

From smoothies to EVs and next generation credit cards, a profile of JamJar Investments

In the ever-growing investment landscape, funds are multiplying and diversifying, and for startups there is more to raising investment than the money and the media moment. With #QVCS Maddyness profiles different funds to give founders and entrepreneurs the information they need to choose the right investor. Today we interview Kirsty Macdonald, Principal, JamJar Investments

My journey with *JamJar Investments* began very serendipitously! I was working for Unilever, having studied economics as an undergraduate and then a global politics masters. To be honest working at a big corporate wasn't for me and I was pretty unimaginatively looking to go into consulting to buy myself some time whilst I figured out what I actually wanted to do.

It was then that JamJar reached out to me on LinkedIn. Katie, one of the Partners, had come across my profile and although I was slightly more junior than what they were looking for she liked my academic background combined with my consumer experience.

Despite knowing next to nothing about VC, I was luckily invited to interview and went through about 7 rounds from memory (!) before I got the job. I remember thinking, if I don't get this role I'll be devastated as JamJar sounds like one of the most impressive companies in one of the world's most interesting industries. Somehow I did get the offer – thank goodness.

That was 6 years ago – I joined as a Junior Associate, learnt the craft of venture and I'm now Principal. We've just closed our second fund of £100M and I can't wait to back the next generation of game-changing consumer companies.

Which industries are you working in?

JamJar is the *innocent drinks* founders' venture fund. We focus on backing early stage (i.e. typically pre-seed to series A) consumer brands. Most of these are tech or tech-enabled but we do the odd classic offline or retail brand too. Our portfolio includes *Deliveroo*, *Babylon Health*, *Toney's Chokoloney* and *Tails.com*.

By definition my job is very varied – right now, I'm spending a lot of time looking at alternative proteins as well as the electrification of the automobile industry and next generation credit card propositions. Never a dull week!

What do you look for in a founder?

We actually have 15 qualities we look for in a founder, these fit into 5 buckets covering

1. Strength of their commitment & vision
2. Sharpness of their thinking & strategy
3. Quality of their execution
4. Ability to attract and develop top talent
5. A slightly more open ended one which looks at what about the team will really accelerate this opportunity vs others that may attempt it, their secret sauce if you will.

Of the 15, if I had to pick the most important one I would say how well a founder ruthlessly prioritises, which sits in the thinking and strategising bucket. This is the quality our top founders scored very highly on – can they identify what is most important and focus just on that with the limited resource they have?

Can you talk about your current portfolio?

We have almost 60 companies from fund one so I won't go through every one. Maybe just a couple I find very interesting on a personal level.

One close to my heart is Skin+Me, which is a subscription, personalised, prescription-only skincare company. I've struggled with acne in the past and have been on some pretty nasty drugs to overcome it. Plus I had to wait months and months for NHS treatment or pay some serious money to go private.

This company uses telemedicine to provide you with a personalised treatment plan which varies the dosage of Tretinoin (one of the most effective active ingredients for fighting acne) through a telehealth consultation. With only 650 dermatologists in the whole of the UK, access to this topical treatment is limited for many people and no one offers the personalised dosage, which leads to better results and much higher compliance. The reviews are absolutely awesome and I just wish it had been around when I was growing up.

Another one I love is Onto - they provide all-inclusive subscriptions for electric vehicles. For one monthly price you get a car, charging, road tax, insurance etc. It's an incredibly convenient, cost-effective and risk-free way to go electric. Check them out.

How has COVID-19 changed the way you operate?

Before covid we were in the office everyday, we didn't actually do too much remote working so that obviously changed overnight. It was a relatively seamless transition if I'm honest.

Clearly, all our pitches went from in-person to Zoom and there have been some pros and cons to that. Mainly, we can now record pitches. I love this so I can concentrate fully on what the Founder is saying, instead of writing notes to remember things later down the line. It is a genuine conversation. The downside is that I think you miss a lot of nonverbal cues, especially in relation to dynamics between co-founders. That is very hard to judge over a computer screen!

What does the future look like?

Wow, big question. I think 2 huge shifts will be around environmental awareness and action as well as distributed web 3 infrastructure – not particularly original but think hard to argue against.

Most people have a good understanding of the dire straits we are in environmentally; the IPCC report on a code red for humanity in 2021 was a huge wake up call for many. You're seeing people reconsider having children because of it, going to prison in protest against inaction, changing their lives in ways that were unthinkable even five years ago. Consumer pressure will be pivotal in this as long as we can combat misinformation, and I'm excited to see what companies and propositions will be built and rebuilt because of it.

Secondly, web3 and associated technologies should allow consumers to move power away from big tech and centralised bodies into a serverless world where they can control their own data much more easily. Up until now, consumers have been happy to trade privacy and control for user experience and ease but this next frontier of the web will hopefully make that trade off non-existent. I'm definitely no expert but I am excited by what will come out of this.

What makes JamJar different?

I love that JamJar is founded and run by operators who are entrepreneurs first and investors second. We are not a fund of financiers. Adam, Rich and Jon founded innocent drinks with just a \$200K angel investment and exited for over \$500M without any further financings. It's one of the most iconic challenger brands of the last 20 years and the help, advice and experience across branding, ops and commercial is very difficult to match in early stage consumer.

What one piece of advice would you give founders?

Take a reference on your investors! We spend a lot of time referencing founders and you should do the same with us. Make sure you know what they are great at and where they can help and, just as importantly, what they don't support with. It can be pretty tough to get someone off your cap table once they are on it so ask to speak to a portfolio company that has done well and one that hasn't gone to plan to get a rounded picture of them in different situations.

