

# Who inspires the Girl Geeks? We asked the industry to identify key female role models and introduce six here.



(L-R) Nicky Iapino, R.O.EYE; Melina Jacovou, Propel London and Amanda Davie, Reform Digital



## AMANDA DAVIE

### Founder and managing director, Reform Digital

I founded Reform because I observed that there is so much valuable business insight that sits among digital marketers – predominantly because of their numerical and data crunching skills – which rarely leaves the marketing department within organisations, or sits outside of the organisation in agencies; or, worse still, it cannot be communicated upwards by the online practitioners (otherwise considered to be the ‘geeks’ of the organisation). Digital is a broad church but in a business context it encompasses commercial, sales and marketing, fulfilment and customer service. Those businesses that aren’t putting digital at the heart of their organisations will struggle over the next ten years.

Last year I founded a voluntary organisation called Mentoring Digital Minds. I felt that there wasn’t enough support or mechanisms in the industry to nurture digital talent. I have been lucky – I have worked for employers who have seen the value of investing in their people, and I have received a lot of professional training in my career. But others need a bit of a helping hand. Mentoring Digital Minds is about helping digital talent to achieve their ambitions, exceed their aspirations and get where they want to go.

Digital is fast paced, and it’s exhausting simply trying to keep up. You have to have tonnes of energy to do this AND to innovate and push the envelope day-in-day out. Fear is the industry’s biggest challenge; clients fear for what they don’t know about digital, and this fear paralyses them to instigate change. As Darwin said: “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change”.

listen. Not just pay lip – or ear service. Surround yourself by confident, supportive and talented people. Avoid people who drain your energy or who are doubters. They will just bring you down. I try to put my trust in as many people as possible. This is a gamble but for me, the rewards always outstrip the risks. I take risks on people. Even if it means that I have expend a ton of energy to them to help them to realise their full potential.

## MELINA JACOVOU

### Founder, Propel London

I started Propel London in 2001 with my business partner Emma McNamara. The decision to work together on a new project in digital recruitment was inspired by our passion for the industry – at the time digital was coming out of the burst bubble of the dotcom crash and was full of new ideas and potential.

I wanted to create a recruitment company that set itself apart – through the quality of service it offered, and through understanding of the challenges of digital businesses. It wasn’t a conscious decision for us to create a business that was about women. However, being a woman managing a company in the digital space has created interesting challenges and opportunities. I find it hugely rewarding to advocate experienced, talented and highly-skilled women for leadership positions within the industry. Not because of their gender, but because of the huge benefits that they offer to a business.

It’s a serious problem for digital that women are so underrepresented. The industry is extremely male-dominated – we see clear evidence for this in the results of industry-wide research, but also at conferences, exhibitions and networking events. The challenge is to change the situation in terms that can’t be ‘donep

down into the old arguments of gender politics – the agenda isn’t about feminism, and anyone who thinks otherwise is missing the point – it’s about talent.

It’s absolutely essential that the digital industry maximises the potential of talented individuals within it; right now if you’re a woman in the industry it’s less likely that your talent will be developed to the full. Fundamentally that’s a waste for everyone involved – the businesses that miss out, and the women whose careers suffer.

For any industry to prosper and succeed it needs to be meritocratic. Digital leaders need to ensure they are creating the opportunities and support structures required to develop all talent, regardless of gender.

It’s great to see digitally focused, women’s groups like She Says and DAWN doing so well. I’ve been involved in both groups, and see their continued success as indicative of the huge demand in the digital sector for support, mentoring and advocacy for talented women.

## NICKY IAPINO

### Managing director, R.O.EYE

This is a very exciting space to work in, and never stands still. It’s no longer just about ‘online’ as everyone touches something digital everyday and mobile browsing in particular is completely changing user interaction with all things digital. Having been part of digital for the past 12 years, I see its growth as fast but quite natural in today’s modern living. However, I do still get blown away by the thought of the younger generation and how much of their life is now influenced by digital.

To be a true digital specialist now is therefore quite a task, as there are so many considerations and areas that are involved. It’s an excellent position to work with clients