

computing IT LEADERS 100

The definitive ranking of the UK's foremost technology professionals 2023

THE CHANNEL CO.

Amanda Brock



Tom Allen

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Amanda Brock is the CEO of OpenUK, the UK organisation dedicated to advancing open technologies, including open source software, hardware, data, standards and AI. Under her leadership, OpenUK supports a sector contributing £41 billion annually to the UK economy. Amanda is a digital leader, writer and international keynote speaker. Her experience spans various technologies and digital transformation strategies. She is an influencer in advisory roles, with a strong background in litigation, risk management, corporate compliance and regulatory affairs, with extensive international experience.

How did you get into IT?

Like many things it was an accident, having been told to avoid computers at school when my code didn't run. My first legal role was to be an IP lawyer, except the lady interviewing me kept saying IT lawyer. Despite my best efforts and knowing my history with computers, the job offer came through for me as an IT lawyer. So I took the plunge!

I was sent by my employer to Queen Mary for their IP and IT law Masters. Part of that included IT law but also I took the UK's first internet law course there. I ended up not only being one of the first lawyers who worked in internet law in the UK, but the first lawyer employed to work on the ISP Freeserve, going through its IPO (the first dotcom IPO in Europe) and also writing one of the first books on ecommerce law.

One thing has led to another and a career in IT law that spanned 25 years and built a later expertise in open source. Moving away from being a lawyer I took on the role as CEO of OpenUK five years ago and haven't looked back.

What do you consider your greatest IT achievement of the last 12 months?

Having raised £500k for our first conference in 2023, I repeated the raise to grow the attendees and speakers for [State of Open Con in 2024](#), firmly establishing it on the international open source conference map (almost 40% international delegates) and bringing open technology - open source software, open hardware and open data - into the UK's tech agenda. This feels like my biggest achievement in the last 12 months. Building the conference from year one and delivering something that grew from our very well received first year was a huge achievement.

Hosting over 200 speakers with 138 sessions, we also welcomed Shadow Minister Chi Onwurah and Baroness Stowell, who gave the first public address on the House of Lords' LLM Report, and saw State of Open Con recognised by the political and policy establishment as an event of importance. This was bolstered by working with the Home Office and DSIT AI teams to undertake direct community consultation during the conference with over 200 delegates. With over 900 signups, our attendee rate was 89% and we managed to maintain almost half of our delegates not being white whilst growing our speakers to over 40% female - amongst tech's most diverse.

How do you ensure diversity is taken into account in your IT recruitment?



AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

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As an organisation built on an open source model we do things a little differently, and although we only have three employees we have several hundred volunteers who make the organisation tick.

Open source generally suffers from a lack of diversity, with between 10% and 17% female participation. OpenUK has over 30%, and has managed to maintain that over the last 4+ years. We are also increasing our ethnic diversity on an ongoing basis and continuously supporting neurodiversity. Being a female-led organisation is in some ways an advantage, as it is perceived as a safe space and attracts engagement from not only women but people in traditionally under-represented groups. I have been open about my own neurodiversity diagnosis to support this.

Empowering people by offering and encouraging them into opportunities, then being there to mentor and support them on their journeys. We support people growing into this by building their confidence over time. In this way we have enabled an organisation with a diverse group of leaders who merit their seats at the table or place on a stage or board - this has created role-models encouraging more folks in by showing them the door to step through.

Which technology are you currently most excited by, and why?

It is impossible not to say AI in 2024. However, what excites me most is not generative AI per se, but a small Scottish open source AI project founded by 25 year-old Torran Bruce Richards, in Edinburgh, by the name of Auto GPT. It is currently the fastest growing open source AI repository in the world - in fact, it is the fastest growing open source repository in the world. It celebrated its first birthday on 30th March. Auto-GPT is an open-source autonomous AI agent based on OpenAI's API for GPT-4, and is one of the first examples of an application using GPT-4 to perform autonomous tasks by breaking down large task into various sub-tasks without the need for user input.

The technology is susceptible to distraction and hallucination and has a long way to go, with the risk that its lack of long term memory sends it into an endless loop. However, it beautifully demonstrates the power of innovation using open collaboration and the potential for people in countries other than the US and China to lead in AI innovation through openness. The founder has taken \$12m in investment yet managed to keep it (Significant Gravitass) a UK company.

What would an outsider find the most surprising part of your job?

The most surprising part of my job is probably the variety of tasks that I am required to perform or width of areas that my role gets involved in. There is a dichotomy of being the founder of a boot strapping start up who may need to book travel or organise catering with an event who will then be flown across the world by enterprises and governments to give talks or to advise a senior executive team in a sponsor company.

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09:00AM

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06:30PM

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If I told you it wouldn't be a secret! I guess it's fossil hunting, I am a dab hand and have been collecting fossils I have found all over the world since I was a kid. I am never happier than at the coast looking for treasures.

What makes you laugh?

I laugh easily and often and regularly until I cry. It's something I am known for. Having travelled with colleagues a great deal I am very aware that there is a camaraderie through laughing at ourselves and the environments we are in that has sometimes kept us all going. But the thing that makes me laugh more is myself. I have a secret ambition to do stand up comedy and tales of my own existence would feature heavily. I regularly make my team, colleagues and friends laugh by telling them (with my own special delivery) tales of my existence. At the same time as great things happen by putting myself out there it can also verge on the surreal ;-D

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