

devmio blog

Profile: Amanda Brock, CEO at OpenUK

## Women in Tech: “We need greater visibility of the many real women who are actually succeeding in tech”

Careers



Amanda Brock

22. Feb 2023

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Women in technology continue to lag behind their male counterparts in terms of representation, leadership roles, and pay. Many systemic issues must be addressed for women to achieve greater equality in technology, and devmio wants to help by providing an opportunity for inspiring women to introduce themselves and share their stories about why they chose a career in technology.

# API CONFERENCE

April 24 – 27, 2023

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## **API Design First: Success or Failure?**

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[Bobur Umurzokov \(/speaker/bobur-umurzokov?loc=dh&utm\\_source=devm.io&utm\\_medium=referral\)](#)

Every Wednesday, we celebrate women in the tech world. This week, we'd like to introduce you to Amanda Brock, CEO at OpenUK.

### **Today's Woman in Tech: Amanda Brock, CEO at OpenUK**



#### **What first got you interested in technology?**

Funnily enough, in high school, I was told to “stay away from computers.” It was one of the first years where the school was innovative enough to teach this, but my code never ran and it really put me off. It was only when I interviewed for a legal job as an IP lawyer for a firm specialising in IT, that my interest was piqued again. The partner who hired me also sponsored me to do a part-time master's degree in IP and IT law at Queen Mary, where I took the first internet law course in the UK.

#### **Could you tell us about your career path? How did you end up at your current position?**

I read law straight from high school in Scotland and was fortunate enough to be successful in obtaining a Rotary International Scholarship to attend NYU straight afterwards, so I did a master's degree there. I then came back to the UK where I qualified

as a lawyer in both England and Wales and Scotland and worked in law firms for a short time, but I found that I liked being in business much more. By the time I was 35, I had my first head of legal role in a company and spent the next decade or so building and running legal teams in organisations as a Head of Legal or General Counsel.

I found the operational side interesting and also had responsibility for HR teams at various times.

Each time I moved roles I seemed to move sectors, although IP and IT were a theme throughout. I worked across the motor industry, electrical retail, and manufacturing, an Internet Services Provider during the dot com boom, a digital transformation team led by Accenture, contract catering, fashion, financial services, and data centres. I also worked in a mobile phone company dealing with Fintech on the phone in emerging markets like Pakistan, Algeria, and Bangladesh. And of course software — in particular open-source software. Variety was frowned upon at the time, and most of my roles lasted two years, which used to be considered short. I had a couple of roles lasting five years, but those were tech roles that kept changing. I loved learning about the business, how it worked, what made its revenue, and how it managed risk. That's what a lawyer writes down in deals, and manages risk around. It's led to me having an extremely broad business understanding which is constantly helpful.



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**API Design First: Success  
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I always felt that law perhaps wasn't the right career path for me, but once your skills are in a certain area, it can be really hard to leave. I ran an art company as a hobby and was the Creative Director of a festival (we lost £600,000 in a weekend, and whilst my content was great, it was a disaster). Finally, five years ago, at 49, I stepped away from law and for the past 3.5 years, I have been the CEO of a UK not-for-profit in the tech sector, OpenUK. We have broken the mould of a country organisation in open source, and I am proud to say that we have built one of the most diverse organisations — not created with diversity as its purpose — in UK tech.

“ I always felt that law perhaps wasn't the right career path for me, but once your skills are in a certain area, it can be really hard to leave.

### **What are you most proud of in your career?**

I am not sure that there is a single thing that I am most proud of, but the book that I edited “Open Source Law, Policy and Practice” that was published last year took five years of work, and is a fairly seminal text in the space, so obviously, I am proud of that.

As one of the first lawyers working on the internet in the UK, I have had a leading role as a tech lawyer, initially around the dot com boom and internet law (I wrote a book about that, too), then around open-source software and digital. I do feel that this was an achievement. As a woman in the time that I worked in this space, most women who started in the space fell away as it could be quite an aggressive environment. Sexism had a whole different meaning, and at points, it really took a toll on me, but I am a very determined person, so I kept pushing forward. When I look back, I often think it's a miracle that I got as far as I did.

However, building OpenUK from nothing — as an organisation with only a few thousand in the bank to a turnover of over £1m a year, and is now well known and well respected both in international open technology and in UK tech, feels like my major achievement to date.

### **What does a typical day look like in your life?**

I'm an early bird and often write in the morning, getting up around 5 am. This was something that I found really suited me during the lockdown. I try to make time for meditation and exercise, but this balance is sometimes hard to achieve as a lot of my work involves speaking at events and doing policy work, so I spend a lot of my time on the road. This is a blessing and a curse as I love meeting people and experiencing different cultures and environments, but I miss being at home. I live on my own — apart from Kitten Dundee — which suits me well, and I like to spend time in my garden when I can.

“ When I look back, I often think it's a miracle that I got as far as I did.

### **Who are some of your role models or people that inspire you?**

Helena Kennedy QC, who hosted OpenUK's IWD event in 2022, is a real inspiration. I am driven by a desire to increase collective equity in tech and to make our digital economy more equitable, and she is a role model for championing what's right.

Helena was involved in bringing 100 of the female Afghan judges (and their families) who had previously sentenced members of the Taliban out of Afghanistan and were in danger when the Taliban resumed control.

### **What are some essentials in your toolkit for success?**

I think taking time to learn about yourself and what really matters to you — which many people never do — is the most useful thing. A few years ago, I did something called the Hoffman Process, and that provided a lot of these tools for me, which gave me the ability to work out what I really want and how to keep balance in my life.

I also have ADHD, and against my better judgement, started taking medication for it last year. The medication allows me a level of focus that I didn't know existed — and really to kick ass on delivering.

Herschel's rucksack and wheelie bag are something that I wouldn't be without.

“ We often focus on how to get women into tech and not on retaining them.

### **How can the industry help support and retain women in tech?**

This is a great question. We often focus on how to get women into tech and not on retaining them. We need to make the environment a human one. It's going to be really important as the tech sector goes through a very tough next nine months.

We need greater visibility of the many real women who are actually succeeding in tech. It is so much easier to be part of something if you are not the odd one out. I spent most of my career as the only woman in the room. It was something I sort of got used to, but it's not easy for most people.

### **What was the biggest challenge you've faced in your professional career, and how did you overcome it?**

Oh, there have been many, and I have managed some much better than others. In all honesty, I could answer a whole interview on these. My current challenge is building a conference for around 1000 people in 10 weeks.

Ostensibly a questionable thing to have done, but I had the base funding in place and have raised enough to put on an excellent event during eight weeks whilst the tech sector has been imploding. Getting people through the door when their companies are laying people off and not paying for event attendance is keeping me busy — but we are getting there, and I have my fingers crossed that the way I have reimagined a tech conference — with not just tracks of content but also delegate experience and amenities, to create a festival of open technology <https://stateofopencon.com/> — will be enough to attract people. I know that once they are through the door, everyone will enjoy it.

We have 120 world-class speakers, including two women security Directors from The White House, a UN Director, Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, and a woman MP amongst the lineup. We just won a Gold Medal from CHAOSS for our diversity, and we have a Sustainability sponsor planting a tree for each delegate attending. It is an event like no other that UK tech has seen.

Pulling this off in this market definitely feels like my biggest challenge to date... Until the next one.

“ Most environments are welcoming once you step through the door. The hard part can be finding the doors to step through.

### **What tech topic would you like to learn more about?**

Everything. I have avoided AI. The ethics of AI are something that I feel should be supranational, and it has put me off, but I am going to have to engage more with it this year as open source, and AIs are more and more integrated with each other.

### **What advice would you like to give women looking to start their careers in tech?**

Just do it. Don't overthink it.

Once you start, try to find the doors. What do I mean? Most environments are welcoming once you step through the door. The hard part can be finding the doors to step through. Take every opportunity that comes your way and if you can find or are offered mentors use it.

### **What job did you want growing up? How does that compare to now?**

At 10 I wanted to be an astronaut. I guess I am at least boldly going where no woman has gone before.



Amanda Brock is the CEO of OpenUK. She brings expertise in open source technology and a 20+ year track record in digital transformation to the role. With a background as a senior lawyer, Amanda has extensive experience across multiple industries, including hardware, mobile, ISP, data center, and digital financial services. Under her leadership, Amanda rolled out the OpenUK Sustainability Strategy and is a well-known figure in the open-source community, regularly appearing as a keynote speaker, podcast guest, and panel participant on the topic of policy and legal issues.

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