

SheHer

# Tech GIANTS

**Sara Yirrell**  
Freelance Editor and Writer



E: [gemma@sheher.co.uk](mailto:gemma@sheher.co.uk)  
T: +44 (0) 7976 645756  
[linkedin.com/in/gemmatelford](https://www.linkedin.com/in/gemmatelford)

**[sheher.co.uk](https://www.sheher.co.uk)**

I'm **Gemma Telford**, Founder of She/Her Ltd, and I specialise in human marketing for technology businesses. My work redefines and evolves traditional marketing in the IT sector through a more collaborative, flexible, human-centric approach. Cultivating partnerships that deliver mutual value by starting real conversations and delivering work which excites, inspires and connects people.

I started **Tech Giants** to celebrate some of the great people I've worked with in the channel over the last 20 years and to share their wisdom and knowledge with others. I hope you enjoy reading about them!

---

**Gemma:** Right. Here we go. How did the Channel Awards judging go? Are you all done?

**Sara:** Yes, we're all done. Um, honestly, I'm brain dead I think after reading all those entries. There were a lot more than there has been for good few years which is good. But Oh my God, I had to read every single one of them and I was just about done by the end of it. And I had the Women in Channel entries to do just before that as well. I've done about three weeks of constant entry reading. So, I am just...yeah. Blimey.

**Gemma:** Right. So, for you, this first question is not as straightforward as it might be for other people! It is: what is your current role and how did you get into it?

**Sara:** So I am - and everyone gets confused by this - I am a freelance journalist and editor and I've been doing that for 6 years now. This is my 7th year of being a freelancer and before this I was Editor of CRN. Actually, I should say I was Editorial Director of CRN UK and Channelnomics, which covered the UK, European and US channel. And I've done various roles at CRN for 17 years and I thought it was time for change basically. So here I am. Woohoo.

**Gemma:** OK. And then can you tell me a bit of background about your career in the channel? How did you get into it originally?

**Sara:** I think like everyone, it was an accident. I started my journalism career on local papers, so I was a reporter for three years on the Northampton Chronicle and it was great grounding. We had the traditional news editor that used to yell at you if you did anything wrong. So, you know, you really learned your trade very quickly. You had very tight deadlines and it was very intense. It was a daily newspaper. After I'd been there a couple of years, I started getting into video games and a lot of people that know me don't know that. I asked the Editor at the time, could I launch a computer video game review page. Basically, I wanted free stuff, you know. Yeah, I loved games. So, I did that. And - we're talking a long time ago now - technology wasn't really that well known. After that, then any technology related stories used to come to me.

After about three years, I thought, well, you know, I'm really enjoying this, but I'd quite like to do something different. So, I started looking at different roles. And I saw an ad for CRN - I hadn't got a clue what it was! But I went along to the interview and thought, 'Oh my God, what the hell are these people talking about?' And you know, 'What the hell is a channel?' and, 'I don't know what a computer really does!' But, there we go. I got the job! So here I am now, all these years later!

**Gemma:** There you go! Do you know what, I'm a big fan of The Rest is Politics. And Alastair Campbell started out in a local newspaper and he said it's the best grounding you can get.

**Sara:** Yeah. It really is. I mean - you see some hideous things. You know, you do some awful stories, horrible, horrible things. But you also see some absolutely ridiculous stuff that you then have to turn into a story. So, it is the best grounding because you can literally write about anything. Yeah, I found it very useful.

**Gemma:** OK. What's the best thing about working in the channel?

**Sara:** The people. I mean, I just love channel people. I think they're great. They're great fun. Over the years, you know, I've met some real characters and formed some really good bonds with people. And they've been great for helping me out with stories and you know, getting all those scoops that we used to have when scoops were a thing – before the Internet really took over. And it's been a lasting thing, you know, these people I've been speaking to for 20 plus years. So, I think that's the best thing about it. And once you're in the channel, you never leave. It's sort of like the Hotel California, isn't it? It's just a good industry to be in. It's great fun. It changes all the time. So, it's never boring. I think that's a good thing about it.

**Gemma:** Yeah, very true. I agree. And what's your biggest frustration? Apart from having to read 4 million entries for the awards?!

**Sara:** Well, I could talk about all sorts of frustrations, but in in terms of the channel or in terms of the work...

**Gemma:** Yeah, otherwise, I think it'd probably be trains!

**Sara:** Yeah, trains are definitely one thing! For me with CRN...I think the frustration is the awards and the perception people still have that they're fixed. That's one of my biggest bug bears because we've got panels of judges that give up hours of time to go through the entries and make sure it's as independent as it possibly can be. And then you still have people saying, 'Well it's all a fix and if I bought this many adverts, we'd win an award'. And it drives me insane because it really isn't the case. We wouldn't get all these people involved if that was how it all worked. So that's one thing. Then, we talk a lot about how difficult it is it is for women in our industry, and I totally get that. I mean, I've been quite lucky. I have come across, you know, my fair share of incidents and attitudes and that kind of thing. But I think it's frustrating

that it's still a thing we have to talk about. When these days, it should just be, you know, a given that you've got an equal mix of women and men in an organisation. It's just annoying that that is still an issue we're talking about in this day and age.

**Gemma:** Yeah, I agree. And I know from being a judge, how independent and how hard that process is. Also, I know that as a judge, that I have literally no idea what any of those companies have in terms of a relationship with CRN. So, I don't know if they bought no adverts or a million adverts!

**Sara:** Yeah. Exactly – so it's very annoying.

**Gemma:** Um, OK. Next question is, what are you working on right now that excites you?

**Sara:** Well, as you know, a lot of my work is still CRN based and we're on the verge of launching a new sustainability initiative, which is really exciting. I've been working on that for months. It really has been a long time. So that's very near to launch. Also, I'm working on the Women in Technology Festival in October for them as well. I'll be chairing a channel stream for that. Talking to different people and finding out what's going on is fascinating. It really is. So that's two major things that are taking up so much of my time at the moment.

**Gemma:** What's the date for the Women in Technology festival?

**Sara:** It's the 31st of October. London. The link is [womenintechfestivalglobal.com](http://womenintechfestivalglobal.com) if you'd like to attend.

**Gemma:** OK, what are you most proud of in your career today?

**Sara:** Probably still being here. You know, it's never a given, is it, that when you start a career it's going to go well, or that things are going to work out. But I know when I took the step to become a freelancer, a lot of people said 'Ohh, you know, well that's a risky move and you might regret that and you'll be back in full

time work in no time because you won't like it and you won't get the work.' And it's not been the case at all. I've been really lucky; I've had a lot of varied stuff going on since I left CRN. I'm just proud of still being here and still being relevant, I guess.

**Gemma:** That's really good to hear. I think so as well. Because, working for yourself, there are always downsides, aren't there? You're always worried about the next thing. But I think you can't beat it, can you? I can't imagine I would go back to a full-time job now.

**Sara:** Yeah, me too. Honestly. I think I'm unemployable now!

**Gemma:** OK...what was your biggest mistake?

**Sara:** Oh my God, there's so many of them.

**Gemma:** I'm thinking, was it the gin?

**Sara:** Ohh. It's always, always, gin! I think...um...in the early days it was not standing up enough for myself. You know, I had a few people I worked with that were, not very pleasant, let's say. And I didn't stand up for myself. I didn't feel confident enough to, you know, actually say 'What you're saying is wrong and you don't treat people like that, and you know that that's not how it works'. I think I regret that. I regret not being more confident and, and also not being more confident in my abilities.

There were probably areas where I handled people wrong that that worked for me as well. Where maybe I assumed a bit too much and should have looked into a couple of things earlier than I did and could have avoided a couple of things going a bit wrong. But, you know, you learn from stuff, don't you?

**Gemma:** You absolutely do, yeah, definitely learn from those things. Um, what's one piece of advice you found useful, or that you pass on to people?

**Sara:** Actually, when I was a student, I did some work experience on Talk Radio. I don't know if it's still going. I was lucky enough to spend some time with some of the presenters there, and one of them gave me really good advice that I've always followed and it's about life being a marathon not a sprint. Just not trying to rush to get anywhere, but really making sure you're on that right path and getting to where you want to be - but getting that experience along the way. I think that's something I always tell people - don't try and rush, just really get to know your trade and know what you want to make out of life. Take time to work out where you want to be and don't let people judge you, basically just be you. I think that's good advice.

I think especially these days there's that pressure that you have to have succeeded straight away isn't there? There's this whole pressure on young people now about YouTube and - not YouTube, I'm sounding really old now, but TikTok - and being famous and being an influencer. And if you're not, if you haven't got millions of followers, you haven't made it in life. It really doesn't matter. Don't base what you do on what people think. Just be happy with what you're doing, that's all that matters, really. Don't let other people tell you what you should be doing and how you should be thinking and acting and looking. It drives me insane.

**Gemma:** Yeah, that sort of staying true to yourself and having that confidence, that goes back to what you were saying before, doesn't it? A lot of those things, you know, like I haven't got enough followers, it's not to do with you, is it? It's just external validation.

**Sara:** Exactly, yeah.

**Gemma:** So what's next for you?

**Sara:** Ohh, I don't really know. This is the beauty of my job really. I never know what's around the corner and I quite like that. I've been very lucky that every year there's always been something different to get involved in and then you know, as the years go on, I'm still working with the

same people I was working with years ago. I think it's just exciting, I have no idea what's next. Whatever comes around the corner I'll run into it. So that's it. Yeah, it's nice like that.

**Gemma:** Have you got a favourite book, film, song, piece of music, anything like that?

**Sara:** All of the above. I have so many of all of those. I can't pick just one. Ohh gosh...uh...books. I have a very strange taste in books. I have a guilty pleasure in reading chicklit, which is really embarrassing, but you know, because it's just so not true - you don't go out and meet the perfect man and life is wonderful at the end of it. But I just love escaping into that. I also love really dark crime thrillers and that kind of stuff. So I haven't got a favourite because honestly, I can't pick one. I've got so many.

**Gemma:** That's alright.

**Sara:** Music. I have several bands that I've loved most of my life. U2. Anything by them. ABBA is another massive passion of mine. Anything from the 80s. I'm a massive 80s fan, so I can't just pick one. It's impossible.

**Gemma:** Fair enough. OK, that's a bit mean. How was the ABBA Voyage dinner? You were just about to do that last time I saw you.

**Sara:** It's really good. I preferred the Voyage experience. I'm lucky to have done both. But it was, yeah, I think everyone should do it. If you're an ABBA fan, you should definitely give it a go. It's quite immersive and it's just good fun.

**Gemma:** Yeah, I'm going to have to give it a go, I think. I've heard lots of people say the same. Next question - I was going to ask you for a little-known fact about you.

**Sara:** I think there's quite a few. Obviously, there's the gaming side. I'm a real retro gaming geek. I love collecting that kind of stuff. Most people probably know I run a ukulele group, so that's probably not a little-known fact. I also ride motorbikes,

which I'm not sure many people know. And the other thing is, I'm a gardening geek as well. I love growing vegetables. So yeah, I'm a very weird mix of all sorts of different things, really.

**Gemma:** So have you got a bike at the moment?

**Sara:** I do. I have two. And have I been out on them this year? No, I haven't had time, which is ridiculous. But yes, I know they're there.

**Gemma:** Do you know what? It's so nice doing this with a journalist. I ask you a question, you just answer it. Whereas most people just sort of go off on a little story, then come back about half an hour later. Which is good too. But I love that you've just given straight answers.

**Sara:** I hope they were not too boring and quick!

**Gemma:** No, not at all!

**Sara:** It's really weird being on the other end of the interview. When you're doing the interview it's so different. Then when you're the one being interviewed - I've done it a few times - you think, ohh God, I'm really boring and nobody's going to be interested, or I'm saying the wrong thing.

**Gemma:** I don't think anyone could accuse you of being boring with all of that stuff going on! Well, thank you very much. That is my questions. All done.

**Sara:** Fab, Thanks so much for your time. That was brilliant.

If you'd like to suggest a Tech Giant, find out more about the work She/Her Ltd does, or have a question or feedback then please get it touch!

E: [gemma@sheher.co.uk](mailto:gemma@sheher.co.uk)  
T: +44 (0) 7976 645756  
[linkedin.com/in/gemmatelford](https://www.linkedin.com/in/gemmatelford)

**[sheher.co.uk](https://sheher.co.uk)**

**SheHer**