

Mike Harris:

Mike Harris was the creator of Firstdirect, the world's first 24/7 telephone bank - which launched in 1989. Firstdirect is famous for delivering consistently outstanding customer service, regularly ranking number 1 in surveys covering all industries.



In 1998 Mike launched Egg, one of the world's first internet banks and for many years the largest, which he took from concept to a £1bn public company within 3 years.

In between Firstdirect and Egg - he was Chief Executive of Mercury Communications (which was responsible for ending BT's monopoly in the highly regulated telecoms sector) and was Chairman of mobile phone company One to One (during its launch of the world's first digital GSM network).

Mike was a regular speaker on strategy, leadership and innovation at the mid career MBA course at MIT from 1996 to 2008 and was Chairman of the Innovation Board at Royal Bank of Scotland from 2005 until March 2009, where he supervised the establishment of a group wide innovation programme. During this time he was also a founding investor and Chairman of digital identity company Garlik until its sale to Experian in late 2011.

In 2007 Mike wrote a book on innovation and entrepreneurship called Find Your Lightbulb. In 2009 he co-founded Find Your Lightbulb Ltd which developed a structured mentoring programme, called IconicShift, based on the ideas in the book. Over 1000 businesses attended IconicShift workshops including companies involved in FinTech, pharmaceuticals, veterinary health, consumer health care, food, fashion, micro-finance, law, business training, secondary education, publishing, investment advice & management and architecture & design. The programme continued until late 2024. Overall, Mike coached over 30 founder led companies in multi-year programmes

Mike ran a coaching programme for Medivet for five years from 2015 when its estimated value was £150m. He was Chairman from early 2018 until lockdown intervened in 2020 at which point Medivet was actively pursuing a multi-billion exit (acquired by CVC for greater than £1bn in 2021).

Previously

Mike grew up in Dudley, West Midlands. His grandfather created a business in 1920 , called Fred Corbett's Garages Ltd which grew to become "Dudley's Leading Motor Agent" and still operates today on the same premises. Mike spent his early life living in the extended family which occupied several houses on the site of the business. It was a perfect education in the art of creating and growing a business based on exceptional customer service.

Having no desire to be involved in the family business , however, Mike studied Chemistry at University College London. Intrigued by the growing influence of computing power on leading edge chemistry research , Mike got his first job a software company called Computer Analysts and Programmers. Midland Bank recruited him from there and he stayed until 1986, ending up as Head Of Systems and Programming , responsible for 500 professional staff.

Describing this as the most boring job he could imagine he left to join a small technology company called Space-Time Systems which was just concluding a Series C investment round. The company got a rapid exit through a trade sale and Mike filled in some spare time with a number of consultancy assignments.

During one such assignment he was able to pitch the idea of Firstdirect to Midland Bank where it was enthusiastically backed by Chairman Sir Kit McMahon.