment that I get from helping other entrepreneurs. The people you meet are great, smart, enthusiastic, and fun to work with. The problems you get to tackle are constantly changing and interesting.

And you are always learning. And by now I have seen many patterns for how startups evolve, and the mistakes that get made along the way. I enjoy using those experiences to help entrepreneurs avoid the common pitfalls and to accelerate their journeys.

What's the best career lesson you've learned?

So many lessons. It's hard to choose the best. But if I had to pick one, it would be the importance of building first class management teams. Get that right, and so many other things will take care of themselves. This is where I put most of my effort when I am working with portfolio companies.

What's the #1 tip for SaaS business success?

Recognize there are different stages in your startup journey and while it is tempting to try to skip stages to get to the scalable growth faster, you cannot skip steps.

Go check out...

For the full 9 step roadmap to get to Repeatable, Scalable and Profitable growth engine, refer to this slide deck: [B2B Startup Roadmap: Matrix Growth Academy](#). Or if you prefer to watch videos: [Matrix Growth Academy: Zero to 100 Videos](#).

Claire Suellentrop

Co-Founder and Growth Advisor at Elevate and Forget the Funnel



Claire Suellentrop is a SaaS growth advisor, and co-founder of [Forget The Funnel](#). It provides resources to help SaaS growth leaders drive revenue-generating customer outcomes.

Claire's specialty is helping B2B SaaS companies like Wistia, SparkToro, Death to the Stock Photo, and many others get out of the "echo chamber" and inside their best customers' heads.

She's spoken internationally about the impact of customer research and her methods have generated record-breaking email open rates, click-through rates, and new user sign-ups. Claire loves helping SaaS teams develop greater empathy for their customers and find marketing messages that create stronger connections (i.e. higher conversions).

What keeps you motivated day in, day out?

My business partner Georgiana Laudi and I had a shared mission when we partnered to launch [Forget The Funnel](#), and later when we [merged our SaaS advisory services](#). That shared mission is to amplify the voices of those in tech who are underrepresented, undervalued, or underestimated, which brings purpose and structure to the work we do.

What would you say is your biggest achievement in SaaS so far?

The development of the [Customer-Led Growth Framework](#), which was a huge focal point for both Gia and myself during 2020. Customer-Led Growth (CLG) is a strategic approach to business growth that leverages customer insights to qualify and quantify customer value, then operationalize and optimize the end-to-end customer experience—through a constant, iterative cycle of research, mapping and action.

What's the best career lesson you've learned?

Your life needs to shape your work and not the other way around. If you value time with family, charge enough for your services, and streamline/ outsource your processes, enough to be able to take a Friday off. If you burn out around the same time every year, acknowledge that. Then adapt your workload: plan for a few busy months leading up to that time period, then block out space in your calendar to rest.

As a hardcore achiever, I have an urge to be *accomplishing something*, so creating space for the non-work areas of my life feels counterintuitive. But making progress on this will be one of my top priorities in 2021.

Benjamin Joffe

Deep Tech Startup Investor



Benjamin is a startup investor and digital naturalist. He's also spent many years as a keynote speaker, where he's provided his insights at over 300 events across 30 countries—including at TEDx, TechCrunch Disrupt, and Honeywell.

Currently he's a Partner at SOSV, which is a global stage fund focusing on deep tech.

Along with this his talks, he guest writes about the business world for Forbes, TechCrunch, and VentureBeat.

Go check out...

Benjamin Joffe's official podcast called [Take a Punch](#). In it, he shares ideas that "would have helped my younger self".

Katharina Unger, Founder and CEO at LIVIN Farms

"It seems there is no statement to which Benjamin would not find an eloquent answer or comment to.

As a mentor at HAX accelerator we very much appreciate his relentless help with finding market opportunities for our product, coming up with ideas for naming, branding and marketing and identifying and evaluating competitors and partners.

Benjamin is key in shaping our value proposition and story and continuously shares with us valuable thoughts. He has been a great resource and personally always amazes me with his knowledge and the variety of his activities and interests."

Katherine Kostereva

CEO & Founder at Creatio



Katherine's business specialises in CRM, low-code, and process automation software. She's spent 20 years helping businesses to transform and engage with customers for newfound success.

What keeps you motivated day in, day out?

We at [Creatio](#) have a vision of creating a world where any business idea can be automated in minutes. With our low-code platform for process management and CRM we help IT, business and digital leaders create low-code companies. Understanding that with Creatio we're building a future where anyone can rapidly automate and improve processes and create applications without coding skills is what keeps me motivated.

My aspiration is to help businesses around the world to be able to transform their companies, automate their work, and accelerate—without expensive IT investments, lengthy implementation, or a steep learning curve. With our team, I believe Creatio has the potential to enable anyone to bring their ideas to life quickly and easily.

What would you say is your biggest achievement in SaaS so far?

For two consecutive years, Creatio has been recognized as a leader in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Sales Force Automation and in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for CRM Lead Management alongside such established leaders like Salesforce, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP and Adobe. 2021 was very different for every company. During such times, support of the community is crucial. We thought what value we could immediately bring to the community of our customers, partners, and startups.

Our response was a program of digital events to connect leaders and experts to collaboratively help cope with current challenges and build a rock-solid foundation for the future. Our initiatives helped us connect over 45,000 of outstanding IT, digital and business leaders to share ideas, discuss challenges, learn from peers, and support their transformation process to increase agility and strengthen resilience.

Stewart Butterfield

Co-Founder and CEO at Slack



Stewart is arguably most famous as the co-founder at everyone's favorite instant messaging software. However, he was also the co-founder and CEO at Flickr from 2002–2005.

He classes himself as an entrepreneur, designer, and technologist, "Born at the right time and grateful to have made a living out of my love for computing technology as a means of facilitating human interaction."

The result of all this is Stewart is the recipient of many prestigious business awards. Including one of Businessweek's Top 50 leaders back in 2005.

More recently, he was Wall Street Journal's Technology Innovator for 2015, won Founder of the Year by TechCrunch, and was on Details' Digital Mavericks list.

He's also provided talks and interviews to many notable sources, including TIME, Forbes, CNBC, and The Verge.

Ramesh Sarukkai, Head of Engineering at Braintree

"What more can be said of a world-famous person like Stewart! Top-notch visionary, entrepreneur with a no-nonsense, can-do attitude - always a great pleasure to work with."

Michael Fergusson, CEO of Ayogo

"Shopenhauer said that the task is not so much to see what no one else has seen, but to think what no one else has thought about what everybody sees. This is how I think of Stewart. Not simply a grasp of the extraordinary, but also an extraordinary grasp of the simple."

Go check out...

Some of the 12 books Stewart recommends for SaaS practitioners and business owners. These include: The Courage to be Disliked by Ichiro Kishimi, How to Change Your Mind by Michael Pollan, and Leadership and Self-Deception by The Arbing Institute.

Sujan Patel

Co-founder & Entrepreneur



Sujan is a SaaS marketing leader with 15 years' experience. He's helped hundreds of companies find their feet and prosper in the industry. His focus on growth strategies is highly effective, helping startups and Fortune 500 businesses to scale up.

He's also a founder and entrepreneur, having established Mailshake in 2015. But these days, he dedicates his time to helping others grow. And you can read his book, 100 Days of Growth, for further insights.

What keeps you motivated day in, day out?

I love solving problems and seeing the outcome of my efforts. There's a never ending supply of problems to solve.

What would you say is your biggest achievement in SaaS so far?

I built a marketing funnel from \$0 to \$30k with new sign-ups per month. I've done a 0 to 5 digit number seven times.

What's the best career lesson you've learned?

Move and test fast. In order to move fast you need to stripe down the idea or simplify things as much as possible to test if the minimum viable version of the idea has any legs.

Who do you find inspiring in SaaS?

Hiten Shah for his insights and collection of content on product. Tomasz Tunguz & David Skok for their SaaS industry metrics/benchmarks. And Dan Martell for his frameworks on SaaS marketing and operations.

What would you say are the most important skills in your area of SaaS?

Understanding SEO, storytelling, product management, and Grit.

How would you describe your day job to friends and family?

I run a handful of software companies and my job is to help other people do their jobs. Sometimes it requires doing the things people can't, won't or know how to do.

Go check out...

Sujan Patel on [Twitter](#). He's an active presence who posts regularly about the world of SaaS, how to succeed, and inspirational ideas to spark new ideas.

Aaron Levie

Co-Founder and CEO at Box, Inc.



Since 2005, Aaron has been the co-founder and CEO at the popular, cloud-based content management and collaboration platform Box.

His idea for the SaaS product came about while he was at college in 2004. During his junior year at USC, he took a leave of absence in order to launch the business. By 2012, operations expanded to Europe and in 2014 Box reported 40% of Fortune 500 companies use the product. Levie is also an active speaker at events such as Fortune Brainstorm Tech, Dreamforce, CxOTalk, LeWeb, and TechCrunch Disrupt.

In a 2018 interview with global management consulting firm [Mckinsey](#), he responded to the following question.

What have you learned about scaling a software company?

“We’ve certainly learned a whole bunch of things not to do over the years. We’ve made our fair share of mistakes. The thing that has worked incredibly well is having a long-term vision for where you’re going.

There are so many things that have the potential to veer you off course. If you are not really, really sure of what you’re trying to do over the long run, like a ten-plus year vision, it is so easy to go off course. We were fortunate. Very early on, we had this vision, which was, we saw that everybody’s work style was going to be changing in the future.

Every company was going to have to change the way they collaborated, the way they shared, the way they fundamentally ran their businesses. That was going to lead people to having to use the cloud to work and manage their data. And we were building an architecture and a strategy and a technology that could lead toward that vision of the future.”

Go check out...

Aaron on [Twitter](#). There he provides business inspiration and ideas, with tweets such as: “Reminder: the biggest disruptions start with the simplest solution to the most important part of the problem instead of the complete solution to the whole problem.”

Brad Feld

Co-Founder and Managing Director at Foundry Group



Brad has been an entrepreneur and investor since 1987. He co-founded the Foundry Group and is also the co-founder of Techstars.

An active speaker, Brad has lent his stage presence to many of the world's top SaaS and business conferences. He often talks about venture capital investing and entrepreneurship. Brad has also written extensively on the startup world since 2010. Some of his books include *Do More Faster*, *Startup Communities: Building An Entrepreneurial Ecosystem In Your City*, and *The Startup Community Way* (the latter is his latest work, launched in July 2020).

Quote from Venture Deals: Be Smarter Than Your Lawyer and Venture Capitalist

"The only thing that we know about financial predictions of startups is that 100 percent of them are wrong. If you can predict the future accurately, we have a few suggestions for other things you could be doing besides starting a risky early stage company.

Furthermore, the earlier stage the startup, the less accurate any predictions will be. While we know you can't predict your revenue with any degree of

accuracy (although we are always very pleased in that rare case where revenue starts earlier and grows faster than expected), the expense side of your financial plan is very instructive as to how you think about the business.

You can't predict your revenue with any level of precision, but you should be able to manage your expenses exactly to plan. Your financials will mean different things to different investors."

P. Simon Mahler, Consultant, Professor, Author, and Speaker

"Brad is by far the most amazing leader in entrepreneurship. His vision, mindset, leadership abilities are all qualities that separate him from the rest of the world. His books are a must read, his blogs are lifeline necessary, and following his advice is the essential ingredient to making any individual interested in starting a business a success."

Go check out...

Brad's website [FeldThoughts](#), where he provides thought leadership blog posts and advice for other SaaS practitioners.

Neil Patel

Co-Founder at Neil Patel Digital and Bestselling Author



Neil is the co-founder at Neil Patel Digital and Quick Spout. He's also a New York Times bestselling author, entrepreneur, and a top 10 marketer by Forbes.

The Wall Street Journal named him as a top online influencer and Forbes classed him as a top 10 marketer. The popularity of his websites draws in over four million visitors a month.

Patel is also an active speaker, having attended over 310 conferences. His presentations have been included at Facebook and Thomson Reuters. He's also famous in the SEO community for his content marketing knowledge and skills. He's always happy to share his latest SEO advice on his site in detailed blog posts and walkthroughs.

Matt Meiresonne, Director at IQS

"Here are the top 3 best things about Neil:

1. He gives away the farm. He doesn't hold back any "secrets". I see soooooo many online marketers do this, and it leaves me guessing. Not so with Neil.

2. He's actually a great guy. Neil has like 5 SaaS companies or something crazy like that, clients like Google and Facebook, and millions of email subscribers. And he still finds time to answer almost all of my emails.
3. He is hands down one of the smartest (maybe THE smartest) digital marketers on the planet.

Bottom line? I have been very fortunate to find someone like Neil as a mentor. And any company would be super lucky to work with him."

Go check out...

Neil Patel's accounts on [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#). He's an incredible source of advice and inspiration, plus his expertise on SEO is endlessly invaluable. He's also a big advocate for a strong work-life balance. As he said in one tweet, "The secret to getting ahead is to take time off, watch Home Alone, and clear your mind."

Hiten Shah

Founder at Crazy Egg, KISSmetrics, Quick Sprout, and FYI



fyi



Hiten has a long career in SaaS and is one of the industry's most respected figureheads. Since 2003 he's founded various industry-leading software companies.

The most famous of them all is the legendary KISSmetrics. But he's also a co-owner of Crazy Egg. His latest venture is FYI, which he co-founded in Q1 of 2018.

He's said the words he lives by are, "You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want." A quote from Zig Ziglar, an author and motivational speaker.

In an interview with [GrooveHQ](#), he was asked what he'd do differently with his time as a startup. He said:

"Spend more time thinking through our pricing and figuring out how our customers want to buy our product.

I would also spend the time to think about where the product and business go in the longer term so that we are more prepared to expand our feature set and opportunity as things change.

Overall just being more thoughtful about these things can lead to great insights earlier in a business which will lead to faster growth.

We used to have a free plan at Crazy Egg and decided to stop making it available for new customers. It was a short-term great decision for increasing revenue but I believe it was not the best decision for the long-term."

Go check out...

Hiten Shah on [Twitter](#). He's active with promoting advice and inspiration to support the wider SaaS community. He also runs a blog with further advice, such as [how to focus on your marketing strategy](#).

Therese Tucker

CEO and Founder at Blackline



Therese was named one of Forbes' top women in tech in 2018. She founded BlackLine in 2001 by cashing out her retirement saving and has since been attributed with breaking Silicon Valley's gender barrier.

She also speaks at high schools in America and at STEM events, teaching young women how to advance their careers in the modern business world.

Therese is also a passionate advocate for equality in the workplace, particularly facing issues of gender and ageism. She said of her success with Blackline:

"It could be confidence, it could be craziness! I was 40 when I started BlackLine. I had never been a CEO before, had no pre-existing customers and no knowledge of how to seek outside capital.

At the same time I was a very good programmer and it was pretty clear that we were providing software that provided a lot of value... rather than spend all my time seeking capital that I wouldn't get, I thought, 'Well, I'll keep pouring my own money into this until it becomes self-sustaining.' And it did. It was very scary though."

Go check out...

Therese Tucker's inspiring talk: Navigate: [Women in enterprise technology](#). Here she discusses how women can succeed in the tech industry.

Dharmesh Shah

Founder and CTO at HubSpot



Dharmesh is a long-term SaaS founder and practitioner. Before co-founding the legendary HubSpot in 2006, he was the founder and CEO of Pyramid Digital Solutions.

The software entrepreneur explains his approach to business life as, “Deep down inside, I’m a technology guy (more specifically, a software development guy). I’ve built and shipped about ten commercial software products across my various startups. I still write code as it keeps me in touch with reality and makes me a better entrepreneur. Plus, I enjoy it.”

Brian Halligan, CEO at Hubspot

“I went to Sloan with Dharmesh and worked on some projects with him. He’s very bright, has relevant experience (to what he’s doing now), and very easy to work with. I am working with him currently on Hubspot and my opinion of him has not changed.”

Rand Fishkin, Co-founder and CEO at SparkToro

“Dharmesh’s eloquence and charisma on stage is matched only by his command of the topics and audience empathy. When surveyed, our 220+ attendees overwhelmingly gave Dharmesh’s presentation the highest score available. Many said it was their favorite session of the event. I’ll be working very hard to make sure he’s at any future seminars we hold.”

Go check out...

Dharmesh’ book *Inbound Marketing: Attract, Engage, and Delight Customers Online*. Since its launch in 2014, it’s enjoyed a revised edition and remains a comprehensive guide to increasing your online visibility and engagement.

Noah Kagan

Chief Sumo at Sumo Group



Noah is an energetic and engaging presence in the SaaS community. He's the Chief Sumo at his business Sumo Group, which means he's the founder and CEO. His product is a free email capture tool.

Along with his expertise, Noah is notable for the personality and humility he adds to his work. You can see this in his marketing blog [OkDork](#), where he celebrates the geeky side of tech.

Michael Williams, Founder of Mementum Marketing

"Noah is amazing at cooking up an idea, implementing it with blazing speed, and then building off of it based on what he learns. I was also impressed with his ability to "find the story" within a huge data set and then use that insight to develop action steps and actually produce results."

Jason P, Executive Director at Resistbot

"In my opinion, Noah single-handedly created the Mint brand almost a full year before we actually launched the product. He had the Valley and blog communities buzzing and was able to build a passionate community around an idea alone. It's the most impressive feat of evangelism I've ever seen. We launched to a hungry audience in late September '07 and have since been blogged about over 2,000 times. I credit this to Noah Kagan, believe it."

Go check out...

Noah's live streams on [LinkedIn](#). He has a weekly session on Fridays between 12 and 1pm CT where he discusses life in SaaS and how to grow your product.

Lincoln Murphy

Customer Success Consultant at Sixteen Ventures



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VENTURES



Lincoln is a customer success expert who's worked at Sixteen Ventures for the last 12 years. He uses an exponential growth framework to help customers achieve scalable revenue growth. All with a customer-centric focus.

He's also a keynote speaker at events all across the world, ranging between the likes of SaaS University, Pulse, SIIA On-Demand, and #FlipMyFunnel.

He's also the author of the book *Customer Success: How Innovative Companies are Reducing Churn and Growing Recurring Revenue*.

Diego Gomes, CEO at Rock Content

"Lincoln is an amazing mentor and one of the biggest brains in the world of growth & customer success. He always brings amazing insights that are super valuable to any SaaS company."

James Dodkins, Customer Experience Expert and Keynote Speaker

"Lincoln Murphy is a titan in the customer success world, his ability to help people discover what customer success is and how they can apply it in their individual and unique environments is second to none. He is blunt, matter of fact and uncompromising in his beliefs and this is just what the customer success game needs right now!"

Go check out...

Lincoln on [Twitter](#), where he provides business advice and inspirational quotes such as "Value is a subjective term. 'I'm not getting value' is not provable one way or another. Get specific with your customers on their required results."

Christoph Janz

Entrepreneur and Venture Capitalist



Christoph is a Partner at Point Nine Capital and in his previous role was an internet entrepreneur and angel investor in SaaS startups such as Zendesk, FreeAgent, and Typeform.

He co-founded DealPilot.com in 1997 just as the internet began to become an international phenomenon, eventually moving on to launch Pageflakes in 2005.

Go check out...

Christoph's blog at [chrija.medium](https://chrija.medium.com). There he explores topics such as how to raise capital in SaaS and how to make your video calls livelier and natural.

Lutfar Nirjhar, Head of IT at The Daily Star

"Christoph is a person of detail. For the first time in my life I found someone is talking about "one pixel up and 2 pixel right" in product design. I was wondering why this 1 or 2 pixel matters! But now I can understand the magic. Still in my path of product development I am following his foot-step. Christoph is my idol in product design. And he is the best CEO I've ever had."

"Christoph is the greatest CEO I have so far worked with. He is versatile, man of time and an excellent decision maker. His expertise in Web 2.0 product design and management often surprises me. His vast knowledge and experience helped Pageflakes move far ahead of its competitors. I look forward to keep lifetime professional relationship with him."

Dan Martell

Entrepreneur, Business Coach, and founder at Clarity



Dan functions as a coach to high performing SaaS founders. He founded the SaaS Academy in April 2016 and runs the business to this day.

His goal is to help SaaS startups grow and meet their business targets by attracting and converting leads. He does this with the best growth plans in the industry.

He's also an award-winning angel investor. He's acted as a key advisor for billion-dollar SaaS businesses like Intercom, Hootsuite, and Udemy.

A natural part of his role in the world of SaaS is to provide motivational talks for SaaS practitioners. He's made presentations at venues such as SaaS North in Canada.

Jason Hamilton, Co-Founder and Co-CEO at TestLauncher

"Under Dan's superior mentorship and programs, he helped our bootstrapped company go from zero to \$1 million in ARR quickly! Amazing motivator, a huge supporter of the SaaS community and an overall great guy."

Jason Wardrop, Founder at Arsenal MKG, Inc.

"Dan's content for starting and growing your SaaS is second to none. He has massive experience and so can educate others in a relatable way because he's been there. Whether you're looking to improve your product, organize your team, create systems in your business, or just scale your marketing and sales, Dan is the guy."

Go check out...

Dan's [YouTube channel](#), where he provides advice and guidance on how to start, and scale up, a SaaS business. If you're looking to leave a mark in your market, it's essential viewing.

Patrick Campbell

Founder and CEO at ProfitWell



Patrick's business provides software for subscription companies. It helps them with their monetization and retention strategies. He founded the business in 2012.

Before this, he worked as a lead Strategic Initiatives for Gemvara. He also worked for Google as an economist.

ProfitWell also provides free turnkey subscription financial metrics to companies.

Patrick can also be found contributing to conferences around the world, where he openly discusses how to build a SaaS business.

Go check out...

Patrick on [Twitter](#). There he posts helpful tips about life as a business owner. Such as advice for the difficult moments, "If you're an exec/founder and you don't feel like an idiot all the time, I think you're doing it wrong."

Taylor Miles, Managing Partner at Squarewebsites

"Patrick helped on Google Adwords Account strategy for several of my clients. He not only fulfilled his job description better than the previous 3 reps I had dealt with in his position, but he went above and beyond when a few clients had issues that could have ruined their business.

He was able to see beyond corporate policy and see the big picture. He saved one business that would have been ruined without his efforts. He responded in a timely manner and always had intelligent answers to my questions.

His creativity helps find out of the box solutions that made a big difference for my clients. I highly recommend working with Patrick, except not very happy that he is a Red Sox and Patriots Fan, but I think I can overlook that minor shortcoming."

Brian Halligan

CEO at Hubspot



CEO at the legendary HubSpot, Halligan is a notable tech executive and author. Since 2009, he's also remained as a Senior Lecturer at MIT in the class Entrepreneurial Product Development and Marketing.

His first book was co-authored with HubSpot co-founder Dharmesh Shah and explores how businesses must provide useful information to customers, who'll use this to self-identify. Halligan also provides talks about marketing at venues such as TEDx, where he helps businesses from around the world (yes, not just SaaS products) successfully scale up.

Go check out...

Halligan's two books on marketing. These are Inbound Marketing: Get Found using Google, Social Media, and Blogs and Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead.

Jennifer Beale, Senior Renewal Manager at HubSpot

"I have had the wonderful opportunity to work with Brian over the last four years at HubSpot. Brian is an amazing mentor who I have leaned on for advice at every turn in my career.

Although HubSpot is no longer the small startup we once were, Brian is always accessible and there to support, listen and advise. The thing that astounds me most about Brian is his heart. He cares about every individual on the front lines because he realizes this is the lifeblood of our company. Brian always tells you what you need to hear to help you grow.

I am forever grateful for the continued opportunity to work with a CEO who is decisive and discerning, while also being charismatic and caring."

David Cancel

CEO at Drift



David is best known as the creator of hypergrowth products and product teams. Currently that's with Drift, which was founded in January 2015. The company produces messaging software for other businesses.

Prior to this, he worked as the CPO at HubSpot between 2011 and 2014. While there, he grew the business' engineering team from 20 to 100 employees.

This led HubSpot's CEO, Brian Halligan, to dub him a, "visionary product development leader ... we now have the best product development team in B2B software."

However, he's also the Entrepreneur In Residence at Harvard Business School, a position he's held since 2017.

Of his rise to success, David told [Matt Turck](#) during a September 2020 interview:

"I was obsessed with the early commercial internet and I started to code and do things. That time when I was doing that, it was so long ago that it felt like we were a bunch of pirates figuring things out. There were no books, there was

obviously no Google, there was no information and so it was just a really interesting time where we could just make things.

Those things led to companies. I joined a couple early start-ups a long, long time ago. Then I started my own company in 2000, post-bubble 2007, I had a knack for starting things in bad times. I've started five, including that first one. I always say that if you start one company it's excusable, because you're naive, two, it's questionable, and three or more, which is my camp, certifiable. So, I'm certifiable."

Go check out...

David's book—Conversational Marketing. It explains how businesses can communicate with customers in real-time, improving the customer experience in the process and generating more relevant leads.

Tomasz Tunguz

Managing Director at Redpoint Ventures



Tomasz has been a Partner at Redpoint Ventures since 2008. The business partners with founders to create new markets and redefine current industries.

It's backed many current famous SaaS products, such as Netflix, Twilio, Zendesk, and HomeAway. Tomasz is also a Board Board at Mattermost, Gremlin, Kustomer, and StackRox.

Naturally, Tomasz has lent his opinions to many conferences around the world where he's discussed topics such as Winning With Data and Top 10 Learnings About Free Trials.

He's also written several books about SaaS, including *The Parallels in the Culture Between the Two Category Defining Companies*, *The 4 States of an Engineering Team*, and *The Great CEO Within*.

David Barret, Founder and CEO at Expensify

"Tomasz is Redpoint's secret weapon. He has strong opinions steeped through and through with real world data and personal experience, but always communicated in a constructive and helpful fashion.

He's patient when you're wrong but don't know it and will shift long-held opinions on a dime when presented with new, more compelling data or reasoning.

He's been a constant advocate and huge asset in Expensify's growth, and a welcome addition to the team. You'd be lucky to have you involved in your company."

Go check out...

[Tomasz' blog](#), which he updates regularly with insights into the world of SaaS, predictions, and thought leadership articles.

Hande Cilingir

Co-Founder and CEO at Insider



Insider

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Hande worked for PepsiCo and Vestel before establishing an international school and travelling to over 40 countries and enrolling students.

After this, she co-founded Insider with Serhat Soyeurel and has run the company since 2012. Since then, she's won Microsoft's Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

She's also on Crunchbase's list of top 3 women CEOs. And she's provided talks to many top conferences around the world, such as TEDx Talks.

When asked by [MarTech](#) about her initial plans for Insider, she said:

"When looking at the areas to support, we first had the idea to establish an e-commerce platform, yet as we discovered the sector more, we saw that there was a gap in almost all geographies in helping e-commerce sites to increase their conversion rates and companies with an online presence in general.

There were some web/mobile personalisation, segmentation and A/B/n testing tools out there mostly for e-commerce firms, claiming that they increase conversions and revenue.

We wanted to develop a technology that would go beyond that and help digital marketers across sectors optimise marketing spend and effort.

For instance, identifying those visitors who are more likely to buy from an e-commerce site with AI would enable marketers to retarget those visitors in ad channels and help them drive their revenue without increasing the spend.

We identified technology gaps by talking to digital marketers and continuously improve our platform. As a result, we've built one of the most comprehensive AI-powered marketing platforms in the market over the past 8 years. And our goal is to become the #1 preferred platform of choice for digital marketers worldwide."

Go check out...

[This podcast with Hande](#) where she discusses the importance of founders developing company culture and finding good people in order to succeed.

Tien Tzuo

Founder and CEO at Zuora



zuora



Tien co-founded Zuora in 2007 and took the business public in 2008. Since then, with Tien at the helm, the business has emerged as one of the leading evangelist in the subscription economy.

Tien actively promotes that industries are moving to a customer-centric, subscription-based business model.

Along with his first book (more on that below), he's a regular speaker at major conferences around the world. Such as BigSpeak Speakers Bureau and Dell Technologies World.

He's also provided various interviews to major media publications such as [The Guardian](#) and CNBC.

Jeff Kim, Google Cloud Enterprise Architect

"I had the privilege of working with Tien when we chose Zuora as our billing system. Even as the CEO, he was willing to roll up his sleeves and get in the trenches to help us successfully on board. He is seriously focused on customer satisfaction and this is one of the pillars that his company is built on."

Go check out...

Tien's book—*Subscribed: Why the Subscription Model Will Be Your Company's Future—and What to Do About it*. It explores how businesses can use their subscription model to push forward growth.

Patrick Arippol

Co-Founder, Investor, and Entrepreneur at Alexia Ventures



Patrick is a former silicon valley entrepreneur and a founding partner at Alexia Ventures. He's also a Venture Partner of two VC funds, where he helped to build several top SaaS companies in Brazil.

Patrick specializes in entrepreneurship, building teams, strategic planning, and business strategy. He's also provided talks at some of the world's leading SaaS conferences.

What keeps you motivated day in, day out?

To see how SaaS platforms are innovating new horizontals and verticals, from all different corners of the world. And how they are constantly raising the bar, in terms of scalability and best practices.

Who do you find inspiring in SaaS?

It is very inspiring to see how top founders from all around the world have deep experiences that are worthwhile sharing. And which many times are contrary to concepts illustrated in "playbooks" that are used widely and many times without the needed caution.

What's the best career lesson you've learned?

Thousands of lessons learned, but probably the most notable career experience was co-founding a health-tech startup in Latin America in 1999 with Wolff Klabin, who now is the co-founder of Alexia Ventures. The crazy dot-com lessons were hard-learned, and give us a very solid foundation to help stellar founders of all ages and backgrounds.

What's your advice for those starting out in the world of SaaS?

Evaluate the global market more closely, since globalization of SaaS has accelerated substantially post-Covid19. In this vein, be sure to evaluate the local vs global aspects and moats to your business model.

What's the #1 tip for SaaS business success?

The founding team's "intellectual honesty" is the most critical success factor, in our view, for SaaS founders.

Nichole Elizabeth DeMeré

B2B SaaS Consultant and Go-To-Market Strategist



Nichole is a B2B SaaS consultant who focuses on helping others in the world of SaaS. She told us that, “Being authentic is essential for networking.” And this is a big part of her daily work.

Nichole is also the co-author of the Playbook to Grow Your SaaS: Business With Your Customers. An actionable guide to growing SaaS businesses.

What would you say is your biggest achievement in SaaS so far?

Creating, engaging, and growing communities. Working on an entirely new type of operating system.

How would you describe your day job to friends and family?

When someone has an idea for a solution to a problem, I help them validate that solution through experimentation and help them determine who needs their solution, how to connect with the people who need their solution, and how to speak to those people in their own language.

What’s your advice for those starting out in SaaS?

Customer experience starts well before someone becomes a customer.

What’s your favourite thing about the world of SaaS?

The incredible community.

Who do you find inspiring in SaaS?

Georgiana Laudi , Claire Suellentrop, Aaron Krall, Val Geisler, Ross Simmonds, and Asia Orangio.

Go check out...

Nichole Elizabeth DeMeré’s book: [Playbook to Grow Your SaaS](#). It takes the complexities out of growing a SaaS business with clear-cut, actionable advice.

Aaron Krall

SaaS Growth Consultant



Aaron accelerates SaaS company growth. He consultancy supports businesses with an ARPU of \$100 to achieve scalable, predictive growth. His goal is to help founders and SaaS practitioners identify their biggest opportunities in the market.

What keeps you motivated day in, day out?

I love what I do. I wake up every morning excited to solve problems. I love the market that I work for and I love the problems that I solve. so that's a huge motivation. I'm also motivated by the idea of making impact and in my small part of the world I know I have so much to give and I want to share it with as many people as I can and impact as many lives as I can.

What's the best career lesson you've learned?

Failure is progress. I used to fear failure and avoid it now I use failure as a compass to determine where I need to go and what I need to fix it's helped to remove any emotional attachment I have the failure and separate failures from my own self worth because it's there trying and failing that I've done my best work

What's the #1 tip for SaaS business success?

Get help. Don't do this alone. You don't need to do this alone. You're not expected to. no man is an island. All of the top founders of the best offer companies in the world have a team of people around them of mentors and coaches advisors who helped them get to where they're at.

You never see them because they're on the sidelines and I never talked about, that makes us feel like we need to do this all on her own. We don't.

Who inspires you?

This is our very first influencer report, but we'll be back in 2022 to highlight the very best practitioners of SaaS.

Already think you've got someone to put forward? Head over to [Top 50 SaaS Practitioners](#) where you can already cast your nomination.

Yes, we're aiming for 50 next time out! And with your help, we'll flag up the very best talent in the industry.





Future of SaaS

