



STARTUP STORIES

NOTES FROM FOUNDERS

THE GAME CHANGERS

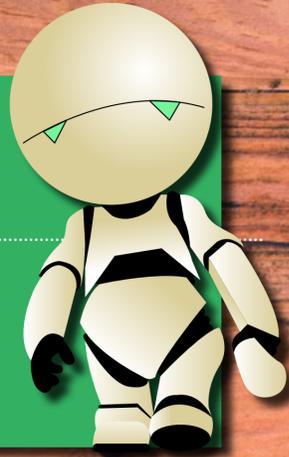
Issue 05 Vol. 02

THE GAME CHANGERS

While some people learn to simply work around problems, these entrepreneurs set out to solve them. Whether they're challenging the banking industry or making brand engagements smarter, they're never going to settle for 'good enough'.

02 | Relay42

Read how one founder went from building a home server at 13, to helping brands optimize their advertising and communications.



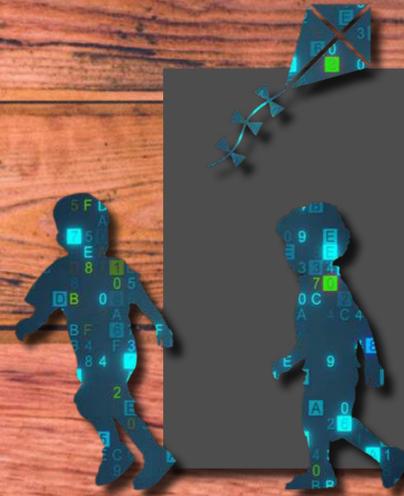
01 | dataiku

Discover how one founder's desire to bring teams closer together, led to a company that makes business intelligence accessible to everyone.



03 | Optio.AI

Take inspiration from two childhood friends from Georgia, on a mission to help customers better manage their personal finances.



04 | CREDIMI

Learn how a Milan-based fintech is revolutionizing how small businesses access short-term financing.



05 | SafeDK

Find out how a challenging build project gave one founder the idea to help mobile app publishers build better and safer apps.



BRIDGING THE TECH SKILLS GAP

There's a global skills gap when it comes to working with data and building AI or machine learning projects. It can cause miscommunication, frustration, and delays across all industries and divide staff into teams of those who have the skills, and those who don't. In 2013, problem solver Florian Douetteau set about plugging the gap by founding Dataiku with three friends. The platform makes it easier for people to confidently use data analytics tools, AI software, and other complex software, even if they lack advanced technical skills.

'There's a disconnect between business people and tech people'

In 2013, I was working for various tech businesses in Paris building their analytics and data capabilities. Back then, there was a huge divide between business-minded and tech-minded people within companies when it came to how they thought about and used data. In meetings where business stakeholders would sit down with data scientists and engineers, conversations were always chaotic, further reinforcing differences between the two sides. Outside the meeting room, the teams only communicated with each other via email or PowerPoint, neither of which were very effective or useful in terms of encouraging innovation. I wanted to build a data product that would help teams work better together. That was the start of Dataiku.

'We took advantage of our different skills'

Dataiku's four co-founders each come from a different business background, so we took advantage of our individual skills and experiences. Thomas Cabrol is a data scientist who became our Chief Data Scientist; Marc Batty is a business transformation consultant who became our Chief Customer Officer; Clément Sténac has an engineering background and became Chief Technology Officer and I took on the role of CEO.



Florian Douetteau has worked in tech since starting his PhD at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. After nearly 15 years of working for companies such as Exalead and IsCool, he set up Dataiku with three co-founders in 2013. Florian resides in Bastille, Paris and is passionate about AI and data science.



Florian Douetteau

Co-founder & CEO of Dataiku



'We needed to understand our customers' problems'

In our first two years, we focused on the product and customer engagement. We needed to understand our customers' data problems, so we could help solve them. Lots of our customers back then were only just starting to use AWS – by migrating their data to [Amazon Simple Storage Service \(Amazon S3\)](#), and trying [Amazon Redshift](#) or similar technologies.

To bridge the tech skills gap, we set about building a user-friendly interface, so that business people could confidently leverage services like Amazon Redshift or [Amazon EMR](#) without having to ask for permission from their IT guy. We got very hands on, delivering some partitional services and developing our main product at the same time.

'We started using AWS right from day one'

Integrating and working with AWS was one of our first objectives as an organization. It's doubly useful to us – we use AWS within our own company, and we enable our customers to leverage AWS themselves. In my eyes, AWS is the best platform of its kind. You can pick and choose each service you need – whether that's something completely packaged, or something you build upon.

'Startup incubators can be inspirational spaces'

Initially we were working from home, but it wasn't ideal because each of us only had a tiny flat in Paris. Within a couple of months, we'd moved to a startup incubator called Agoranov in the city and hired our first employees. Several famous

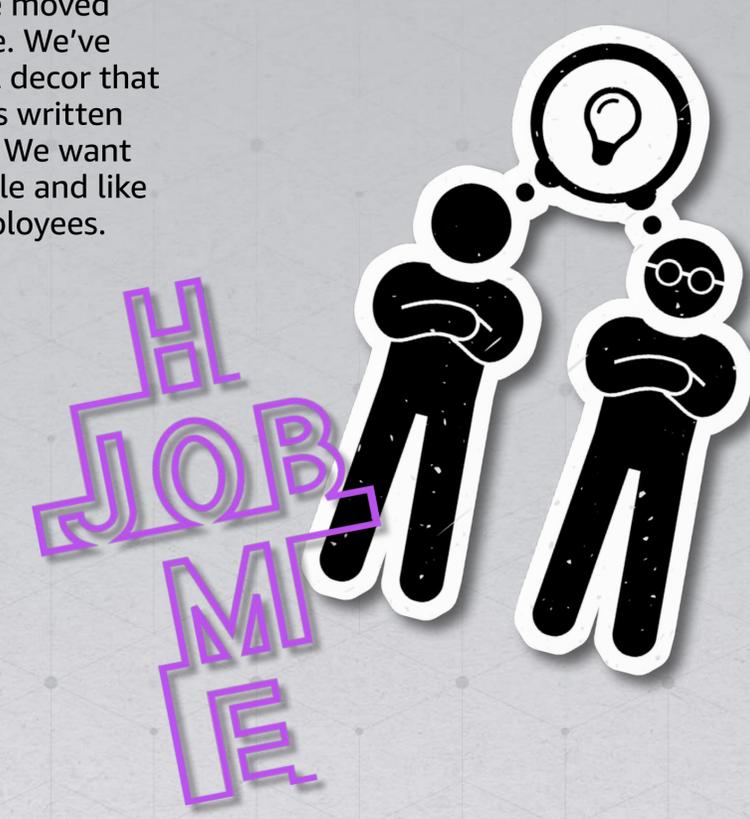
French startups had come from there, such as the personalized retargeting company – Criteo.

Being with other startups was really useful. It wasn't so much that we could learn from them – it was more about having a community that shared our startup mindset.

'We want our staff to feel at home'

After two years at Agoranov, we moved into our own proper office space. We've never gone for the stereotypical decor that many startups have, like phrases written on the walls in big, bold letters. We want something that feels comfortable and like a home-from-home for our employees.

BE PART OF A
COMMUNITY THAT
SHARES YOUR
STARTUP MINDSET



TO BRIDGE THE TECH
SKILLS GAP, WE SET ABOUT
BUILDING A USER-FRIENDLY
INTERFACE



Clean & Wrangle



Build & Apply
Machine Learning



Mining & Visualization



Deploy
to Production



Monitor & Adjust

'Our business experience isn't something you can learn from a book'

For us, hiring involved lots of networking, including following up with people we'd met previously, alerting our network, working on the marketing of the company, and going to startup events. Having a consistent founding team was a huge help. We're all pretty similar in that we're aged between 30 and 35, and have 10 to 15 years of work experience.

I wouldn't have been able to start the company by myself fresh out of school. I know some people do it, but our combined understanding of the business scene, our ability to find our first customers and employees, and our ability to network is something you just can't learn from a book.

'I bring like-minded people together to encourage innovation'

Managing staff was a bit of a departure for me, but I enjoy coordinating employees and bringing like-minded staff together to encourage innovation. When you're growing a company, you need to talk to prospective employees and see where there's a commonality between what they want to do with their life, and what the company needs from them.

'The key to retaining staff is honesty'

You should make sure every employee understands and believes in the trajectory, and the mission of the company right from their first day with you. I've seen a lot of startups trying to come across as more successful than they actually are when attracting talent. But employees go to a company because of the story they've heard, and they stay because they believe in that story. If there's a discrepancy between what you're telling them and the real story, you end up with a post-honeymoon effect, and employees get disheartened.

'If you have international offices, make sure everyone knows each other's workstyle'

We're one of those companies that started the product in one city, then quickly expanded within Europe, to the US and Asia. Our main offices are in London, New York, and Paris. The challenge is to balance the differences in each place's workstyle. There's no one way of working that makes sense to everyone. For instance, the time a team will go out for a beer is different for the UK office, the France office, and the US office. If you don't understand the differences, there can be miscommunication between international teams or even conflict.

YOU NEED TO FIND THE COMMONALITY BETWEEN WHAT PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES WANT TO DO AND WHAT THE COMPANY NEEDS FROM THEM



'Our ultimate goal is to be a large independent software vendor'

In the next few years, we aim to get into new markets, double our annual revenue and employee count, and get listed on the public stock market. Small and medium sized software vendors usually end up getting acquired by US companies, but we want to be a big European vendor and keep our independence.

'One day I may not be the CEO of Dataiku, and I'm okay with that'

I realize that heading up a company of 50 or 100 people is very different to heading up a team of 1000 staff, so I know there's a chance my role might change with time. The chances are there might be an

opportunity for others to take over from me down the line, and that's alright. The worst thing for me would be if the company grew and I felt coerced into staying in my position if it didn't feel right.

'I wish there was an extra 24 hours in the week'

I sometimes think there should be a day between Sunday and Monday! If such a day did exist, I'd use it to read. With work, my digital life and Netflix, I spend much less time reading than I'd like to. I enjoy non-fiction, but I also like thrillers, fantasy and science fiction. I love the feeling of a book in my hand, but I don't read enough. I guess an extra 24 hours in the week would be one way to fix that!

'I want to last the journey'

You have to give yourself the chance to recharge and take your mind off the business. Spending time with my two children helps me focus on things that matter more than work. I also like to play the piano; I've played since I was five and it lets me escape by doing something completely different.

Stress isn't conducive to longevity when it comes to building a business. People can only do something very intense for one or two years. If they work too hard, they burn out. I never put myself in intense situations, because building a business is a marathon, not a sprint. I want to last the journey.

GIVE YOURSELF THE CHANCE TO

RECHARGE AND TAKE YOUR

MIND OFF THE BUSINESS

AT A GLANCE



Florian Douetteau founded Dataiku with Thomas Cabrol, Marc Batty and Clément Sténac in 2013.



Dataiku makes it easier for non-technical people to use machine learning, data science, and more.



The company has raised \$145 million, including \$101 million in 2018.



Dataiku has offices all over the world. Its three main offices are in London, New York, and 'Silicon Sentier' in Paris.



It uses [Amazon Redshift](#) and [Amazon EMR](#), amongst other AWS services.



www.dataiku.com

FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



Founder Stories



CONCENTRATE



Remembering Avisai Cohé

GET PUMPED



Dragon Attack Queen

CHILL-OUT



In The Lap Of Gods... Revisited - Live Queen

Spotify account & internet connection required

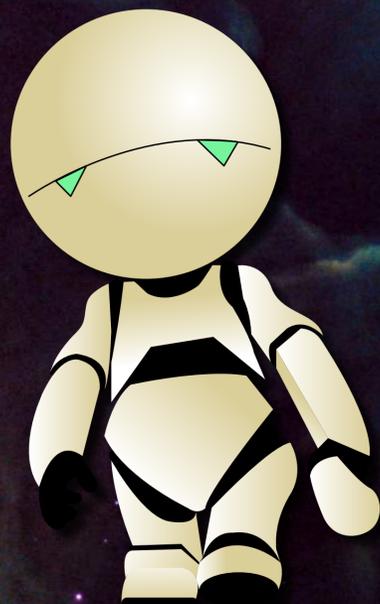
MAKING MARKETING HEROES OUT OF DATA

Launched in 2011, Relay42 uses smart technology to help brands transform fragmented information into personalized, powerful marketing messages. A constant stream of real-time data, gathered from multiple sources, is relayed to a central hub, which uses AI to process billions of decisions and predict customer behavior. Businesses then use these insights to optimize their advertising and communication campaigns.

More than 600 brands use Relay42's platform, including KLM, Thomas Cook, Air France, Mazda, BMW, and Foot Locker. Relay42 employs around 80 people, most of whom are based in Amsterdam. The startup also has offices in London, Paris, Sofia, Skopje, and Singapore.

'The answer to life, the universe and everything is 42'

The name Relay42 is part geeky and partly related to what we do. The 'Relay' bit is about being in control of and relaying data. Anyone who's seen or read 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' will know the central joke of the story is that the answer to 'the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything' turns out to be 42. As part of our onboarding process, each new team member is given a copy of 'Hitchhiker's' because it reflects our culture of humor and not taking life too seriously.



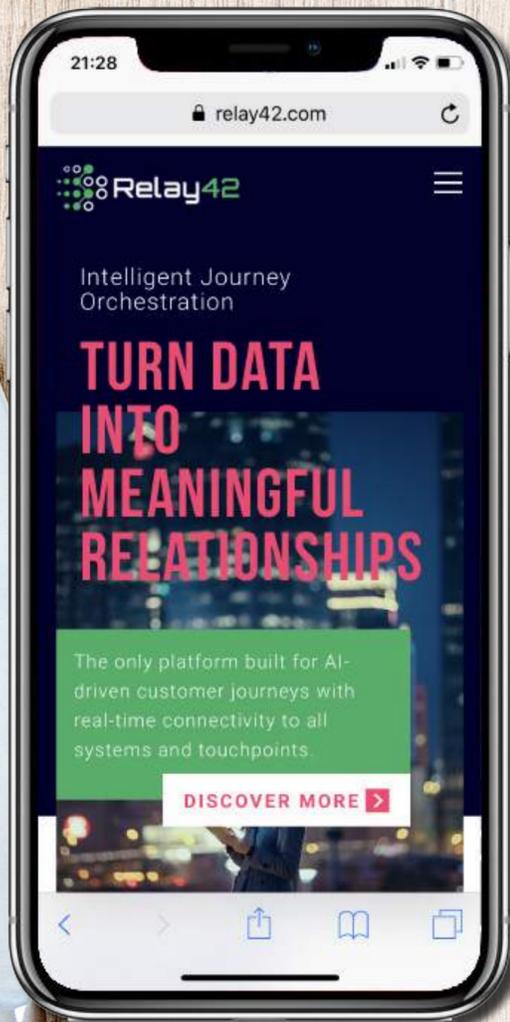
Koen Bos is co-founder and chief technology officer of Relay42. He set up his first company – an IT consultancy, while still at university in Utrecht where he studied Computer Science and Business Informatics. Koen lives with his girlfriend near Amsterdam.

Koen Bos

Co-founder & CTO of Relay42



THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE
GALAXY REFLECTS OUR
CULTURE OF HUMOR



'Classic doomsday scenarios keep me awake'

Having a product which is continuously running and used by clients 24/7 can be a bit stressful. As an engineer, I'll sometimes have that thought in the back of my head: 'What if something goes wrong?' It's crazy because even if it did, we have contingency plans in place, but those classic doomsday scenarios still keep me awake some nights.

'I find it difficult to open-up to others'

I'm a bit of an introvert, so when I'm going through challenging times at work, I find it difficult to open up to other people about it. What helps is finding time to get out on my bike, take in the landscape and listen to the birds singing. I've cycled through the Ardennes in Belgium a couple of times, and would love to do it again in the not-too-distant future.

Another way I take my mind off work-related things is by cooking. I find it really relaxing to spend time in the kitchen making my favorite type of cuisine – Indian. I especially love masala.

'Apart from money, what can an investor bring to the table?'

When we were searching for Series A funding towards the end of 2015, we

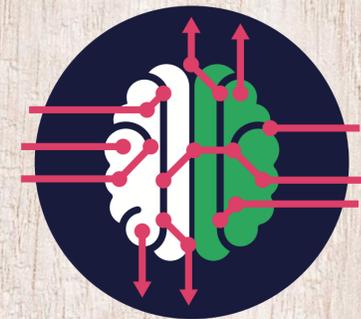
had an advantage – there was too much money in the market. It was more a case of having to choose which fund and VC best matched us and our ideas. It's important to ask: 'Apart from the money, what can you bring to the table?' because the right fundraising can really help you grow your business.

'One of our strengths is our team's diversity'

Building our company from the days of just a couple of people around a table, to the multi-million-dollar company we are today, our biggest challenge has been, and still is, finding the right people with the right mindset and skills. If you compare us to Google, Adobe and Oracle, they have the budget to hire a lot of people, but we have to be more careful. Finding people who fit the culture is a continuous challenge.

Our team is made up of more than 25 nationalities. It just happened that in the early days, everyone apart from the founding team came from another country. We quickly realized having diversity brings a different vibe to the company and makes it better. It's something we cherish and see as a strength.

DIVERSITY IS SOMETHING
WE CHERISH
AND SEE AS A STRENGTH



'Faith inspires loyalty'

Loyalty is a two-way thing. It's about having faith in people. I'm not here to command our team members to do this or that. I believe if you take your employees on that journey of building something, and have a shared commitment to making it work, loyalty is something that comes automatically.

'Having a more focused approach would have made a difference'

Looking back at the early days, I'd say we were working on too many things at once; having a more focused approach would have made a difference.

We also should have moved to the cloud a year earlier than we did. In the early days, we didn't feel ready for the cloud. A couple of years later, we were having a lot of trouble adapting and rolling out products, so looked into the cloud again. We made all the comparisons and AWS came out on top.

'Scalable automation is a game-changer'

Automation, and making it scalable in an efficient way, is a game-changer for us and is the main reason why we chose AWS. That's proven to be a very good decision because looking back at what we had to manage in the early days, compared to what AWS now takes off our hands, there's a big difference.

[Amazon Kinesis](#) has probably helped us scale the most. We came from a queuing system and the transfer to a streaming solution makes a huge difference in how we work. [Amazon S3](#) is also brilliant in its simplicity, particularly when you think about what you can do with it to build an efficient platform. Without the right tech, we wouldn't have come this far.

'AI and machine learning will play a greater role in our business'

We're already using [AWS SageMaker](#) and I can see how AI and ML will soon be able to bring even greater value to our customers, so I believe we'll use them even more in the future. I'm also really interested in what more we can achieve using cloud-based technology. Apart from being an entrepreneur, I'm also a techie, so I'm really enthusiastic about what's to come.

'We'll always want to be the challenger'

In 10 years' time, we'll be truly global, but I don't see us becoming the next Google. It's not something we strive for because we'll always want to be the challenger. As we continue to grow, I don't want to become disconnected from building the product too much. I definitely don't want to move in a purely management direction; I see myself being an innovator, but on a bigger scale.

AT A GLANCE

Relay42 started life as Synovite, but the name was changed two years later to better reflect its culture and products.



Koen Bos and Tomas Salfischberger were the original co-founders and were joined by Koen Koppens, Maurice Pothof and Erik Broekhuis.



Relay42 uses [Amazon EC2](#), [Amazon S3](#), [Amazon Kinesis](#) and [AWS SageMaker](#).



The company's platform is used by more than 600 brands, including KLM, Air France, Mazda, Thomas Cook, BMW and The Foot Locker.



www.relay42.com

FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST**CONCENTRATE**

Cobrastyle
Teddybears

GET PUMPED

Spiderbait
Black Betty

CHILL-OUT

Wonderful Life
Katie Melua

Spotify account & internet connection required

LOYALTY IS A TWO-WAY THING.
IT'S ABOUT HAVING
FAITH IN PEOPLE





Shota Giorgobiani and Giorgi Mirzikashvili founded Optio.Ai in 2016. The childhood friends currently spend most of their time working, but still find the occasional opportunity to share a bottle of local wine in their home city of Tbilisi. Having become Georgia's first entrepreneurs to enter the Techstars Berlin accelerator last year, they hope the momentum of Optio.Ai will help build their country's tech ecosystem.



Shota Giorgobiani & Giorgi Mirzikashvili

Co-founders of Optio.Ai

KICKSTARTING GEORGIA'S FINTECH SCENE

Optio.Ai is on a mission to move the global banking system into the 21st century through smart applications of artificial intelligence and data analytics. The company's series of powerful, data-driven software products enable financial firms to precisely categorize their customers' transactions and create conversational banking experiences that help people to manage their personal finances.

Over the past two years, Optio.Ai has flourished into a promising fintech company, built from the ground up in a country that traditionally attracts little investment. The founders have marked themselves out as leaders in a new wave of innovation and entrepreneurship emerging from Georgia.

Giorgi: 'It was natural for us to launch a startup together'

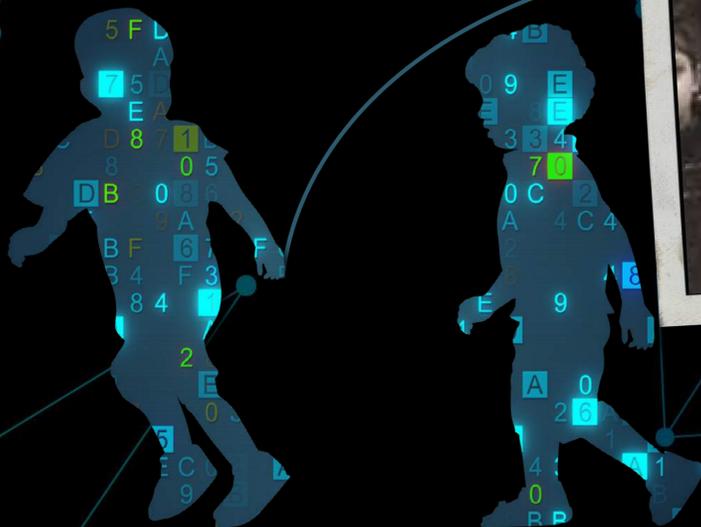
We've been friends since childhood, so our families weren't surprised when we decided to start a business together. Everyone around us knows we're curious guys with a drive to build something new and cool that has global ambitions. I guess you could say it's just in our nature. Having the support of our families and friends has been really important. It's what gave each of us the courage to leave our corporate jobs – with high salaries and secure paths for progression – to start something from zero.

We have complementary skills – I'm the retail banking expert and very business-oriented, while Shota is more tech-

oriented and has lots of experience in delivering enterprise-level solutions.

Shota: 'Why are we successful? Because we believe in hard work'

It might sound like a cliché, but I believe a big part of our success so far has been our dedication and diligence. We're not afraid of hard work. Coming from a country like Georgia means we've started this thing with a geographical disadvantage. But with hard work and a precise focus, we know we can not only survive, but even do better than our competitors. The experience of building a company from a place that isn't known for its innovation gives us a natural resilience, and helps us overcome challenges that might cause others to flounder.





Hello!

Giorgi: 'I love Tbilisi. I especially enjoy spending time in the old town, where there are dozens of churches, the Sulphur baths and the Narikala fortress. It's a great place for relaxing with a glass of our excellent local wine.'

Giorgi: 'Government funding allowed us to expand'

Initially, we built a chatbot designed to help millennials manage their personal finances. From that, we received some funding from the Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency, and began to expand our remit. Then last year, we were accepted by the StartupYard accelerator in Prague and the Techstars accelerator in Berlin. We ended up spending three months in one accelerator, and then three months in another immediately afterwards.

Shota: 'We're the only Georgian startup to have reached Techstars so far'

Being accepted by the Techstars Berlin accelerator was a significant achievement for us. We're the only startup from Georgia to have accomplished that, and it shows we can compete on a global scale. I hope other Georgian startups see what we've achieved so far, and are inspired to believe in what they can do to dream even bigger.

Startups in Georgia face challenges that are unique to our location, mainly because

the startup scene here is so incredibly new. To paint you a picture, we have only a couple of angel investors in the whole country, and one or two venture capital funds – and these have only recently launched. When we were starting out, getting investment in Georgia was the stuff of science fiction.

Giorgi: 'Tbilisi is an amazing place to live and work'

I'm in love with my city, Tbilisi, and I can't ever imagine living anywhere else for a long period of time. Our team works

from a fantastic coworking space called Terminal, which has a really supportive, collaborative community. Shota and I live in the same neighborhood as both our office and each other. It means we can walk everywhere, rather than spending hours commuting, which is handy when we're at work from nine in the morning until nine at night every single day.

Shota: 'You have to make sacrifices'

Without a doubt, it can feel like the company is taking over our whole lives sometimes, but I think that's natural at such an early stage of a promising venture. You have to make those sacrifices and put other things on hold. For example, I'm actually a licensed paragliding pilot and I love to paraglide in my spare time. But my last flight was over a year ago. I have my equipment at home waiting for me and I know I'll have time to do it again sometime in the future, just not now. You have to accept reality and think: 'I'm building something important. Today, I'm sacrificing something, and tomorrow I will get it back, maybe in a different shape.'

Giorgi: 'You need two qualities to work for Optio.Ai – a youthful outlook and curiosity'

When you're younger, you're always searching for new challenges and you want to make the world a better place. Those are the qualities we look for when we're hiring employees. We ask questions like: 'Are you curious?' and: 'Are you excited to work in a challenging environment?' Curiosity unites everybody who joins our team. It's what drives all of us to go further every day, every week, every month. We're not interested in people who are only looking for a big salary or a comfortable chair or the chance to show off.

Shota: 'We chose AWS for Activate – but stayed for the amazing customer service'

Every penny counts in the beginning, so while we were at Techstars Berlin, we

were looking for a cloud service provider that would enable us to build a product with credit support. We met someone from the AWS startup team and explained our needs and concerns to her, and she was able to solve and arrange everything for us within an hour. I've met very few people in my life who are so focused on helping you make things happen.

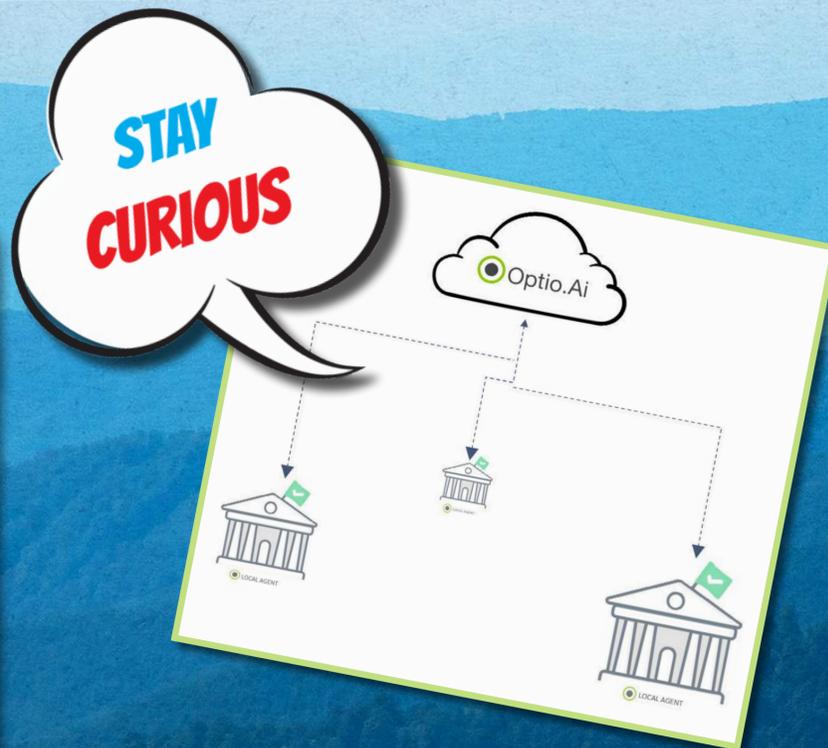
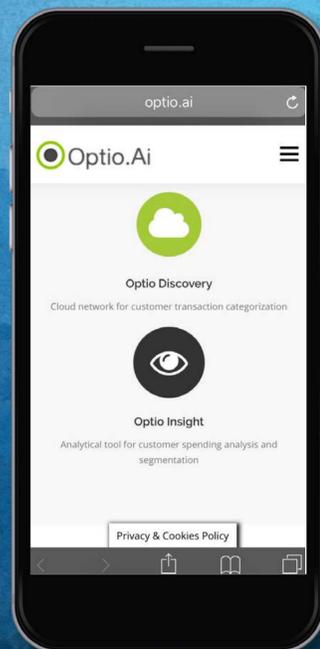
We were given access to AWS and some high-level people from AWS Tech Control, who worked with us closely and helped us decide the best way to build our infrastructure. Experiencing such amazing support so early on – when we were still just a small company with four or five employees – gave us a lot of confidence. We thought: 'If this is how great the service is now, we know we can rely on this partner when we grow bigger and need to ask more of them.'

Shota: 'We use AWS Lightsail for development'

When we started the company, we had just one product, then a few more, and now we're building a variety of different products for the banking industry. Despite our changing and sometimes unpredictable needs, AWS has provided everything we need at each stage. We're in love with the simplicity and ease of [Amazon Lightsail](#) – it works fantastically well in the development environments, and saves us both time and resources. We also use [Amazon Relational Database Service \(RDS\)](#) and [AWS Elastic Beanstalk](#), and in the near future, we plan to start using the [PowerShell DSC](#) platform for our Docker containers.

EXPERIENCING SUCH
AMAZING SUPPORT
FROM AWS SO EARLY
ON GAVE US A LOT
OF CONFIDENCE

STAY
CURIOUS



CURIOSITY UNITES
EVERYBODY IN
OUR TEAM. IT'S WHAT
DRIVES US TO GO
FURTHER EVERY DAY,
EVERY WEEK, EVERY MONTH

Giorgi: 'The biggest challenge for any startup is doubt'

While we were at Techstars Berlin, I heard the quote: 'The biggest challenge for any startup entrepreneur is doubt.' I think that's true. Looking back at our journey, self-doubt is definitely the biggest challenge we've faced so far. But you simply have to work through it and believe in yourself. It makes you so much stronger and resilient if you go outside of your comfort zone. Remember, nobody ever changed the world or made a true impact by staying in their comfort zone, and refusing to take risks.

Shota: 'Self-belief and curiosity are the keys to success'

My belief is if you're curious enough, you can achieve anything. It doesn't matter where you're born, whether it's a poor country or a big country or a small country. What matters more is your attitude and the perspective you have towards the world. You need the belief to say: 'This is something I want to do. This is something I want to build.' It'll take a lot of time, and it will take a lot more

time than if you were in a more developed country or ecosystem, but that doesn't mean you don't have a chance. You're the one who defines the opportunities you have, and if you believe that you can do something, you'll get there.

Giorgi: 'I want to help build the startup ecosystem in Georgia'

Optio.AI is generating revenue now – we'll be cash-positive in 2019. We have team members and people who are willing to work with us, and banks that want to partner with us. We're planning to focus on the Georgian market until the end of the year, and hope to expand into Europe soon after that.

In the future, it's my dream to be in a position to help young and motivated people from Georgia to get a headstart

on their entrepreneurial journeys. I want to do my part in helping local companies thrive as leading global businesses. In 10 years' time, I hope Georgia and Tbilisi will be known as vibrant global hubs for startups, especially in fintech. I'd love to see people from other countries coming to set up their businesses here. It feels like we're at the beginning of something extraordinary in the region right now.

IN 10 YEARS, I
HOPE TO SEE
GEORGIA AND TBILISI
AS VIBRANT HUBS FOR
FINTECH STARTUPS



NOBODY EVER CHANGED
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IMPACT BY STAYING
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REFUSING TO TAKE A RISK

GEORGIA

AT A GLANCE



Shota Giorgobiani and Giorgi Mirzikashvili founded Optio.AI in 2016.



Optio.AI was the first company from Georgia to be accepted into the Techstars Berlin accelerator program.



In February 2019, Optio.AI was awarded a grant of 100,000 GEL (\$37,000) from the Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency and the World Bank to develop its Optio Discovery product.



Optio.AI uses [Amazon RDS](#), [Amazon Lightsail](#) and [AWS Elastic Beanstalk](#).



www.optio.ai

FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



CONCENTRATE



Concentrate
Playlist
AWS

GET PUMPED



Get Pumped
Playlist
AWS

CHILL-OUT



Gather
Bakradze

Spotify account & internet connection required



Edmondo Porcu is chief technology officer and co-founder of Italian fintech company Credimi. Edmondo's background is in software engineering, and he's held senior roles at financial institutions across Europe, including in London, Geneva, and Paris. Edmondo, 34, grew up in Sardinia, but now lives and works in Milan.



Edmondo Porcu

Co-founder & CTO of Credimi

CREATING WORKING CAPITAL FOR BUSINESSES

Italian businesses often have to wait several months for invoices to be paid. This can be challenging for small and medium-sized enterprises, as the wait disrupts cash-flow, stifles growth, and can even lead to job losses and bankruptcy.

Online financial services company Credimi turns invoices into cash advances. Applying for a loan only takes a few minutes, thanks to Credimi's proprietary risk evaluation technology, which analyzes more than 1,000 variables. Approved loans are paid out within 48 hours.

Since launching in December 2016, the Milan-based startup has loaned more than €500 million (\$565 million) to over 3,500 companies.

'A small business can't afford to lose a big client'

Italy is the second-worst country in Europe when it comes to payments. Best-case scenario, a small or medium-sized business will wait three months for an invoice to be paid, but that often stretches to four or five months. Small businesses can't afford to lose big clients, but they're seen as replaceable, so don't have the clout to demand payment. It's also hard for small enterprises to take out a bank loan to ease cash-flow, as a number of Italian banks have collapsed over the last few years. My co-founders and I spotted the need for a digital lender to provide invoice financing quickly and easily.

'I want to prove we can build innovative tech in Italy'

We're on a mission to help Italian businesses. Times are tough – the banking sector is struggling and cash issues are slowing down the economy. I want to prove to the rest of the world we can build innovative technology in Italy. After I graduated in 2008, there were no interesting jobs here because Italian companies invest so little in R&D, so I ended up working abroad for eight years. This is still happening, with most young tech graduates leaving to work in other countries.

'Our flexibility is our USP'

One of the things that makes us different is our flexibility; businesses use us when they need to. There's no ongoing commitment to have all invoices paid through the platform – customers can just use us for a single invoice if they want to. They decide which invoices they want funded, upload the information, and we make them an offer.

'I never imagined how challenging working in a startup would be'

Building our own proprietary software has thrown up a lot of challenges. You're always trying new things, and you need to be ready to cope with repeated failures. You'll try an approach and clients won't like it, but eventually, after you've changed it for the 27th time, they might start to be OK with it.

'I'm constantly facing issues I don't know how to solve'

If you want to start a business, you need to be ready to invest a lot of time in learning new things. Some startups



raise money to get everything built externally, but they can end up having no intellectual property, and not really understanding their own technology. If a competitor comes along, they can't defend themselves. Building the core relevant parts yourself is exhausting, as you're constantly facing issues you don't know how to solve, but at least your company ends up with valuable intellectual property.

WE'RE ON A MISSION TO
HELP ITALIAN COMPANIES

WHEN THINGS AREN'T GOING WELL,
THE THOUGHT OF GOING BACK
TO A MORE RELAXED LIFESTYLE
CAN SEEM APPEALING



'AWS has the largest offering'

One of the technologies that excites me most is Kubernetes. We use [Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud \(Amazon EC2\)](#) at the moment but are soon moving to [Amazon Elastic Container Service for Kubernetes \(Amazon EKS\)](#), as it will allow us to run more complex independent applications. It's a good way to build, because you're creating a series of independent blocks, so if one's broken, you can fix, replace or upgrade it independently from the others.

We store contracts safely with [Amazon S3](#), without having to worry about security. AWS has the largest offering in terms of cloud services and know-how.

'You need really smart people'

A key factor for success is building a really strong team. I came back to Italy from London with the experience of having worked at Goldman Sachs; a colleague came back from Luxembourg; another from Dublin where he was working for Google and a third from Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt. Our CEO and co-founder Ignazio Rocco understood that to create a sustainable competitive advantage, you need really smart people.

'I don't want employees who just do what others tell them'

I'm not a boss – I'm a leader who helps Credimi reach its goal, by giving my team a voice in what we should be doing. Empowerment is something developers love, because it gives them a sense of responsibility and allows them to be creative and propose solutions. One of the worst situations is when you end up in a team with leaders telling staff: 'Just do it this way.' I don't want employees who'll blindly do what others tell them – I want colleagues who'll tell me what they think should be done.

'Some knowledge can only be learnt through experience'

We had a German consultant in recently who made me consider the value of tacit

knowledge – knowledge that you can't transfer by speaking; you can't transfer by writing down; you can only transfer by doing. Take cooking. To learn to cook well, you need a teacher who'll watch what you're doing and correct your errors, not someone who'll do it all for you or tell you exactly what to do.

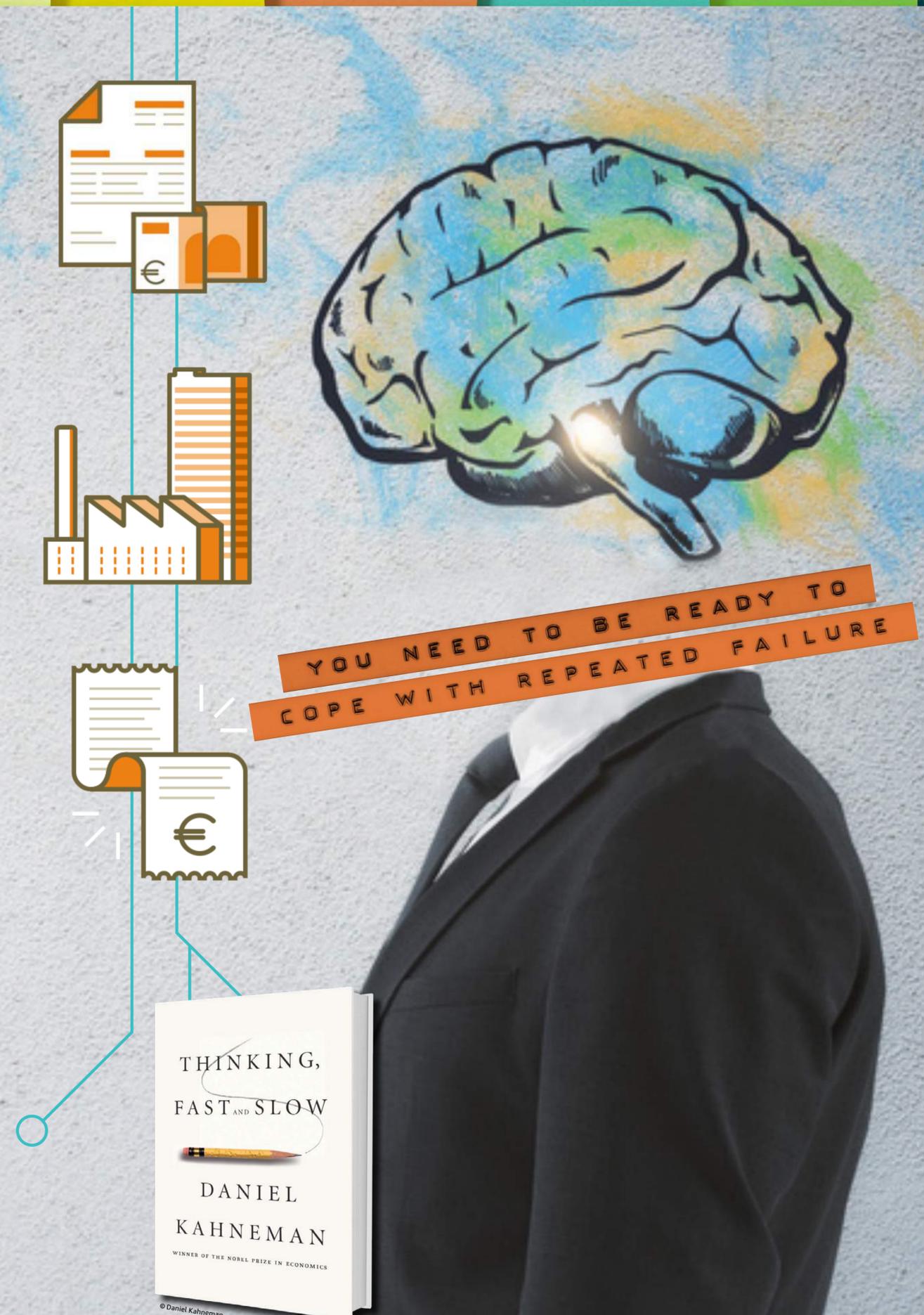
'When you're building something new, be ready for surprises'

One of the hardest decisions we've had to make as a company is whether to embrace a structured project management approach or go with a more agile perspective. In the end, I had to say: 'Look, planning above three months is pointless. I can't commit to delivering something by a fixed date.' There are just so many unknowns with technology. Before you start working on something, your level of understanding is so abstract, you can't know how long it'll take – especially if you have no idea how it works and have never done anything like it before!

Sometimes, investing two or three weeks longer to understand something can save you six months of development time, but you still need to be ready for surprises. That's what innovation is all about.

'Our brains are designed to make errors'

My work is my passion, so quite a bit of my free time is taken up with learning. I'll often spend my evenings and weekends reading to help me figure out how to tackle a work problem. My desk at home is piled high with books. I've read some of them, but others just seem to sit there saying: 'Hey, you haven't done your homework yet.' My favorite book of all time is 'Thinking, Fast and Slow' by Daniel Kahneman. It's about cognitive bias – how humans make decisions and deal with uncertainty. Your brain is designed to make errors in certain situations, so you have to learn to say: 'OK this is what came to mind, but it's wrong.'



'Getting angry and emotional never helps'

At Goldman Sachs, I went on several training courses and one referenced the book 'What Got You Here Won't Get You There' by Marshall Goldsmith. It describes 20 workplace habits that prevent successful people from making the next big leap forward in their career. There's a section about fixing bad behaviors, and how getting angry and having emotionally-charged talks with people never helps bring a goal closer. Fortunately, I'm very rational by nature, which helps in work situations.

'I'm close to giving up every couple of days'

Every day, there's at least one recruiter offering me a job because there's such a shortage of good software engineers. When things aren't going well, the thought of going back to a more relaxed lifestyle can seem appealing – I come close to quitting every two days or so. One tech company that approached me said it would provide all my meals, including dinner. Then I'm sitting here thinking: 'Oh God, it's 9pm, I'm still at work, and there's nothing in my fridge.' But in the end, I think about what we're doing at Credimi, and remember our mission.

'A kickaround is a good way to switch off'

As an Italian, I love football. When I want to switch off from work, there's nothing better than having a kickaround with friends.

Whenever I go back to Sardinia, I like to windsurf. Fortunately, the weather is so good you can do it year-round. I love being able to eat outdoors from March to November. I grew up in the capital, Cagliari. My mother, who's a retired gynaecologist, was still there until about two years ago, but now she's living in the countryside with seven dogs and six cats.

'The thought that what I do matters keeps me going'

I sometimes worry that although I put all my energy and effort into Credimi, there might be something I've missed or won't be able to fix, so it can be really stressful at times. What keeps me going is the feeling that what I'm doing matters, because it makes a real difference to whether smaller Italian businesses can survive.



AT A GLANCE



Credimi was founded in 2015 and the platform launched the following year.



The seven co-founders include Edmondo Porcu and CEO Ignazio Rocco.



The startup's core target market is companies with a turnover of between €2 million (\$2.27 million) and €100 million (\$113 million).



Credimi has raised €18 million (\$20.5 million) in equity funding and can draw on €72 million (\$82 million) debt funding.



Credimi uses [Amazon EC2](#) and is moving to [Amazon EKS](#) to run and manage Kubernetes in the cloud.



www.credimi.com

FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



Founder Stories



CONCENTRATE



Alla Vita
Ambala,
Elisabetta
Fadini

GET PUMPED



Stupidisco
Junior Jack

CHILL-OUT



Parole Parole
Anane

Spotify account & internet connection required

WHAT KEEPS ME GOING IS THE
FEELING THAT WHAT I'M
DOING MATTERS



Orly Shoavi left a high-level role in business development because she wanted to start her own company. A few months later, she met the perfect co-founder, Ronnie Sternberg, and SafeDK was born. The startup now has offices in Israel and the US, and Orly lives near its Tel Aviv head-office with her husband and two children.

Orly Shoavi

Co-founder of SafeDK



BRINGING TRANSPARENCY AND CONTROL TO THE MOBILE WORLD

SafeDK helps mobile app publishers build better and safer apps by enabling them to analyze, monitor, and optimize third-party Software Development Kits (SDKs). It's the first end-to-end platform for managing SDKs. Since launching in 2014, the company has raised over \$8 million in funding, and grown from a two-person operation in Orly's living room, to a company with almost 30 employees. SafeDK boasts a roster of high-profile clients, including Zynga, Gram Games, and Wooga.

'Before SafeDK, mobile publishers had no idea how SDKs and Ad Networks affected their apps'

The idea for SafeDK came while I was working at an Israeli company that was building what would become a popular mobile application. I was in charge of finding SDKs – third-party software components that can be integrated into mobile applications. We wanted to use some for our app, but it was a nightmare trying to find out which ones were any good. There wasn't an impartial resource to find the best SDKs. You had to search the internet, examine the SDKs, and then hope they worked once you'd installed them. In our case, it turned out that one of the SDKs ended up draining the battery of users' devices far too quickly. So we had to remove the SDK, and quickly submit a new app to the store, hoping our users would update it soon. That experience gave me the idea for SafeDK – I wanted to create a place where you could see inside the blackbox of SDKs, and find out what they're doing inside your app in real time.

'Meeting my co-founder was like love at first sight'

While I was mulling over this idea, the company I was working for was acquired by a bigger corporation that I'd worked for previously. I decided it was time to follow my dream of running my own business, so I resigned three months later. That was in the spring of 2014. In July 2014, I met Ronnie Sternberg, my co-founder, and it was like love at first sight. We always say it was like the best blind date ever. We met on Tuesday and started working together the following week. By December 2014, we'd raised our first seed round.



BEFORE SAFEDK. MOBILE PUBLISHERS HAD NO IDEA HOW SDKS AND AD NETWORKS AFFECTED THEIR APPS



YOU'VE GOT
TO LIKE
THE PEOPLE
YOU DO
BUSINESS WITH

GOOD INVESTORS CAN PUSH
YOUR COMPANY TO A
HIGHER LEVEL

'We struggled to find time to eat'

When Ronnie and I first started fundraising, we were meeting investors three or four times a day. It was a struggle to even find time to eat, so we'd sometimes end up eating in my car. I keep a picture with me of one of those moments – the two of us cramming in food in-between back-to-back meetings. It's a reminder of how it all started.

'Good investors can open doors'

It's hard to raise money. Actually, the first round was the easy one. You're selling a dream to investors, and our dream was really logical and reasonable. There was an obvious need for the service. But later, when we needed to show results and numbers, it was more challenging. You have to focus on a goal and keep going through meeting after meeting – hearing 'no', but not giving up. You hear 'no' an awful lot as an entrepreneur. But then when you have good investors, they open doors and can push your company to a higher level. Our investors helped us get our first customers, and meet more investors.

'Just start. Just do it'

My background is in computer science. I have a BSc and MSc in computer science from Technion – the Israel Institute of Technology. I was an engineer for a long time and I was used to managing developers, but felt I should gain some business and product experience if I wanted to start my own company. So I shifted over to product management and then business development, and only then was I confident enough to create my own company. But when I look back, if I had to do it all over again, I would just start – just do it.

'Our first employee worked for free'

Our first employee was Maya. I was her team leader in a previous startup. She's an amazing Android developer, but most of all, she's an incredible person. When I introduced her to Ronnie, my co-founder, she fell in love too. She understood the need and the product, and she believed in the company so much that she started to work for free. Many of the company's employees are people who worked with us in the past. When we find good people, we hang on to them.

'Our team is like a family'

We have the best mobile developers in Israel. Actually, we have the best people full stop. I had the team over to my house the other day just because we wanted to spend time together. We watched a movie, had pizza, and played some old school games. We're like family – we like to hang out together. We've stopped working with suppliers in the past, solely because they're just not nice people. It's that simple for us. You've got to like the people you do business with.

'People who work for me have to leave their ego and politics behind'

It's really, really hard to build a team correctly. You want to build the right culture – you want people to not only be super professional, but also super nice. It's really challenging. In my last job, I would often sit in meetings and watch people arguing. I'd say to myself: 'They're saying the same thing; they have the same goal, but they're still arguing. Why?' It really stuck with me. At SafeDK, the culture we're trying to foster is one of positivity. There's no room for being cynical or blaming each other. People who work for me have to leave their ego and politics behind. We're here to win, and the only way we can do that is together.

'Spare time? That'd be nice!'

We're so focused on SafeDK, I don't really know what spare time is at the moment. I like to read, but I haven't read a book for almost three years. So it's hard to say that I have room for hobbies these days. What time I do have, I spend with my children. My kids, husband, friends, and family take priority over hobbies.

'Transparency is really important to us'

We're very open to showing the team what's happening in other departments. The R&D people know about the customers we have; they know about the challenges, who's in trial, who's big. The salespeople know the challenges we have in R&D, the patents, the IP, what we're working on, and so on. These communication channels are really, really important to us.

'Start selling as early as possible'

When we bring out new products, solutions or features, we always price them. We don't want to just understand what price we can sell them for; we want to see what people are willing to pay. You need to start selling as early as possible. However, in the beginning, we didn't have the budget to hire salespeople. My background isn't in sales, and neither is Ronnie's, so we had a lot to learn. We met every sales expert in Israel we could; we listened to podcasts and read a lot of blogs. While it was necessity that drove us, it then made hiring people easier as we knew what to look for. Those new sales people taught us things, but we also taught them, so the company culture became about learning together. It wasn't easy, but it was such an important part of our journey.

WE KNEW NOTHING
ABOUT SALES.
SO WE MET
EVERY SALES EXPERT
IN ISRAEL WE COULD.
WE LISTENED TO
PODCASTS, AND
WE READ A LOT
OF BLOGS

Nurture
MORE LEADS!

MARKETING
LEADS

Prioritize
Sell!

'AWS gives our customers confidence'
 AWS is great for us. Our customers are always asking which service we're on, and saying 'AWS' is a bonus point for us. Everybody knows them; everybody trusts them. We use AWS for many things, including our storage, database, and code. Working with a trusted technology partner just makes everything easier.

'We want to be in every mobile application'

Ten years from now, I believe we're going to be a standard service used by every mobile application. Not just for publishers, but also for advertisers, so they can know exactly which ads are running in which app, and the quality of the ads so they can be sure everything is secure.

'Success can be measured in different ways'

We gave our seed investors a very special gift – a box with a cigar inside. We wrote on it: 'Break in case of success.' All our investors keep their box in their office and whenever we come out with a success, they ask if they can open it. Success can be measured in many, many ways so we always say: 'Don't open it just yet; only break it when we say you can break it.'



AT A GLANCE

-  SafeDK was launched by Orly Shoavi and Ronnie Sternberg in 2014.
-  The platform helps developers see how SDKs are performing inside their apps.
-  SafeDK has been through two funding rounds, raising a total of \$8 million.
-  The company has two offices – one in Tel Aviv and one in New York.
-  SafeDK uses AWS for storage, database management and more.

 www.safedk.com

FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



CONCENTRATE	GET PUMPED	CHILL-OUT
		
Concentrate Playlist AWS	Believer Imagine Dragons	At My Most Beautiful R.E.M.

Spotify account & internet connection required

IN CASE OF SUCCESS

CUSTOMERS ARE ALWAYS ASKING
 WHICH SERVICE WE'RE ON.
 EVERYBODY KNOWS AWS;
 EVERYBODY TRUSTS AWS



FOLLOW THE GAME CHANGERS



FLORIAN DOUETTEAU

DATAIKU

Florian Douetteau co-founded Dataiku in 2013 to make it easier for people without advanced technical skills to use data analytics and AI tools. The platform helps teams confidently interpret large datasets, powered by services like [Amazon Redshift](#) and [Amazon EMR](#). Dataiku's main office is in Silicon Sentier in Paris.



KOEN BOS

RELAY42

Launched in 2011, Relay42 uses smart technology to help brands transform fragmented information into personalized, powerful marketing messages. Co-founder Koen Bos credits an innovative tech stack including services like [Amazon Kinesis](#) for helping Relay42 expand from its original Amsterdam office to operations in five global capitals, including London, Singapore, and Paris.



SHOTA GIORGOBIANI

GIORGI MIRZIKASHVILI

OPTIO.AI

A Techstars alumni startup, Optio.AI was founded by Shota Giorgobiani and Giorgi Mirzikashvili in 2016, to move the country's banking system into the 21st century through the use of AI and data analytics. Based in the founders' native Tbilisi, Optio.AI uses a suite of AWS services for development, cloud storage, and management.



EDMONDO PORCU

CREDIMI

Credimi co-founder Edmondo Porcu is on a mission to help Italian businesses. In Italy, it can take several months for invoices to be paid, leading to disrupted cash-flow and stifled growth. Credimi bridges this gap by turning invoices into cash advances, with loans rapidly approved by Credimi's proprietary risk evaluation technology. Founded in 2017 in Milan, the Credimi platform is supported by [Amazon EC2](#) and [Amazon S3](#).



ORLY SHOAVI

SAFEDK

The first end-to-end platform of its kind, SafeDK enables mobile app publishers to analyze, monitor, and optimize third-party Software Development Kits (SDKs). Co-founded by Orly Shoavi in 2014, SafeDK has expanded from Israel globally, relying on AWS for storage and database management.



NEXT STEPS

AWS ❤️s STARTUPS

Launching a successful startup takes more than building on the most flexible, reliable, and scalable infrastructure available today. To help get you started, we've put together some additional resources:

AMAZON REKOGNITION

Deep learning technology developed by Amazon's computer vision scientists analyzes billions of images and videos daily. This simple and easy to use API doesn't require machine learning expertise and can quickly analyze any image or video file stored in Amazon S3.

AMAZON KINESIS

With Amazon Kinesis, startups can easily collect, process, and analyze real-time, streaming data such as video, audio, application logs, website clickstreams, and IoT telemetry data for machine learning, analytics, and other applications.

AMAZON DYNAMODB

Amazon DynamoDB is a fast and flexible NoSQL database service for applications that need consistent, single-digit millisecond latency at any scale. It's a fully managed cloud database, and you only pay for the throughput and storage you need.

JAVA DEVELOPER CENTRE

Startups can get started building software with the AWS SDK for Java library, code samples, and documentation. You'll find all the tools you need to develop secure, reliable, and scalable Java applications on the AWS cloud.

