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Range of backgrounds: the female presence is strong in the social media sector. London-based Sendible is a prime example

ANTHONY UPSON

## Making the sciences fashionable

**T**HINK fashion is a career a world away from technology? Well, think again. ASOS, net-a-porter and a host of smaller firms – such as Snap Fashion – heavily rely on tech. In fact, Jenny Griffiths, founder and CEO of Snap, is a computer scientist and software engineer, not a dress designer. Griffiths is part of a new EDF Energy programme that will introduce teenage girls to inspiring role models, via a video content series, to demonstrate the breadth of career opportunities available in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Beauty is another sector not always associated with science, but it is heavily reliant on it. Florence Adepoju, a cosmetic scientist and founder of makeup brand MDMflow, will be another of the EDF role models as part of a programme that will also see a series of events across the UK. EDF Energy hopes to change teenage girls' perceptions after its research discovered that girls are unsure what they can do with a science qualification and feel they are too creative to go into science. They also lack role models,

Role models are great for inspiration but understanding what particular jobs involve can be key to attracting more people – particularly women – to work in science, engineering, technology and maths, says **Niki Chesworth**

with fewer than a tenth of 11 to 16-year-old girls knowing someone that works in a science or engineering-based job. Today, STEMNET, the charity which aims to encourage pupils to study STEM subjects and pursue careers in the sector by connecting them with inspiring role models, is holding its annual awards at the House of Lords. With more than 30,000 STEM ambassadors and connections with 90 per cent of secondary schools, the charity supports teachers, runs clubs and aims to inspire young people to think about the broad range of opportunities which

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**Adeline Ginn, Women in Rail**

STEM subjects open up. However, while role models can inspire, it is a greater understanding of roles that makes the real difference. Samantha Lovell, 28, from Essex, a heavy maintenance planner at Angel Trains, started working in the industry "by accident" three years ago and had never considered it as a career choice. "I was working as a shop assistant with a tailor in Savile Row to feed my passion for fashion. It wasn't getting me where I wanted, so I started looking for a job where I could be trained in new skills," she says. "Angel Trains advertised a position as a 'general admin role' and stated they were looking for young people to train up from fresh, so no prior experience was necessary. It was 12 hours before the interview that I found out I was interviewing for a role in the rail industry." After securing the job, she found she loved how "fascinating" the sector is

and the fact that she is "constantly learning new things". Adeline Ginn, founder of Women in Rail and general counsel at Angel Trains, says part of the problem is unconscious bias. "In industries such as rail, which is still male-dominated, young girls and women's own unconscious beliefs about themselves may be holding them back," she says.

**SOCIAL MEDIA THRIVING**  
One area where there is less of a male stereotype is social media. Unlike engineering, women are more familiar with social media. Gavin Hammar, the founder and CEO of London-based Sendible, says: "Roles range from content writers, researchers and strategists, to brand ambassadors whose primary job is to engage, entice, and create viral content. Other jobs include designers to allow good visuals and video to create vines and clips."

Sendible, which generates leads and manages social media activity, says recruits come from a range of backgrounds. "It can relate to a marketing degree, especially since it's become such a crucial aspect of the marketing role," says Hammar. "Any journalistic, editorial, PR or media relations will equip you with the skills to work in this industry." However, he admits that roles often appeal to younger generations. That is why the focus is now on education. This September, the UK's first two Digital Career Colleges opened – one in Barking & Dagenham and the other at Harrow College – teaching skills relevant to the digital industry. Cathy Walsh, principal and CEO of Barking & Dagenham College, says: "Vital work capabilities like creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism will provide our trainees with the edge that employers now demand." Ruth Gilbert, CEO of the Career Colleges Trust, adds: "Alongside the requirement for technically skilled individuals, there is also a need for people with more general e-business skills such as e-commerce and e-marketing."