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HOW WE MADE IT PATRICK FISHER AND DAMIAN COX FOUNDERS OF WILDSTONE

Patrick Fisher was still in primary school when he started his first business. Aged just eight, he got an accounts book and began selling eggs from the chickens on his family's farm in Barston, just outside Solihull.

"By the time I was 16, I was supposed to be doing my GCSEs, but I was breeding chickens," Fisher said. "I was earning a lot more money than my friends who were doing paper rounds."

His entrepreneurial spirit has endured. In 2010, he joined forces with Damian Cox to start Wildstone, an outdoor advertising business. It buys land for billboards and gives advice on ad space to clients ranging from British Land and local councils to airports and corner shops.

Wildstone reported a pre-tax profit of £1.8m on turnover of £15.7m in the year to October. The company has 55 staff at its headquarters in Hammersmith, west London,

and in Germany, France, Ireland and Spain.

It is not the first time the pair have worked together. They met at Ocean Outdoor, another advertising business, where Cox hired Fisher to be a developer.

When Cox sold his Ocean Outdoor stake, he asked Fisher if he would like a job at his new venture, and was turned down. Fisher wanted to come on board as co-founder of Wildstone. "I said that I wanted something that's my own too," he recalled.

Chief executive Cox is the creative force, while Fisher makes sure the business stays grounded. "A combination of the two ends up creating quite a sensible path," said Cox, 43. They each own one-quarter of Wildstone, with 30% held by investors that ploughed in £1.1m at the start and the remainder held by management.

The business began as a consultancy, selling panels at Piccadilly Circus, for example. The pair said their advice has helped more than 30 councils exploit their property to earn £120m from advertisers — helping to boost the public purse.

Wildstone has four arms: the consultancy, a specialist

construction business, a planning practice and an investment fund. Most of its income comes from the fund, a joint venture with the US company Landmark Dividend that buys leases on billboard sites across Europe.

"We realised if you want to see a significant return you've got to hold assets," said Cox. They said turnover would more than double this year.

Serial entrepreneur Cox left Douai School, near Newbury in Berkshire, at the age of 18 and wound up working at an outdoor advertising start-up in his twenties. He founded his first business, EK Straas, because he had seen guys in charge "earning all the money while I was doing all the work".

Fisher, 37, read sociology at Nottingham University and was an estate agent in Birmingham before joining Ocean Outdoor. He lives in Queen's Park, northwest London, while Cox lives in the Cotswolds village of Coln St Dennis with his wife and three children.

Fisher said entrepreneurs have got to "learn to live with uncertainty". His partner urged founders to strive to be happy, even when stressed. "Go for a walk and try to enjoy what you're doing."

Liam Kelly

CARLOTTA CARDANA



Damian Cox, left, and Patrick Fisher: £15.7m turnover