

Sir Richard Branson was educated at Stowe until he was 16 years old and he began his entrepreneurial activities there by the setting up of Student Magazine. When he was 17, he opened a Student Advisory Centre, his very first charity institution. Branson set up a record mail order business in 1970, started a record shop in London shortly afterwards and then in 1972 the record label Virgin Records with Nik Powell, opening a recording studio. The company's first issue was multi-instrumentalist Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells, which was to be a best-seller. Branson's company also courted controversy by signing bands like the Sex Pistols, whose contract more conventional companies had dispensed with. Virgin also introduced Culture Club to the music world. Later, in 1992, Branson sold the Virgin label to EMI, the conventional company who had rescinded the contract of the Pistols. He later formed V2 Records when re-entering the music business.

Described as "flamboyant" by the mainstream media, Branson's personality can partly be credited for his successful career. Branson is known for his outlandish media events used to promote his businesses. He is keen on playful antagonisms, exemplified by his "Mine is bigger than yours" decals on the new Airbus A340-600 jets used by his airline.

The hot air balloon the "Virgin Atlantic Flyer" was the first hot air balloon ever to cross the Atlantic Ocean, and was the largest ever flown at 60,513 m³ (2,137,000 ft³) volume, reaching speeds in excess of 130 mph (209 km/h). In 1991, Branson crossed the Pacific Ocean from Japan to Arctic Canada, a distance of 7,672 km (4,767 miles), but their track took them a claimed 10,885 km. This again broke all existing records with speeds of up to 245 mph (394 km/h) in a balloon measuring 74,000 m³ (2,600,000 ft³). In October 2003, he teamed up with balloonist Steve Fossett as lead sponsor for an attempt to break the record for a non-stop flight around the world. A new aircraft, the GlobalFlyer, was built specially for the attempt by Scaled Composites and on March 3, 2005, at about 01:50 PM CST, Fossett completed the record-breaking flight after 67 hours and 1 minute, with an average speed of nearly 300 mph (480 km/h).

He formed Virgin Atlantic Airways in 1984, launched Virgin Mobile in 1999, Virgin Blue in Australia in 2000, and later failed in a 2000 bid to handle the National Lottery. He has also started a European short-haul airline, Virgin Express, and a national airline based in Nigeria, called Virgin Nigeria. Another airline, Virgin America, is set to launch out of San Francisco in 2006. Branson also attempted to develop a Virgin Cola brand, which was not a successful enterprise. The Private Eye has been critical of Branson's companies. [citation needed]

After the so-called campaign of "dirty tricks," Branson sued rival airline British Airways (BA) for libel in 1992. John King, then-chairman of BA, countersued Branson, and the case went to trial in 1993. British Airways, faced with likely defeat, settled the case, giving £500,000 to Branson and a further £110,000 to his airline; further, BA was to pay the legal fees of up to £3 million. Branson divided his compensation among his staff, the so-called "BA bonus."

Besides his activity in business, in 1987 he started Virgin Healthcare Foundation, a charity foundation that helps people with AIDS. In July 2003, Branson flew a replica of the first heavier-than-air flying machine, the glider designed by Sir George Cayley, at the original site in Yorkshire.

On September 25, 2004 he announced the signing of a deal under which a new space tourism company, Virgin Galactic, will license the technology behind SpaceShipOne to take paying passengers into suborbital space. The group plans to make flights available to the public by late 2007 with tickets priced at \$200,000. The deal was mostly financed by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, and the modern American space engineer & visionary, Burt Rutan.

Branson has been tagged as a 'transformational leader' by management lexicon, with his maverick strategies and his stress on the Virgin Group as an organization driven on informality and information, one that's bottom heavy rather than strangled by top-level management.

Although Richard Branson says his success was not planned, and it just happened, he affirms that he has got 10 secrets to success:

You've got to challenge the big ones.

Keep it casual.

Haggle: everything is negotiable.

Have fun working.

Do the right things for the brand.

Smile for the cameras!

Don't lead "sheep", herd "cats".

Move like a bullet.

Size does matter.

Be a common, regular person.

Branson was 7th in the Sunday Times Rich List 2005.

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Politics

He was feted by the Conservative government in the 1980s and was briefly given the post of "litter tsar" by Margaret Thatcher, charged with "keeping Britain tidy". He was again seen as close to the government when the Labour Party came to power in 1997. In 2005 he declared that there were only negligible differences between the two main parties on economic matters.[1] He reputedly considered running for Mayor of London in 2004, but decided not to. Branson has described himself as a libertarian.

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Honours

In 1993 Richard Branson received the honorary degree of Doctor of Technology from Loughborough University.

He became Sir Richard Branson when he was knighted by the Queen in 1999 for "services to entrepreneurship"[2].

He is the Patron of the International Rescue Corps which is one of the few truly independent front-line search and rescue organisations in the world - a UK registered charity, financed solely by donations and their own fund raising, and manned totally by volunteers.

He has guest starred, playing himself, on several television shows, including Friends, Baywatch, Birds of a Feather, The Daily Show, Only Fools and Horses, The Day Today and a special episode of the comedy Goodness Gracious Me. He also was the star of a reality television show on Fox called The Rebel Billionaire where sixteen contestants were tested for their entrepreneurship and their sense of adventure. It did not succeed as a rival show to Donald Trump's The Apprentice and only lasted one season.

Sir Richard appears at No. 85 on the 2002 list of "100 Greatest Britons" (sponsored by the BBC and voted for by the public). Branson's high public profile often leaves him open as a figure of satire - the 2000 AD series Zenith featured a parody of Branson as a supervillain as at the time the comic's publisher and favoured distributor and the Virgin group were in competition. He is also caricatured in The Simpsons episode Monty Can't Buy Me Love as the tycoon Arthur Fortune.