DIGITAL EDGE

women in data

Exclusive Interview with

BECKY LODGE

Founder of Startup Disruptors

marionete

Becky Lodge doesn't wait for systems to change. **She changes them.**

BECKY LODGE
Founder of Startup Disruptors

Over the past decade, she's built two brands that address structural problems in the UK innovation economy today. **StartUp Disruptors** trains and coaches business founders to build start-ups and investment-ready companies. Over 10,000 leaders have gone through the programme over the last decade since the movement started in a Portsmouth pub to help people that wanted to start a business but were new to business. As a result of this 'real world research' and hands on coaching practice, she has honed this knowledge and used this data and knowledge to build 'Desk2Educate'; the ground-breaking AI/ML tech platform that connects skills development with social mobility; tailor made learning and leadership development at a fraction of the cost of a typical degree or leadership programme, personalised to each learner.

Lodge was one of the first signatories of the University of Nottingham's 'Charter of Inclusive Entrepreneurship' and is a highly awarded and decorated female in data and technology globally. This year she won three awards alone for her work in innovation, DEI and tech. Most notably she was included as one of the 'Twenty in Data and Tech' by Women in Data at their flagship event at the 02 in London sponsored by Snowflake, this added to her previous accolades from Sky News in 2018 (Sky News 100 Women); TechRound in 2023/2024 and named as one of Computer Weekly's Top 100 UK Influential Tech Leaders in 2024. Lodge is the epitome of introversion coupled with an undisputed moral compass that is always seeking to find better ways to include everyone.

Both of Becky's business brands tackle gaps that institutional players have ignored; or perhaps she is the first to see their potential? It wouldn't be the first time.

Lodge is also a vocal advocate for women founders and neurodiverse entrepreneurs and minorities. When Innovate UK in 2024 proposed funding cuts that would have catastrophically disadvantaged women-led businesses, she led the campaign backed by 500 women that forced a reversal reinstating £2.1MN of innovation funding in just 36 hours via a viral social media campaign on LinkedIn. In 2025 she helped them at their roundtable events to re-structure assessment processes and accessibility but in her own words 'this is only a small step, there is much more work to do'.

That's not activism for its own sake. It's accountability.

She operates from Portsmouth, UK, outside of the bubble of the London ecosystem. She's

"THAT'S NOT ACTIVISM FOR ITS OWN SAKE. IT'S ACCOUNTABILITY."

neurodivergent. She's built her social influence in B2B tech and business over 30 years quietly working hard and without following the standard playbook. These aren't biographical details, they inform how she sees the problems and what solutions she builds. She has a unique way of opportunity spotting and connecting ideas and innovation that others cannot see. She attributes this to a combination of her neurodivergence and upbringing from working class roots and a passion to make sure that everyone in business has equity and parity.

In this Our Voice interview, Lodge talks about what she's learned building brands, why the funding landscape still fails women entrepreneurs, and what needs to change in UK innovation policy. No rhetoric. Just experience.

Leadership, Innovation, and Inclusion: A Conversation with Becky Lodge

Becky Lodge is widely recognised as a powerhouse in the UK entrepreneurial ecosystem, a disruptor, advocate, and mentor whose work spans commercial innovation, social impact, and ecosystem leadership. Over decades, she has built businesses, championed female founders, and influenced policy, all while navigating the complex intersections of neurodiversity, leadership, and systemic change. In this in-depth conversation, Becky reflects on her journey, insights, and vision for the future of innovation in the UK.

Q: **Becky, you've built a reputation as a powerhouse in the UK entrepreneurial ecosystem. When you look back at your journey so far, what moments stand out as the ones that genuinely reshaped your trajectory?**

If I'm honest, my journey has been defined as much by

moments of loss as by moments of triumph. I am the UK's biggest failure. One of the earliest, and perhaps most formative, was realising that the world wasn't going to hand me access or opportunity simply because I was capable or ambitious. There was no roadmap for someone like me, a woman, neurodiverse, operating outside traditional networks; and that realisation forced me to become the architect of my own path. I am great at failing and totally surprised when I win. It's a mindset that's inbuilt. If someone says no, I will find another way until they say yes.

Another defining moment came when I had to walk away from partnerships that were emotionally and professionally misaligned. That was incredibly painful and upsetting at the time because these weren't just business relationships; these people felt like family. But stepping away created the space for me to innovate, to take risks I might otherwise have avoided. Our team is unassailable and my broader ecosystem work all emerged from that clarity and independence over time.

Then, there are the quieter affirmations, like being named one of Computer Weekly's Top 100 UK Influential Tech Leaders. On the surface, it's a public accolade, but for me it symbolised the recognition of decades of work often done behind the scenes, challenging norms, mentoring other founders, advocating for equality and working in my pyjamas through evenings and weekends when others were out with family and friends. Those moments, both personal and public, reshaped my trajectory because they taught me that courage, integrity, and persistence are not only strategic choices but moral imperatives in building an ecosystem that values inclusion.

Q: **You've spoken openly about neurodiversity and how it intersects with leadership and entrepreneurship. How has your neurodiversity influenced the way you think, create, and challenge established norms?**

Neurodiversity has been both a lens and a tool in my work. It shapes the way I see patterns and possibilities, allowing me to connect ideas that others might consider unrelated. I process complexity in ways that are non-linear, which is both an advantage and a challenge. It means I can anticipate gaps in systems, spot opportunities for disruption, and generate solutions that others might overlook.

But neurodiversity also demands intentionality. I've had to learn to manage my energy, protect my mental bandwidth, and design structures around myself to ensure I can operate consistently at a high level. There's a duality to it: it's a source of creativity and insight, but also of friction in a world built for linear thinking.

Perhaps most importantly, neurodiversity has given me a moral compass to question the status quo. I can't take systems at face value, I instinctively ask, 'Who benefits from this? Who is excluded? And why?' That questioning has been central to my advocacy work, to the brands I've built, and to the way I mentor other leaders. In short, neurodiversity isn't a label for difference; it's a source of strategic advantage if harnessed consciously and supported structurally. It can be problematic for neurotypical people to understand my thinking. For example, I don't acknowledge social hierarchy as I believe that as humans we are all equal. Societal construct would perhaps consider this naïve but when you remove the social barriers then life is less complex, and anything is possible.

Q: Only 1.85% of VC funding goes to female founders. You've been a vocal critic of these inequalities for years. In your view, what are the most damaging structural barriers still holding women back?

The numbers are shocking, but they reflect systemic biases rather than isolated failures. There are several deeply entrenched structural barriers:

1 Pattern-matching and bias in investment: Investors often fund people who remind them of themselves historically white, male, and linear in career trajectory. That leaves women, particularly those with unconventional paths or neurodiverse profiles, invisible in the investment landscape.

2 Care responsibilities: Women disproportionately shoulder childcare and eldercare. Current funding processes rarely account for this, expecting founders to operate on male-centric timelines and availability norms.

3 Network exclusion: Investment is relationship-driven, and informal networks continue to act as gatekeepers. Women outside London or established tech hubs often find themselves isolated from the conversations that lead to deals.

4 Risk framing and scrutiny: Women founders are interrogated about risk; male founders are asked about potential. Women must justify why they are "investable," while men are invited to imagine scale. Gender stereotypes are still embedded in patriarchal structures and we need to restructure these from the ground up for the sake of equity and inclusion.

These barriers are structural because they are baked into policy, culture, and practice. They won't be solved by mentorship alone or by token funding initiatives or 'mentoring' or helping women to 'build confidence' we have this already; they require intentional redesign of the entire ecosystem, from investor education to funding criteria, to measurement of success.

Q: Desk2Educate blends commercial innovation with genuine social purpose. What inspired the concept, and what change are you aiming to drive through it?

Desk2Educate came from a very simple but urgent realisation: education in the UK is failing to equip all children equally for the digital and social economy. Schools struggle with infrastructure, training, and resources, and the gap between well-funded and under-resourced schools continues to widen. I've spent decades observing innovation ecosystems thrive in tech and entrepreneurship while education lags, and I wanted to bring the same principles of agility, data-informed decisions, scalable solutions into being.

We are not a charity, but a subscription based edtech business. It's systemic change. Desk2Educate is designed to give learners tools and frameworks that are scalable and sustainable; to enable entrepreneurial learners to understand their learning styles and have executive education and leadership development tailored to them it will help to close the digital divide that too often dictates life outcomes. By combining commercial discipline with social purpose (UN SDG's 4,5,8 and 10), we're proving that impact-driven initiatives can also be financially sustainable and that sustainability amplifies

social impact over the long term. It will also help to bridge the skills gap from school to work and aid start-ups to scale-up, so it is in itself an economic growth engine.

Q: **Through your SME community at StartUp Disruptors, you've supported entrepreneurs with clarity, confidence, and commercial direction. What's the biggest misconception founders still have about building a sustainable, investor-ready business?**

The biggest misconception is that investment is the starting point, rather than a lever to amplify an already viable business. Founders often believe that if they can secure funding, growth and success will automatically follow. That's a dangerous assumption. Investors can accelerate growth, but they cannot create product-market fit, customer retention, or operational discipline from scratch.

Many founders also undervalue resilience and repeatability. Early-stage companies often focus on vision and innovation, which is critical, but they neglect the foundational mechanics: revenue streams, scalable processes, governance, and team dynamics. Without these, a business is fragile, and investment will simply accelerate the path to failure rather than sustainable growth. True investor-readiness requires a holistic view: clarity in purpose, robustness in operations, and courage in leadership. For women however investment is rarely or unlikely to come and this is leaving over £250BN per annum on the table for the UK in terms of economic growth (source The Rose Review), so women have to use savings, bootstrap or crowdfund. These should not be seen as viable options as the whole investment market is seemingly closed for business if you are a woman. This is slowly changing, but it needs to accelerate to be more meaningful.

6. Your work across the Portsmouth and Solent region has made you a central figure in the South Coast innovation community. What makes this ecosystem special, and where do you see its untapped potential?

The South Coast has a unique DNA: a combination of deep technical expertise, maritime and defence heritage, and an emerging tech-savvy entrepreneurial community. It's not a clone of London or Cambridge; it has its own rhythm, its own talent, and its own potential.

Where we fall short is cohesion. There are

pockets of brilliance; university research, SME innovation, creative industries but they are too siloed and often work against one another. If we could intentionally connect these nodes, facilitate knowledge-sharing, and build funding pathways that remain local, the region could become a powerhouse for innovation that balances quality of life with economic impact. There's also untapped potential in talent retention: if we invest in infrastructure, mentoring, and digital literacy locally, young innovators won't feel compelled to leave for larger hubs, and the ecosystem can mature organically.

Q: You've collaborated closely with the University of Portsmouth Business School. How has that partnership helped shape the next generation of innovators and leaders?

The partnership has been mutually transformative. For students, it has brought real-world entrepreneurial insight into the academic environment not just theory but lived experience. They see what it takes to build a business under constraints, how to navigate ambiguity, and how to lead with integrity.

From my side, access to rigorous research and emerging insights into behavioural science, AI, and innovation theory has been invaluable. It's allowed me to refine the support we provide to founders, ensuring it's grounded in evidence, not anecdote. Beyond the curriculum, we've also co-created mentorship networks and innovation labs that act as bridges between theory and practice. The ultimate outcome is a generation of leaders who understand that innovation is a discipline: systemic, intentional, and human-centred.

Q: You've become a leading advocate for women's economic empowerment. If you could redesign the funding landscape for women from the ground up, what would the "Becky Lodge blueprint" look like?

If I were redesigning the landscape, it would be guided by three principles: equity, empowerment, and impact.

EQUITY: Funding criteria should recognise diverse career paths, care responsibilities, and intersectional disadvantage as assets, not risks. A woman who has been balancing eldercare and launching a business demonstrates resilience and strategic prioritisation, qualities investors should value alongside experience and career pedigree.

EMPOWERMENT: Women-led capital is critical. We need UK-wide investment vehicles run by women, deploying capital with the explicit goal of unlocking growth in untapped female-led markets. Mentorship, network access, and commercial skill-building would be embedded, not optional. I would like to see legislative change through the UK Government as exemplified in Canada, this would allow for tax breaks for female founded businesses and a commitment to tangible DEI.

IMPACT: Funding should not be short-term. It must support businesses through scaling challenges, internationalisation, and leadership development. Success metrics should include sustainable revenue growth, jobs created, and societal impact, not just ROI on paper.

The blueprint is about unleashing half of the UK's economic potential, not "helping women" in a tokenistic sense. We make up 51% of the UK population after all, but are woefully supported in business.

people they were designed to support and when they perpetuate inequity, exclusion, or inefficiency. I feel a responsibility to challenge those systems, not just for myself, but for those whose voices are silenced or overlooked.

Balancing disruption with support is an ongoing practice. I recognise that most people inside these systems are doing their best under the constraints they inherit. They are not villains; they are constrained actors. So my approach combines accountability with empathy: push hard on structures, policies, and processes that are unjust or ineffective, while offering guidance, mentorship, and advocacy for the people who are navigating them.

This dual focus; challenge the system, uplift the individual to me is critical. If we only disrupt without support, we risk creating chaos that leaves the very people we aim to help behind. If we only support without challenging the system, we perpetuate inequity. True leadership requires both courage and compassion in equal measure.

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Q: We would describe you as both a disruptor and a force for good. Would you agree and how do you balance challenging broken systems with supporting the people who are trying to navigate them?

I would agree with that description, though I'd nuance it: I see myself as a constructive disruptor. Disruption for me is not about noise or antagonism; it's about intervention with purpose. Systems become broken when they fail to serve the

Q: For women founders, neurodiverse leaders, and the next generation of innovators, what's the one message you wish someone had given you earlier in your journey?

I wish someone had told me: your difference is your power, not your liability and if it doesn't feel right then challenge it and if necessary - leave. Early in my career, I spent far too much energy trying to fit into boxes that weren't designed for someone like me, as a woman, as a neurodiverse thinker, as a founder with unconventional priorities. That effort cost time, emotional energy, and even opportunities. Women are taught to be liked

and be 'nice'. You don't have to do this; you just need to be yourself; contribute and show all the qualities that you have loudly. Do not shrink yourself.

Your difference, whether in perspective, approach, or lived experience is often exactly what allows you to see opportunities others miss, to innovate at the edges, and to lead authentically. The second part of the advice I would give is: protect your boundaries fiercely. Energy is finite. If you don't guard it, the system, with all its biases and expectations, will consume it. Finally, don't outsource your self-belief. The only person who can sustain it is you, and it will carry you through decisions, rejections, and setbacks that others will never fully understand.

Lastly, don't take people at face value. Believe in actions and not words. Some claiming to be allies are not. They will show themselves (as will the truth) in the fullness of time. Silence and patience overcome all obstacles, stoicism has its own rewards, cultivate it.

OUTRO: Becky Lodge has built a track record that speaks for itself: championing female founders, elevating neurodiverse voices, and launching ventures that address real gaps in the market. Her work has created a measurable impact in the Solent region and has resonated across all corners of the UK.

She's unafraid to challenge when women and minorities are disadvantaged. That directness has made her a significant voice and leader in the UK innovation and tech ecosystems.

The work continues. Digital Edge will be watching what comes next.

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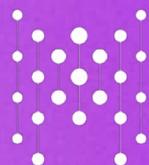
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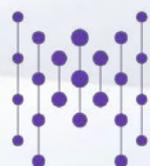- Cyber Insurance & Specialty Line data architectures

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