

ALANTRA DIGITAL FAST 50

Fast 50 Voices: One to watch

FAST
50DIGITAL
ONE TO WATCH 2023*Only Curls*

Bouncing with Only Curls

Lizzie Carter worked at fashion retailers including Abercrombie & Fitch and Nordstrom before launching direct-to-consumer business Only Curls in 2016 with husband and co-founder Hugo Lewis.



LIZZIE CARTER
CO-FOUNDER

ONLY CURLS IN NUMBERS

LAUNCHED IN

2016

WEB TRAFFIC GROWTH %*

63%

*SEP 23 VS SEP 22

CATEGORY

D2C Brand

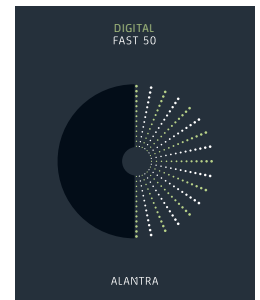
“In fashion you’re always looking for that next gap in the market,” she says. “When it came to launching my own business, I saw that gap in my own experience.”

For years, Carter had searched in vain for beauty products that would tame her curly hair. “I was always looking for the product that was finally going to make my hair less frizzy; what I should have been looking for was something that would really show off my curls, but that product didn’t seem to exist.” Carter and Lewis therefore decided to develop their own, briefing manufacturers to create a product that would leave curly hair hydrated and defined, but not sticky or crunchy.

It took two years to get the product right, but since then Only Curls has grown very rapidly. The Covid-19 pandemic provided a boost, with people stuck at home and spending time on social media viewing hair and beauty videos, and growth has endured and accelerated since then. Carter says the fact people didn’t have to dress smartly to go into work also helped, since curly hair is often wrongly seen as messy.

The company scaled through effective use of influencer marketing. “We could see the power of Instagram, which worked well for us,” says Carter. The key, she believes, has been to focus on community. “Our tone of voice has really worked – we’ve taken our customers on our journey,” she says. “We understand the customer because we basically are the customer; three of the senior team members today were originally influencers who used our product.”

A burgeoning Only Curls Facebook group is one example of the goodwill that the brand has built, with the social media platform a key focus for Only Curls given its slightly older customer base. But the company isn’t afraid to try new ways to reach out – an early presence on TikTok has proved very successful too. “Any form of communication with our customers is really valuable,” adds Carter. “We answer questions as they come in, no matter which channel people use.”



**ALANTRA DIGITAL
FAST 50 REPORT 2023**

It's an approach that is paying off. The business reached £7.6m of sales last year, a 70% increase on 2021. This year's forecast is for around £13m. Those revenues have been achieved without any outside investment support.

Looking forward, Only Curls is exploring several routes to further growth. One target is to increase the size of its wholesale business, focussing on the professional channel – sales to hair salons currently account for just 2% of revenues but Carter thinks that has huge potential. Product expansion is on the agenda too, with promising early sales from a recently launched range for children.

Then there is the international potential of the brand. In its early days, Only Curls exported into the European Union, but then found post-Brexit administration too bureaucratic. Resolving those issues is a priority, but Carter also sees the US as a massive potential market. "We're already making sales there, but we've not pushed the marketing yet," she says. "The team is desperate for us to turn it on." Americans, after all, are no strangers to the challenges of curly hair.



In fashion you're always looking for that next gap in the market.

LIZZIE CARTER



ALANTRA



CHRIS BATES
Director and UK Head of Ecommerce



chris.bates@alantra.com



RUSTY RAY
Managing Partner, US



rusty.ray@alantra.com



MATTHEW WISEMAN
Managing Director and UK Head of Consumer



matthew.wiseman@alantra.com



ORIANE DURVYE
Managing Partner, France



oriane.durvye@alantra.com

Possibility is in the ascent