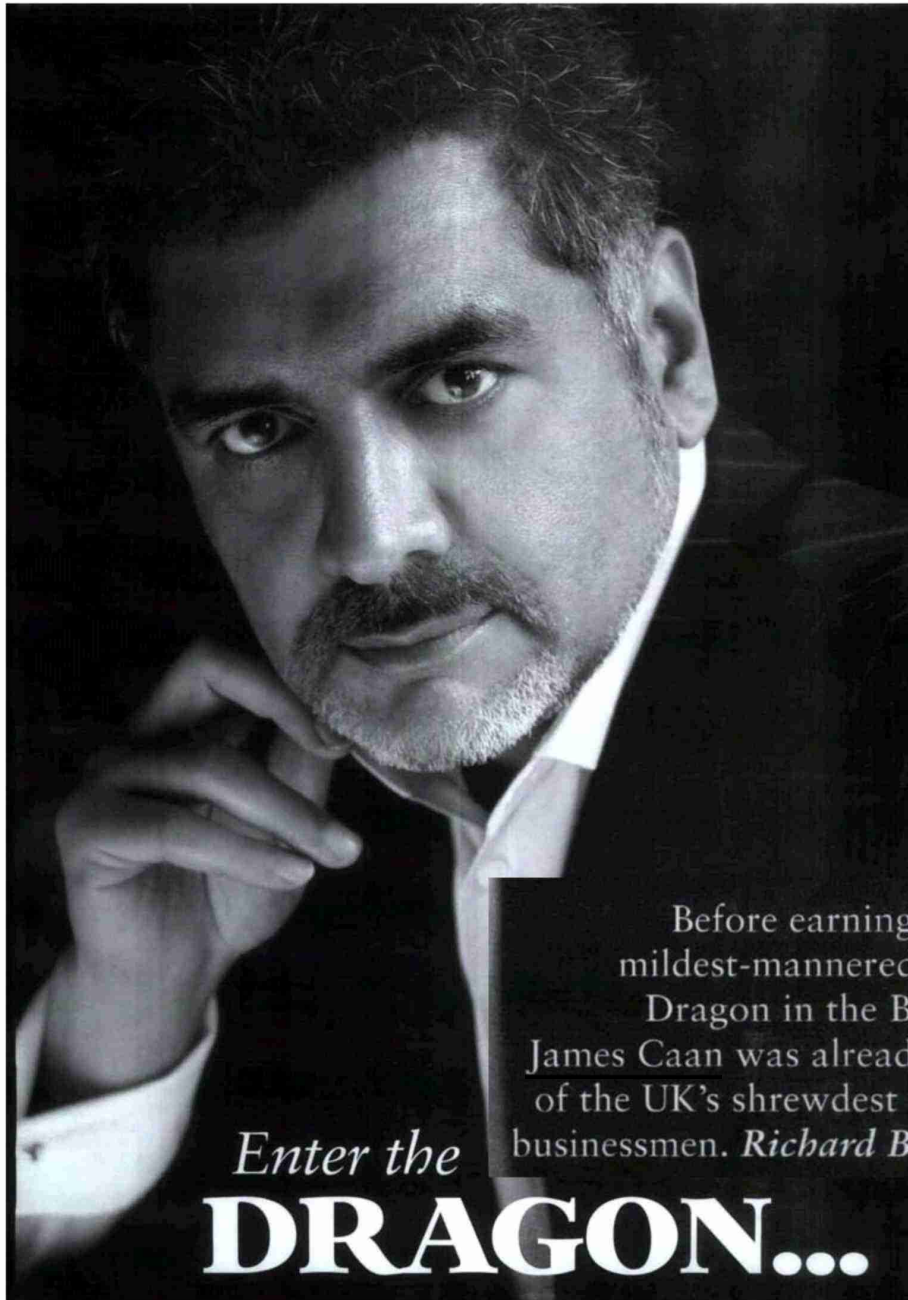


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Before earning a reputation as the mildest-mannered, most level-headed Dragon in the BBC's Dragon's Den, James Caan was already recognised as one of the UK's shrewdest and most successful businessmen. *Richard Brown* finds out why

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Founder and CEO of private equity firm, Hamilton Bradshaw – in whose Mayfair offices we meet – James is able to boast the ‘rags to riches’ story that typifies many self-made millionaire narratives. While his pensive and articulate manner would suggest an academic background and top-tier education, in reality, this couldn’t be further from the truth. James entered the cut-throat culture of the real working world at the age of just 16. Having left school with no qualifications and subsequently declined a position in his father’s fabric business, he held a number of jobs before starting work at a recruitment company as a trainee interviewer.

The job suited him. James quickly realised that selling and interacting with people were two things out of which he could forge a career. After employment in various agencies, James founded Alexander Mann, his own recruitment company and one that would, having started operations out of a broom cupboard of an office in Mayfair, develop into a global brand with a turnover of £130 million. From recruitment, James moved into executive headhunting,

an industry in which he co-founded Humana International. It took the company just six years to expand to 147 offices across 30 countries. In 2003, having sold Humana, James established Hamilton Bradshaw. It was shortly after that that the BBC came knocking.

“I had just set up a private equity firm and all of a sudden I get approached by a TV channel saying, if you come to a studio and sit there, we will go out and find you hundreds of innovators and entrepreneurs all looking for capital. At the time, finding good opportunities for investment wasn’t easy and here was an opportunity that cost me nothing. I would basically be doing what I already did for a living. For me, it worked fantastically.

The programme enabled me to understand any business in any sector. When a guy comes in and wants £600,000 to launch a submarine, you’ve got to be able to analyse the market, the margins, the opportunity, the distribution, the manufacturing, the partners, the equity and put at an



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overall value on the business. That's extremely challenging to do within 20 minutes but by the time I stepped out of the *Dragon's Den*, I could pretty much do that in any sector. Today I have thousands of people approach me in every kind of industry, and I tend to get it immediately."

James admits that the show changed his life. "Unless you have done TV before, how can you be prepared to walk into a restaurant and have everyone stare at you? Or to walk into a shopping centre and be approached by people who want your autograph? It's not natural." For the 2008 Asian Media & Marketing Group's 'Man of the Year', it was an interesting change and there is nothing he regrets. "The truth of the matter is that we choose to do everything. Nobody forces you to do TV and getting recognised is what comes with the territory. If you're not comfortable, don't do it."

James realises that, as his profile has grown, so too has his capacity to provide help to those who most need it. Now, as well as the work he does for The Prince's Trust as Enterprise Fellow and Marie Curie as a senior advisor, James devotes much of his

time to his own charity, The James Caan Foundation (JCF). "When you are successful, you have the opportunity to make a real difference. What I have done through the JCF is essentially applied the expertise I've gained to philanthropy. A lot of charitable administrations are not run as businesses, but if you apply certain business techniques and commercial parameters, you can create a much better organisation."

It is an approach that James has applied to various initiatives in his home country of Pakistan. "We started out by sponsoring a child to allow them to get a better education. Then we thought 'why don't we just build our own school?' Having done that, this year we have built an entire village where we have managed to rehouse a thousand people."

While the sense of satisfaction James gets from his charity work is obvious ("what better feeling can there be than giving someone else a better life?" he asks me), it's also clear that this is a man whose finger rarely strays from the business world's pulse.



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At the start of the year, the St John's Wood resident read an article explaining how, over the next 12 months, nearly 33,000 UK businesses would go into receivership. It was a fact that inspired him two months later to devise his first SmartPhone app. Drawing upon his 30 years of experience, *Business Secrets* offers guidance not just to aspiring entrepreneurs and fledgling businesses, but to anyone looking to improve the performance of their company.

"When I started my business there were so many things I did wrong, purely because I had never done them before. Things like raising capital and attracting the right people, knowing about the financial margins of a business, understanding media and marketing. All of these things have taken me over 20 years to understand. *Business Secrets* was my

opportunity to put all that experience in an app that I could share with the entrepreneurial community."

And it's an app that entrepreneurs have been keen to take advantage of. In the four weeks preceding *Business Secrets'* official launch last month, the aim was to have reached 10,000 downloads. Never having launched

an app, James was sceptical but he needn't have been. *Business Secrets* became the number one app in its very first week, and by the second had already achieved more than 73,000 downloads. "I think we did okay," James smiles.

James has amassed his millions through a career based in recruitment, by investing in people who are both passionate and methodical, and for whom work isn't just a job. "You need people with a kind of fired drive," he says. "People who can evaluate and analyse, and who have a natural knack with people." It's probably because James boasts all of these qualities that he'll remain at the top of his game for many years to come. ■

James founded his own recruitment company... having started operations out of a broom cupboard, it then developed into a global brand