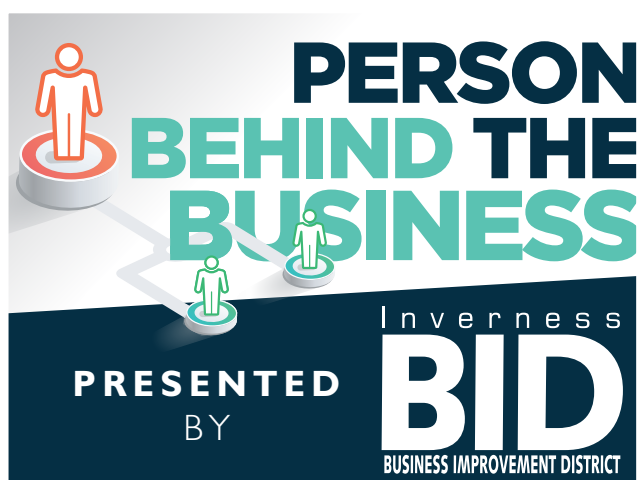


# We've survived and thrived through traumatic times

Anyone who is growing or starting a business now is amazing says Inverness-based **Garek Begg**, chairman of Begg Shoes and Bags



**PERSON BEHIND THE BUSINESS**

PRESENTED BY **Inverness BID**  
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

## Q How would you describe your business?

**A** Begg Shoes is a family-run business, established in 1866 that offers a wide range of products from top brands and shoemakers from all over the world.

We have nine shops across the north of Scotland including two in Inverness and our core values are offering high-quality products, with an expert shoe-fitting service to our customers.

Our business has 55

staff, many of whom are long-standing employees with over 20 years' service. We work hard on training and developing expertise in our stores to ensure that we offer expert advice as well as a warm welcome.

We take pride in doing business differently compared to others within the retail industry and this has been a driver for our success. This includes offering industry-leading standards of pay, as an accredited real living wage employer. Our aim is to look after the employees who will ultimately drive the long-term success of our business.

While we have maintained many of our traditional values, software and technology are at the core of the business and our website [beggshoes.com](http://beggshoes.com) has become a major part of the business.

Website orders are fulfilled directly from our stores and this integration of modern retail technology to our traditional stores has been a huge success. The bumper stock selection needed for our online offering is available to all our customers in store, who can also browse the full catalogue from the comfort of their sofa.

## Q What led you into the business?

**A** I was always fascinated with shoes and started in the family business when I was at school, working Saturdays and holidays under my father in our shop in Elgin and really enjoyed it. I studied accountancy and then went into business with my father and brother.

Training under my grandfather, who was a great teacher, I developed an extensive understanding of shoemaking, shoe repairs and the key features of the styles that we went on to sell.



Garek Begg, chairman of Begg Shoes and Bags.

I ran our shops with my brother for several years and I opened in Inverness in 1983, where I have been based ever since.

## Q What is your greatest achievement?

**A** Taking the company into its sixth generation, developing a model which is fit for the future, where we provide excellent shoe shopping experiences in our stores and online.

Software and innovation has been key to the resilience of our business. Twenty years ago, I developed and subsequently programmed the IT system that services our till and stock purchasing and which is still in use today.

Begg Shoes has survived and thrived through traumatic times in the footwear industry – from the offshoring of production to the Far East to the financial crisis of the '80s and most recently the Covid pandemic and the current currency crisis that has followed.

## Q Who do you admire in business?

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**A** Anybody who can survive and grow a business today is amazing and also anyone who has the nerve to start a new business because the personal toil they go through is really something you can only understand if you do it yourself.

## Q What's your advice to budding entrepreneurs?

**A** Take off your rose-tinted specs, keep your optimism and do your homework on your costs and above all, know who your customers are and how you are going to keep them happy.

## Q Can you tell us more about yourself?

**A** I was a World Cup skier in my younger days – although I didn't win any races.

I still ski for pleasure and also Scuba dive and I'm an instructor in both as well as a keen cyclist. It's any excuse to get outdoors!

I also ran a farm for 20 years at my home where we kept 120 sheep.

In business, I am a former chairman of Inverness BID.



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