

Karen Emanuel, CEO, Key Production Group



Karen Emanuel is a multi award-winning,* independent, self-financed entrepreneur operating 5 businesses, having converted her passion for music into a career. She is the CEO of [Key Production Group](#), the UK leader in designing and manufacturing of vinyl records, CDs, DVDs, cassettes, plus bespoke packaging for music and other industries. The group turned 30 years old in 2020 and employs 65 people across offices in England and the EU, with a combined turnover around £18m a year. Yet, making money was never Karen's driver. She is happiest doing what she loves, being passionate about **people and the planet**. Giving back is hugely important to her.

BUILDING KEY PRODUCTION BY FOCUSING ON PEOPLE & VALUES

Karen started in music in the 1980s, booking bands and DJ-ing at Leeds University. After graduating, she was told that being a woman in the music industry meant starting as a secretary, after which she could 'possibly' progress to be a personal assistant. But she never learned to type, and in 1990 she used £2,000 in redundancy pay to start Key Production. Then, through a combination of organic growth, making acquisitions, and 'steering her ship' through **turbulent times** (not least when music went from physical products to digital files), she became a leader in her field.

After many years of negotiating with businesses of different types, Karen found people coming to her for advice. She started mentoring and speaking, sharing her ups and downs, what she's learnt, and continues to learn. **Sustainability, diversity and equality** are what Karen aspires to in all aspects of life. Key Production has a high staff retention rate thanks to its **strong company**

culture and an ability to inspire her teams via mentoring and training. Eleven of her team have reached 20+ years of service at Key.

SURVIVING INDUSTRY and MARKET CHALLENGES

One of the hardest things Karen faced was making a proportion of her workforce redundant, which happened when the market for CD singles nearly dried up, having been a mainstay product. Recently, the challenges have been very different: **Brexit supply chain** issues, and an **overwhelming demand** for vinyl records amid limited capacity to make them.

CHAMPIONING WOMEN IN MUSIC

When Karen started Key, people would arrive at her office and ask to see the boss. She was the boss! This is just one reason why she co-founded [mtnNOW](#) (MTN) - the educational support group encouraging women of all ethnicities, backgrounds and personalities to enter the *wide range of careers* available in the UK music industry: They don't have to hold a microphone to join this vibrant, economically-important sector - one worth £5Bn a year. In an industry where women disappear in their droves once reaching their forties, mtnNOW supports and nurtures women to achieve their *full potential*. Female-owned companies contribute £105Bn to the UK economy, yet just a third of UK businesses are owned by women - something Karen is keen to address. It's about doing more 'growing', but also 'giving back'.

CHARITY PATRON

Besides mtnNOW, Karen has been involved in various charities over the years, encouraging her staff to join in. She sits on the advisory board of [Migrate Art](#) who use art to change the world. Key Production Group's charity this year is [Attitude is Everything](#). AIE connects disabled people with music and live event industries to improve access together. Employees are encouraged to raise money for AIE and/or volunteer for local charities that each office at Key have also chosen to support.

EMERGING SOLUTIONS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN

Another aspect of manufacturing Karen has much to say about is how to make it more **sustainable**. She works closely with factories to ensure they employ best practice, and helps clients understand what innovations are becoming available in the marketplace. Key Production was first carbon-balanced in 2007, and now Key is proud to be declared carbon positive through [C-Level](#), as well as being in the final stages of verification for becoming a B-Corp. Karen sits on environmental advisory boards, and is passionate about sharing her knowledge with anyone who will listen!

* [NatWest Everywoman Award](#) - overall winner 2019

* [Women In Music Role of Honour](#) - 2019

* [Great British Businesswoman Award 2021](#): Engineering and manufacturing businesswoman of the year, 2021

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