



# STARTUP STORIES

NOTES FROM FOUNDERS

---

## THE ALTRUISTS

Issue 04 Vol. 02

# THE ALTRUISTS

Most startups set out to solve a business problem. The founders you're about to meet have instead begun a journey to create lasting social change. Together, they're improving the day-to-day lives of millions of people across the globe, by harnessing innovative technology to tackle problems ranging from car accidents to loneliness.

02



Learn how two founders tapped into their frustration with the Nigerian banking industry to create a startup that's already issued \$7 million in micro-loans.



04 | AvaO

Read about the former chocolate entrepreneur, who's now tackling women's health and reproductive issues, helping over 18,000 women get pregnant.

01



Find out how one founder took inspiration from a dating app, to connect over 500,000 mothers and mothers-to-be across the UK, US, and Canada.



03



German Autolabs

Discover how this startup is solving the challenge of making driving safer, with an AI-powered digital co-driver called Chris.



05 | Bolt

Read how a 19-year-old on a mission to reduce congestion and emissions, launched a ride-hailing app that's since attracted 25 million users.





# Peanut

By her own admission, Michelle Kennedy found being a mother incredibly lonely. It was while working as a director at dating app Badoo that she had the bright idea of borrowing from cupid's tech toolbox to 'connect and match' isolated mothers. Michelle lives in London with her husband, son, and French bulldog.



## Michelle Kennedy

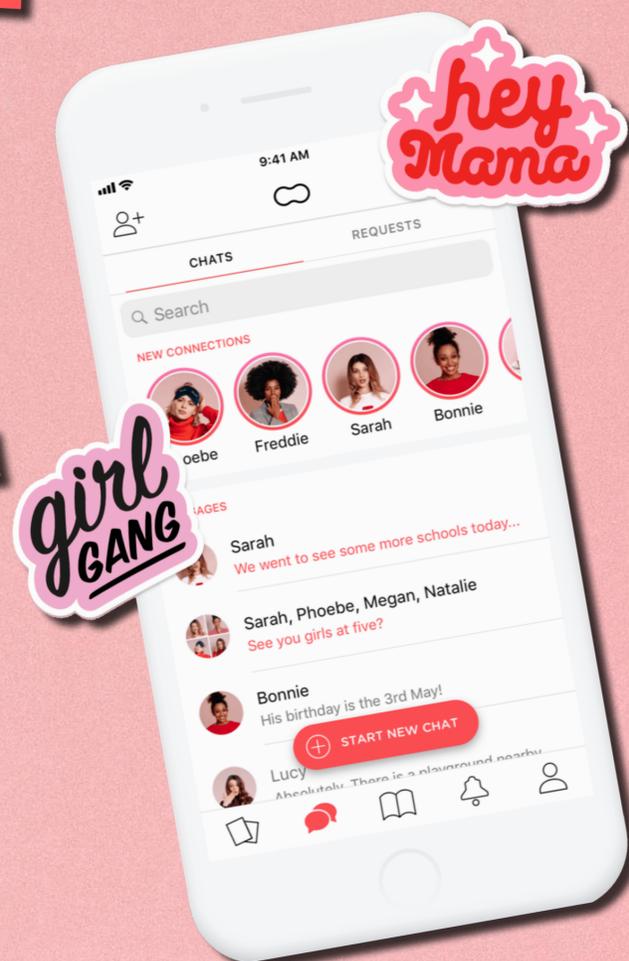
Co-founder of Peanut

# CONNECTING MOTHERS THROUGH TECH

Motherhood can be challenging. It's not always easy to find women who understand what you're going through, or who can offer advice about sleep routines, teething or tantrums.

Peanut is a smart mobile solution designed to bring mothers together. Through the app, mothers can find other women who share the same views on parenting and who have children of a similar age. They can chat, share advice, and arrange get-togethers with like-minded women in their local area.

Peanut registered 500,000 users across the UK, US, and Canada within one year of its launch. The company, founded in 2017 by Michelle Kennedy and Greg Orłowski, employs 10 people at its office in London.



SUCCESS TAKES DOGGED  
PERSEVERANCE. HARD WORK  
AND GENUINE BELIEF

**'I was lonely'**

The inspiration for Peanut came from a single event – becoming a mum. I had so many questions when my son, Finley, was born, but I was the first of our group to have a child, so it was hard to get the everyday advice I needed. I'm an only child and my parents don't live in London, so I felt incredibly lonely and isolated at times. It all really came to a head when Finley started preschool, because the bigger the kid, the bigger the problem.

**'Women deserve a modern, easy app'**

The Mumsnet forum was a great idea at its launch. But by the time I had Finley in 2014, I wasn't seeking information from forums; that's not how I was used to living my life. All my other apps were in the palm of my hand, and I was using Facebook groups for advice instead. This was more in line with my user behavior, but it had limitations too. And because of all this, I thought: 'Women deserve a modern product. Women deserve an app that's as easy for motherhood as another app is to order food or cabs.'

**'It's not all about babies'**

Peanut encourages social discovery – finding women around you who share similarities, such as language, education or kids' ages. We also have 'Peanut Pages', our community function, where you can crowdsource advice on anything from love and sex, to health and fitness to pregnancy. It's not just about babies. Who can you ask about what to say to your boss when you're pregnant? Or returning to work after kids? Or raising boys in the #MeToo era?

**'We were all in the London startup scene'**

Peanut was my idea and our co-founder, who's an engineer, scoped the concept. We started developing the app in September 2017 and released it in February 2018, so it was all pretty quick. All of our founding team have been in the London tech startup scene for a while, so we knew each other. There were four of us to start with and now we're at the crazy heights of 10.

**'You have to build for your user base'**

Things that we thought would be important for the product turned out not to be. We found there's much more value in listening to our users and seeing what they're doing. If there's a behavior we see coming across on the app, we lean into that more. We get constant feedback from users – for example, they want the ability to form special interest groups, so we're building that functionality to address the needs of our user base.

Pregnancy

LOVE

Fitness

Health

'When I was pregnant, I used to call my bump 'Peanut'. I'd read that the foetus was the size of a peanut and the name stuck'

### 'Pig-headed stubbornness helped me succeed'

I honestly believe women deserve this product. I wouldn't let people tell me they didn't need it, or that it wouldn't work, or that it wasn't a valid market, because I just knew it was. I think it was pig-headed stubbornness that helped me succeed, as well as a belief in the market. Success takes dogged perseverance, hard work, and genuine belief.

### 'Motherhood made me more empathetic'

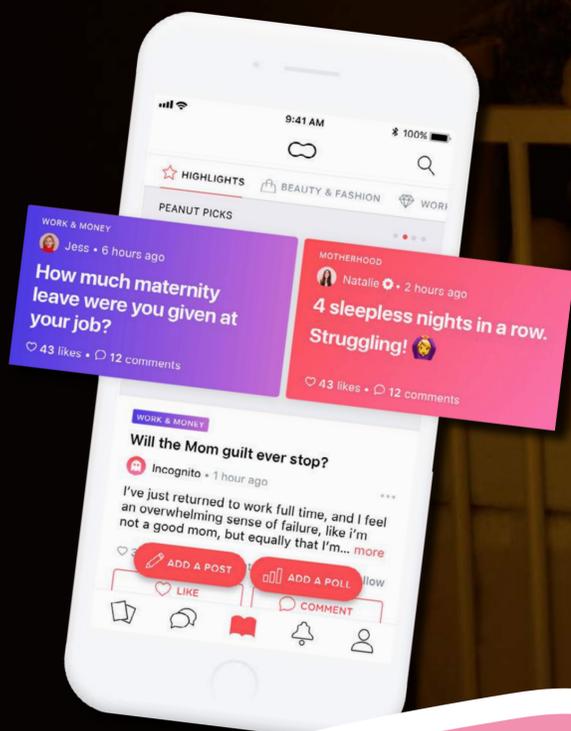
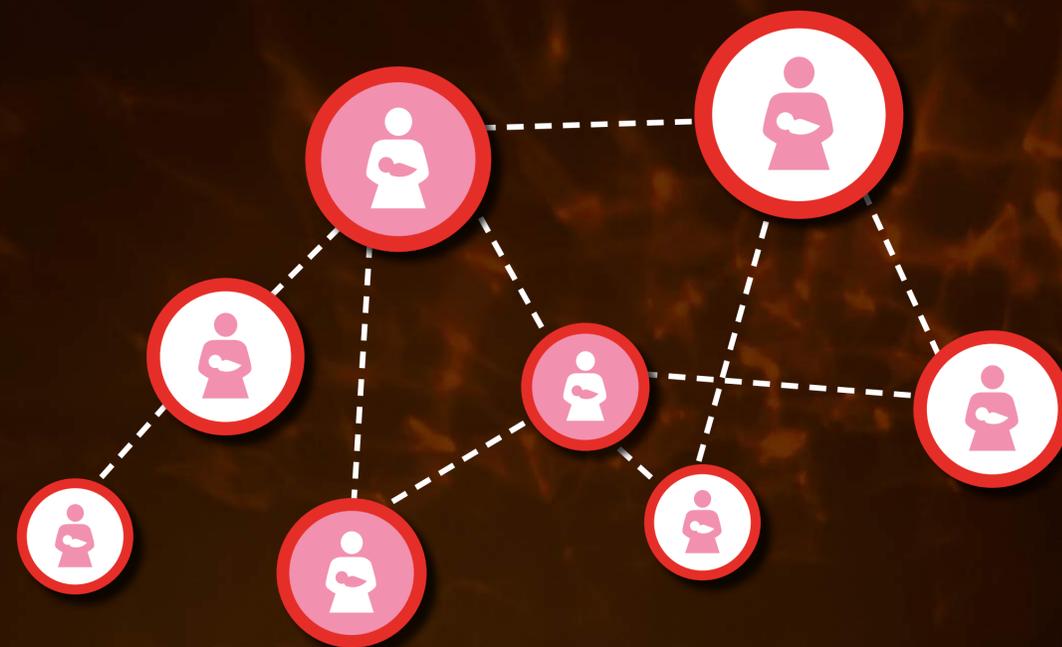
Empathy is a really important quality when running a business. It's not something I was great at when I was young; but since motherhood, I've become better at it. To be successful, you need to understand your users and your team to be able to bring people along on the journey. There's no point being the only woman on the ship – you need a crew. I think this realization has definitely developed with maturity. When I was younger, I was much more arrogant and thought I didn't need other people.

### 'I'd have sleepless nights on the bedroom floor'

There are times when things are going to feel really low – it could be that you wanted to do that partnership deal, or get an investor on board and it didn't come through. There are extreme highs and extreme lows. The extreme highs feel amazing, but you forget to enjoy them, because they're followed by extreme lows. I think I've become better at dealing with the lows. They used to be all encompassing – I'd have sleepless nights and it would feel like the end of the world. Today, I've become more hardened so I can deal with the knocks. I used to take everything so personally, because it's such a personal thing when it's your company.

### 'It hurt me when people didn't want to be part of the journey'

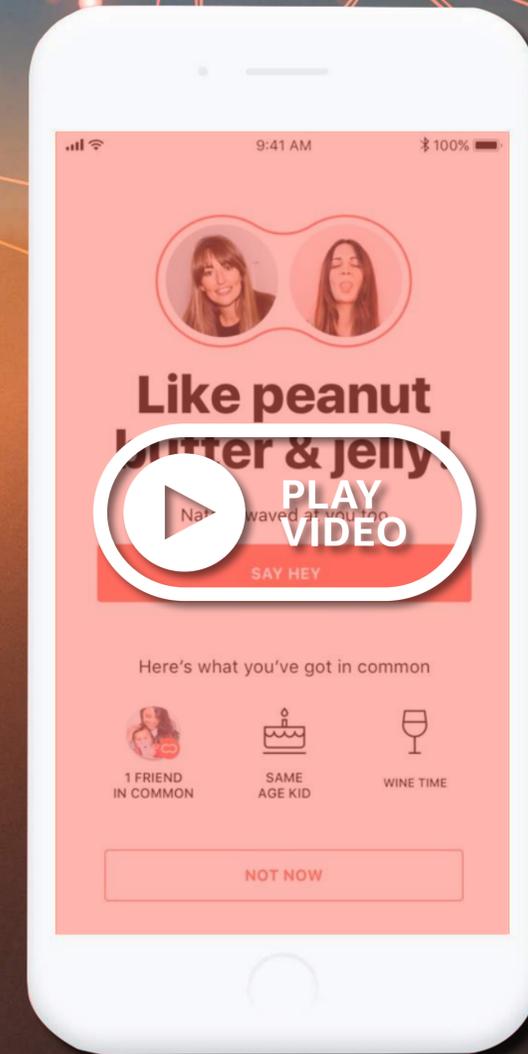
Whether it's in your personal or professional life, it's important to surround yourself with the right people, while also acknowledging that some people won't stick around for the ride – and that's okay. You need to surround yourself with people who understand that the company is your priority and you'll sometimes cancel arrangements, or be distracted by an important email when you're out for dinner. It's all about what you're trying to build. There will be people around you who support that and there'll be people who don't want to be part of that journey. You have to be prepared to deal with that because I wasn't and it was one of the low points of this experience. It hurt.



THE TRICK IS TO STAY ON TOP OF  
THE TECH RELEVANT TO  
YOUR BUSINESS

MY CTO WOULD ONLY BUILD ON AWS

AN AUTHENTIC TONE OF VOICE  
IS VITAL FOR BRAND LOYALTY



**'Don't worry about what others think'**  
I left a well-paid, high profile role to go and try something on my own. That's hard and scary. Some people like my mom will never understand it, while others will live it vicariously with you. As long as you believe in what you're doing, then it won't matter what other people think.

**'We never deviate from who we are'**  
An authentic tone of voice is vital for brand loyalty. We never deviate from what we say. This is a platform for women – it's not focused on babies or children; it focuses on you as a woman. That's something we've always built into every part of our brand. It's in our app design, in

the brand narrative, social media, and the way we speak to our users. When you see something, you'll know it's Peanut.

**'No one cares if we have AI in Peanut'**  
The trick is to stay on top of the tech relevant to your business. No one cares if we have AI in Peanut – it's not what we're about. But there is an expectation we'll be using machine learning to deliver a smarter product. If you have the right engineering and product team who are excited by advancements in technology, they'll be ahead of you. They're already testing things, trying it, and working out a way to build it.

**'My tech team loves AWS'**  
My CTO would only ever build on AWS. Having previously worked with huge startups like Deliveroo, he knows what he's talking about. AWS is critical both for our storage needs and also for scalability.

**'I hire people smarter than me'**  
I want to understand what gets my potential employees excited. What are they trying to get from Peanut and their lives – what are they trying to build? What's the part of the journey that can make them work late or get up early? I want to understand that. Some people have different motivations and some motivations might not work for our

business. Understanding what makes employees tick is really important. And I definitely want to hire people who are smarter than me.

We've built a team that's a diverse mix of parents, people without kids, men, women, and different age groups, so we all have different ideas and use different products. Everyone in the team contributes to how we develop, but we have different ways of innovating.

PEANUT

AELLA CREDIT

GERMAN AUTOLABS

AVA

BOLT

*Oprah's*  
MASTER  
CLASS

OWN

HUSTLE

## AT A GLANCE



Peanut was launched in 2017 by Michelle Kennedy and Greg Orlowski.



Greg is former CTO at Deliveroo and Michelle is former Deputy CEO of dating app Badoo.



The app has over 500,000 registered users across the UK, US and Canada.



Peanut raised two rounds of seed investment from a total of eight investors in 2017.



Peanut uses AWS for scalability and storage, including [Amazon S3](#), [Amazon Route 53](#) and [Amazon EC2](#).



[www.peanut-app.io](http://www.peanut-app.io)

## FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



Founder Stories



CONCENTRATE

GET PUMPED

CHILL-OUT



Le Nozze di Figaro  
Mozart



Buffalo Stance  
Neneh Cherry



Do Right Woman, Do Right Man  
Aretha Franklin

Spotify account & internet connection required

### 'Choosing an investor is like choosing a spouse'

It's so hard to choose the right investors. It's super hard. It's good that we had a choice, but it's almost like choosing a spouse. You're about to marry these people and you don't fully know them – you've both been flirting and you're trying to guess what the other will be like on a bad day. Choosing the right investor is part of the journey to help you further the business. I've learnt so much from it.

### 'There's been a change in attitudes towards female founders'

The first time we sought funding, it was

challenging. The second time around, it was easy. First time around, it was just me and the Peanut deck. The second time, I had data so it was much easier. There's also been a change in market attitudes towards female founders and motherhood as a market. There's still a long way to go though.

### 'What are you waiting for?'

If I were to talk to my younger self, I'd say: 'What are you waiting for?' It took me a while to try something I could have tried much earlier. The longer you leave it, the more life experience you have though – so it's a double-edged sword.

### 'I'm fascinated by Oprah Winfrey'

I love listening to Oprah Winfrey's podcasts. It sounds a bit cheesy, but I love her. I think what Oprah has built is amazing. I'm fascinated by her business network and the boards she's on. Oprah, if you're reading this, would you like to be on the Peanut board?





AELLA CREDIT

Aella CEO Akinola Jones and CTO Wale Akanbi teamed up in Lagos, where Akin headed investment banking at Primera Africa, and Wale was at mobile game studio Gamsole.

Akin, 35, studied in Washington, DC. He has held senior investment banking roles on Wall Street and started his career at Wachovia Securities – now Wells Fargo. He has a five-year-old son, and divides his time between the US and Nigeria. Wale, 29, who taught himself to program as a teenager, lives with his wife in Nigeria.



## Akinola Jones & Wale Akanbi

Co-founders of Aella

# CHANGING LIVES WITH INSTANT LOANS

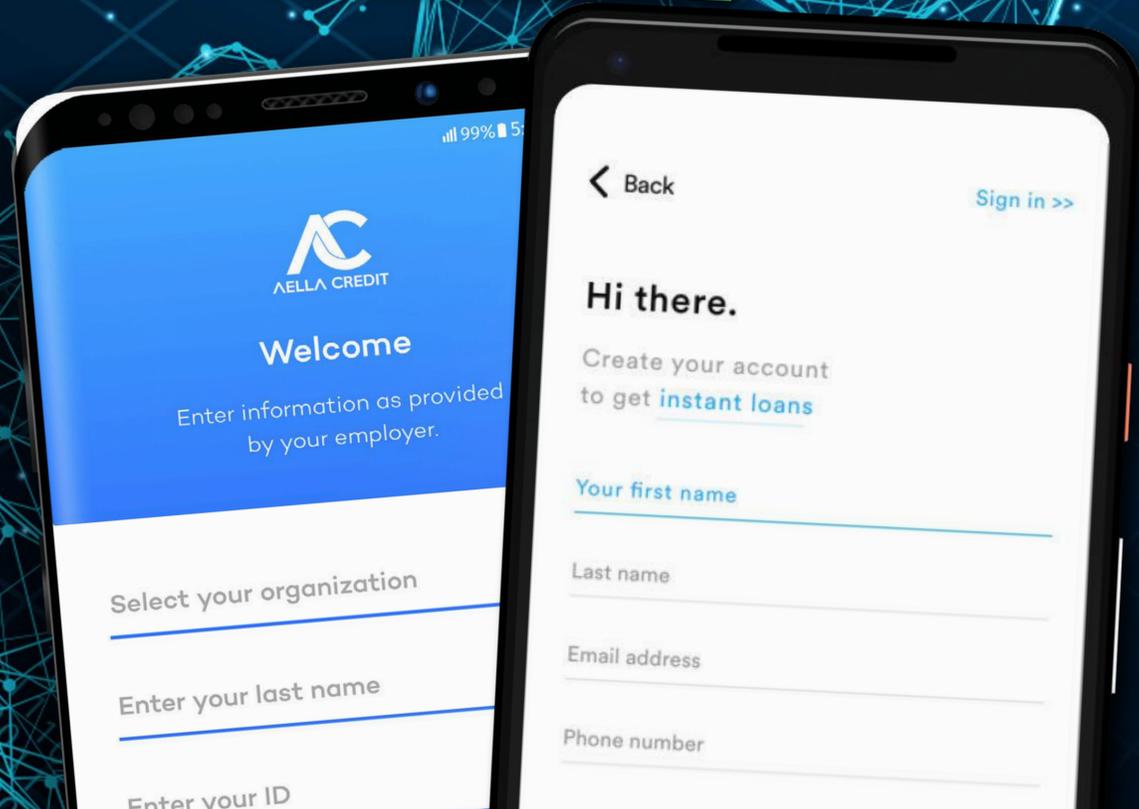
Before Aella Credit, it was a struggle to borrow money in Nigeria. The process was cumbersome and it could take several weeks to access credit. Akinola Jones and Wale Akanbi are helping change that. Now customers can apply for a loan via mobile phone and receive their money in minutes. Aella Credit is integrated with major credit agencies; lending is based on blockchain technology and purpose-built algorithms. The concept proved a hit – Aella Credit has given out \$7 million of micro-loans to more than 200,000 borrowers since launching in 2015.

### Wale: 'It used to take weeks to get credit'

A couple of years ago, I needed to borrow some money, so went to my bank. They gave me 20 pages of forms to fill out and told me I'd have to wait two weeks to find out if I even qualified for a loan. It would then take at least a month to get the money. That was a major problem because I needed the cash in a week for an important business deal. It got me thinking – there had to be a better way.

### Akinola: 'I started asking 'Why aren't these people getting credit?'

When I was head of investment banking at Primera Africa, every day there'd be 300-400 proposals coming across our desks. They were great ideas with the possibility of strong margins, but no one was tackling them. It hit me that financing for businesses and individuals was a big problem, and I started asking: 'Why aren't these people getting credit? What's stopping that from happening?' I realized the problem was identity and credit scoring, which got me thinking about how we could verify that people were who they said they were, give them a proper credit score and make sure they paid us back. Trying to solve those three problems was what led to Aella.



Loan Amounts	Late Fees
5k - 720k NGN	None
Loan Tenor	Monthly Interest
4 - 68 weeks	1% - 14%

**Wale: 'It was a lucky coincidence'**

I had the technology knowledge to solve the problem, but knew nothing about the lending or credit business. Fortunately, Akin had been thinking along the same lines. It was a lucky coincidence he contacted me the same week I applied for the loan. Akin had the business experience and I had the tech experience, so we were a good combination.

**Akinola: 'Everyone kept seeing problems, where we could see opportunities'**

When we began giving out instant, online loans in Nigeria in late 2015, everyone was telling us: 'This is crazy. Handing out loans to people you've never met? No one's going to pay you back. How are you going to get money to them instantly?' Everyone kept seeing problems, where we could see opportunities. The country was building a national biometric identity database, which I realized was the key. If we could verify people were who they said they were, giving them the money and credit scoring would be the easy bit.

**Wale: 'Rekognition verifies ID on our mobile app'**

I'd interacted with a few cloud providers before we launched Aella Credit. In comparison, AWS is straightforward to use and reliable. We use [Amazon Rekognition](#) to verify ID on our mobile app, [Amazon Simple Email Service \(Amazon SES\)](#) for email, [Amazon Relational Database \(Amazon RDS\)](#) for our database and about 10 other services.

**Wale: 'We gave out 1,000 loans within six months of launching'**

We didn't do any marketing; instead partnering with 12 companies in Lagos, which gave us access to about 500,000 borrowers. We gave out 1,000 loans worth \$800,000 within six months of launching.

**Wale: 'Our loans can transform lives'**

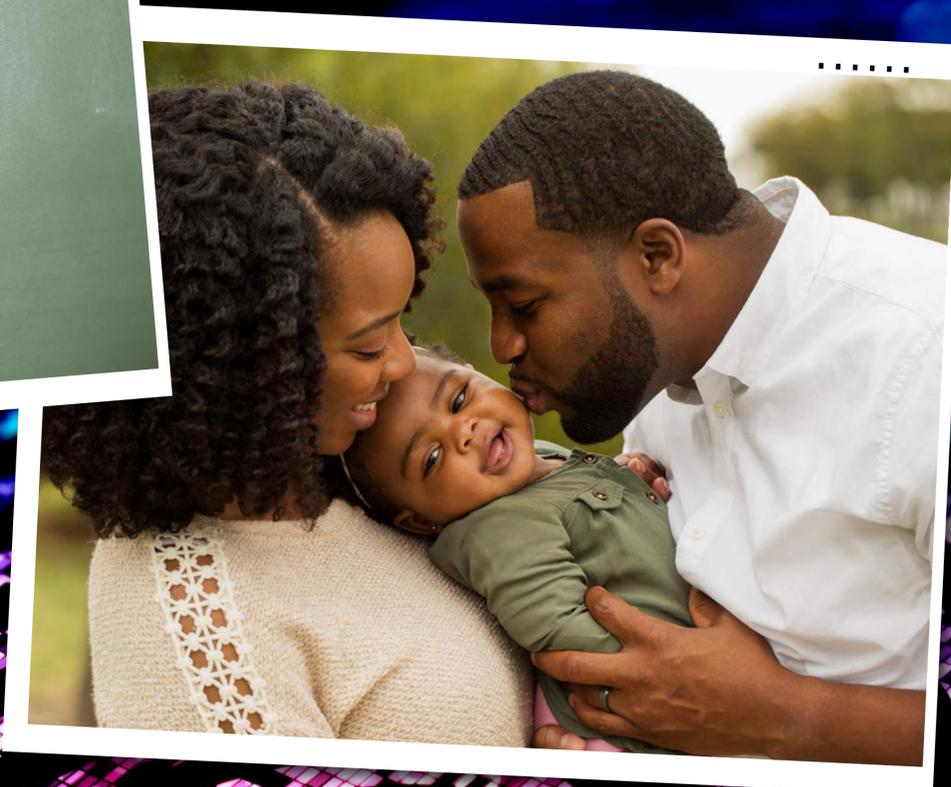
One customer told me she'd needed cash fast to pay for school fees so she could keep her child at school. She couldn't get the cash anywhere else but applied to Aella and almost instantly got credit. Her story got me thinking: 'We're actually affecting lives and changing a lot of people's stories.' That thought has stuck with me ever since.

**Akinola: 'We're trying to get credit out faster and more cheaply'**

One woman whose child was sick came on our platform and within five minutes was given a loan to buy drugs, which helped stabilize her child. Those stories make us want to get credit out faster and cheaper. The pricing isn't where we want it to be yet, but we're working hard, using blockchain technology, partnering with banks, talking to different lenders, and trying to find ways to get the cheapest possible capital to our borrowers.



WE'RE CHANGING A LOT OF  
PEOPLE'S STORIES





GOING THROUGH THE  
ACCELERATOR PROGRAM WAS LIKE  
STARTING FROM ZERO

**Akinola: 'We'd planned everything around that injection of capital'**

There have been times when we've come close to giving up. Not long after we started, a large US investor was going to invest a huge amount into the company. We'd planned everything around that injection of capital, but it fell through at the last minute, which was a major setback.

**Wale: 'We were ready to quit and leave everything behind'**

We were trying everything to keep the business going, but could see our business model wasn't working. We were feeling maybe we should quit, but then in 2016, we were accepted into a US-based startup program called Y Combinator. That program helped us shift our viewpoint and change our business model. It made all the difference because the advisors had experienced these things themselves, so knew exactly what we were going through.

**Akinola: 'It was like starting from zero'**

Going through Y Combinator was like starting from zero. Having been on the other side as an investment banker, I had to learn to think like a technology company founder across everything from scaling and growth to disruption, and to stop thinking in a linear way. I used to love having everything planned out from A-Z; but when you're running a tech startup, it's about being willing to make mistakes and learn from them so you can tweak and measure things.

Looking back, we had this vision of what we wanted to force on the market. We didn't build a product, test it out and let the market give us feedback. If I could go back, I'd let the market tell us what we needed to build, versus building something and imposing it on the market.

**Wale: 'My background helps me face up to challenges'**

When I was three years old, my dad passed away so my mum raised me on her own. She instilled in me the belief that nothing is impossible – you can do anything if you put your mind to it. She gave me those values from the beginning and they're still my driving force. I'm so proud of her. My background has helped me overcome any challenge.

I've always loved building things. I started programming as a teenager and built a couple of websites for people. I just wanted to see if I could do it. When I was at university, I built a portal which was used by 10,000 students and set up the 'New Frontiers TV – Nigeria', a streaming channel using an internet connection and a laptop. It's still running today.

**Akinola: 'Investors bet on people, not business plans'**

Raising finance is really difficult. You're trying to prove to investors you're the one they should back. The question is, do they believe you can become a unicorn? Are you a founder who can continuously raise money? It's a bet on people, not business plans. But at every point where we've felt: 'This is the end of the road', there was always someone who heard our vision and said: 'Alright, I'm going to take a chance, I think you're onto something here.' We went out and tried to sell our vision, but were willing to tweak it to conform to what the market needed versus what we wanted to do. You have to be flexible.

WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH

I REMEMBER OUR CUSTOMERS'

STORIES AND THEY KEEP ME GOING

**Akinola: 'Your team has gone on this blindfolded journey with you'**

There's always this fear of failure because a lot of people have taken a bet on you and you don't want to let them down. You want to give your customers more money and you want the people who took a risk on you when nobody else would to believe it was a good investment. And you want your team members, who've gone on this blindfolded journey with you, to know it wasn't a mistake.

It's a high-pressure, high-stress job – a bit like being in a rocket ship. You could fly to the moon tomorrow or the rocket could explode at any point because you're moving so fast. That's why I try to find one day in the week when I shut myself off from any kind of electronic device, go to the beach and just relax to take my mind off things.

**Wale: 'Take a break when stress levels rise'**

When stress levels at work are rising, I take a break and go traveling. I love to travel. The most interesting place I've been so far is Ghana. My other favorite two things are reading and watching movies, especially action stories that keep you on the edge like Mission Impossible.

**Akinola: 'You need people willing to work in mayhem'**

Creating the right team to kick-off with is very important, because it can affect the whole culture if you bring in the wrong people. If they're used to having everything structured, a startup might not be the best fit for them. Even though they might be very talented, they might not be able to fulfill what they're meant to do. You need people willing to work in mayhem.

**Wale: 'We want people who are problem-solvers'**

When we're looking for people to join our team, the thing we prize most is commitment and loyalty. We want people who can think outside the box. How smart are they? Are they a problem solver?





### Akinola: 'We're trying to do something much bigger than ourselves'

The reason we've been able to do what we've done is because our team has made sacrifices. Many of them used to work at Goldman Sachs, so could be making far more money elsewhere. But they believe in our vision, which is that we're trying to do something much bigger than ourselves. Going to work every morning knowing this company has given out over \$7 million of loans, and there are hundreds of thousands of people on our platform, feels good.

### Wale: 'Credit is a basic human right'

Since we launched, we've had so many customers telling us how Aella has made an impact on their lives. When things get tough, I remember the stories and that's one of the things that keeps me going and energizes me. We've just expanded into the Philippines and in five years' time, we want to have captured significant market share in many emerging markets. Everybody should have access to instant loans, because we believe credit is a basic human right.

IT'S LIKE BEING IN A  
ROCKET SHIP.  
YOU COULD FLY TO THE MOON  
OR EXPLODE BECAUSE YOU'RE  
MOVING SO FAST

## AT A GLANCE



Akinola Jones founded Aella Credit with Wale Akanbi in 2015.



Aella Credit customers mainly borrow money for housing, healthcare, and education.



45 percent of customers are women or women-owned businesses.



Aella Credit has had two funding rounds. Investors include Y Combinator and 500 Startups.



Aella Credit uses [Amazon Rekognition](#) to verify identity on its mobile app.



Aella has given out \$7 million of micro-loans to more than 200,000 borrowers.



[www.aellacredit.com](http://www.aellacredit.com)

### FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



#### CONCENTRATE



Love is Stronger than Pride  
Sade

#### GET PUMPED



Ye  
Burna Boy

#### CHILL-OUT



UMI Says  
Mos Def



Oceans  
Hillsong UNITED



Thunder  
Imagine Dragons



Shape of You  
Ed Sheeran

AKINOLA

WALE

Spotify account & internet connection required


**German Autolabs**

Holger G. Weiss has worked in the automotive industry for over 20 years. After several senior leadership roles, he decided to start his own company – German Autolabs. He's also a public speaker, board member, mentor, and investor with business interests in Germany, the UK, and the US.


**Holger Weiss**

Co-founder & CEO of German Autolabs

# SAVING LIVES WITH SMARTER CARS

One in four road traffic accidents is linked to smartphone use. Legislation has had little effect – an estimated 80 percent of drivers still check their phones while driving. Automotive enthusiast Holger Weiss knew he was prone to using his phone at the wheel, but couldn't find a tech solution to the problem. So in 2016, he founded German Autolabs to make driving safer. The Berlin-based startup has created an AI-powered digital co-driver called Chris, which enables drivers to operate their phone through gestures and voice commands. With Chris, you can listen to text messages, control your music, make calls, and be guided to your destination, hands-free while driving.

## 'The first startup I joined got sold to Nokia'

I'm addicted to startup life – I love seeing something small grow so much bigger. The first startup I joined was a satellite navigation company – Gate5. It got acquired by Nokia, who grew it further and sold it on again. I then became CEO at a company I'd originally helped as a business angel. It was acquired by Panasonic in 2015, so I saw my opportunity to have a much-needed break.

## 'I took three months off to travel'

After my first startup experience, I was thinking that I should take a break before the next ride, but I didn't. Retrospectively, that was a mistake. So, once I was more

or less done with my job, my wife and I spent three months traveling through Latin America, namely Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, and Mexico. We would drive, spend a week getting to know somewhere, then set off again.

The most exciting drive I've ever had was the journey out of Panama City. We were heading into the countryside in a hire car and the traffic was horrible as there are no proper roads. At one point, I had to bribe a policeman \$20 after taking a wrong turn. He'd originally told me I had to go to the police station, but I really didn't want to end up in trouble in Latin America!



### 'German Autolabs was born from a personal frustration'

That three month break gave me the space to think about a new business. I'd sometimes use WhatsApp, email and Facebook when I was driving, even though it wasn't allowed and I knew it was distracting. I investigated and found out that 80 percent of drivers frequently consult their phones while driving. There was no solution that integrated smartphones into cars properly to allow for safer driving. I wanted a digital co-driver. So, I developed this strategy to build a virtual assistant for cars, something that could support drivers and passengers in future cars. Because the average car in Germany is almost 10 years old, we decided to start with the retrofit version of the assistant. We bypassed traditional automotive development cycles to build a voice AI platform as an independent assistant for the automotive industry.

### 'I knew I needed a co-founder at my side to make my startup work'

I developed the core idea for Chris, but I'm not a technical or product development guy; I'm the guy with the vision. I build strategies, motivate people and see trends, but I need someone to execute it on a very detailed level. That's why I set out to find a co-founder. It seemed like destiny when I found Patrick Weissert. A friend suggested Patrick, so we met over a coffee and clicked pretty much immediately. At the time, he ran the consumer product department at HERE Technologies – a digital mapping and navigation company. He needed six months to tie up loose ends and handover his role before he could leave HERE. While he did, I sourced some desks, a tax consultant, a payroll consultant, and a coffee maker.

### 'We had a clear vision of what we wanted to build'

We knew we wanted to start with a retrofit product that could be used in any car, then develop the technology into a software platform that could be built into new cars. A lot of very professional people told us we couldn't do it with our timescale and budget, but they were wrong. We're up to 40 staff now; there were only 10 of us two years ago. It's pretty spectacular what we've done, really.

### 'We needed to hire people with experience'

We closed a €2 million (\$2.3 million) seed round early on, which allowed us to hire senior people, including a Head of Marketing. We also needed creative people to help us with design, so I hired Remi Bigot – a really talented product designer. He was excited by the project and brought in some interns to do design research, market research, prototyping and so on. For a company our age, we're unusual because the core team is very experienced. What we're doing is very complex, so we need people who know what they're doing.

### 'Teams bond through challenging times'

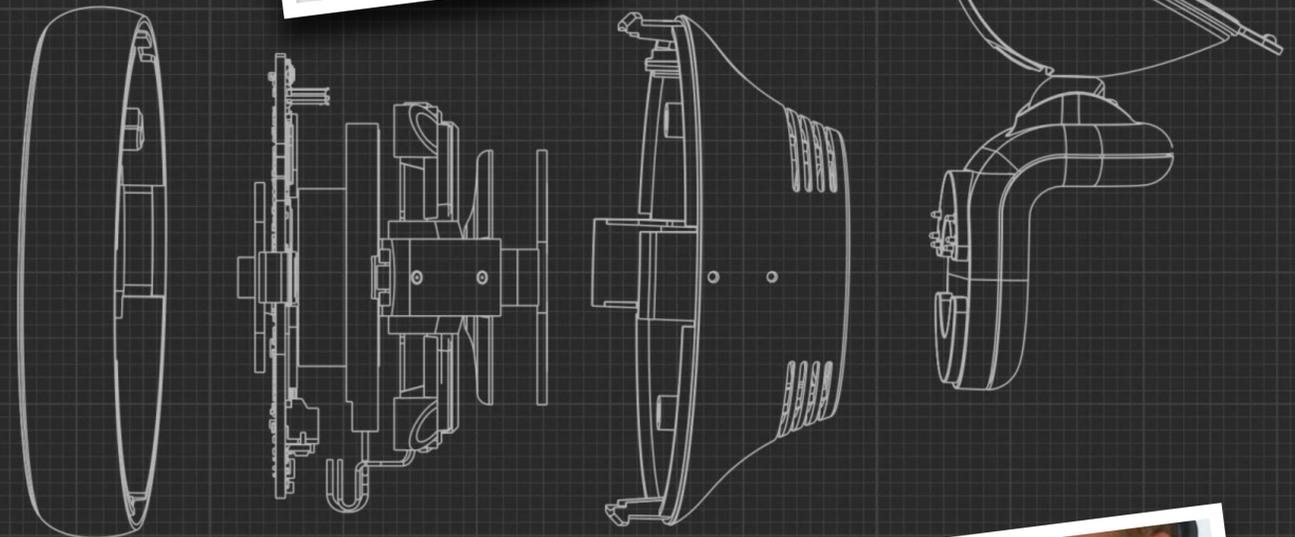
When you're 25, you can share a room with a friend and live off pizza and beer. Once you turn 40, you have a mortgage, kids in school, and a family that want to go skiing. Our senior staff all agreed to a significant salary cut when they joined us, but we pay well enough.

As a team, we all trust each other. It's partly due to leadership – believing in the story yourself and being able to convince people there's substance to your strategy. We also bond through challenging times. You grow together and look after each other.

I'M NOT A TECHNICAL OR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT GUY:  
I'M THE GUY WITH THE VISION.



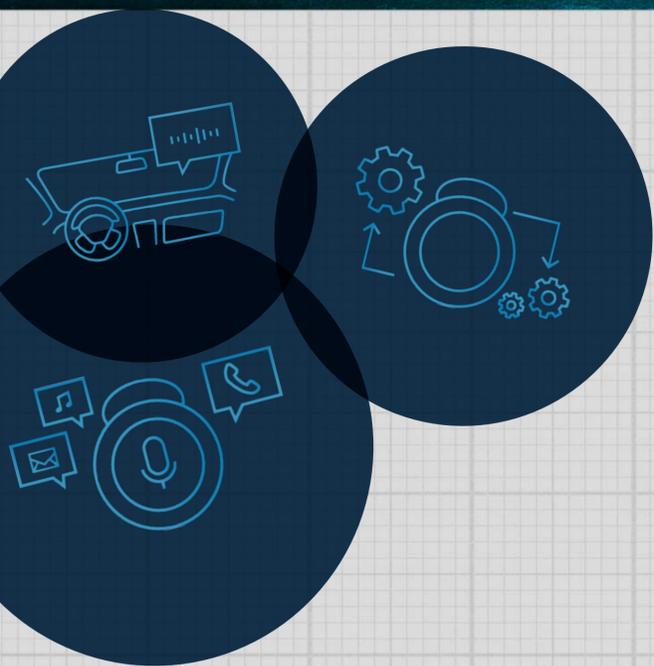
Remi



Me and Patrick



A LOT OF PEOPLE TOLD US WE COULDN'T DO IT WITH OUR TIMESCALE AND BUDGET



### 'We need access to advanced tools so chose AWS'

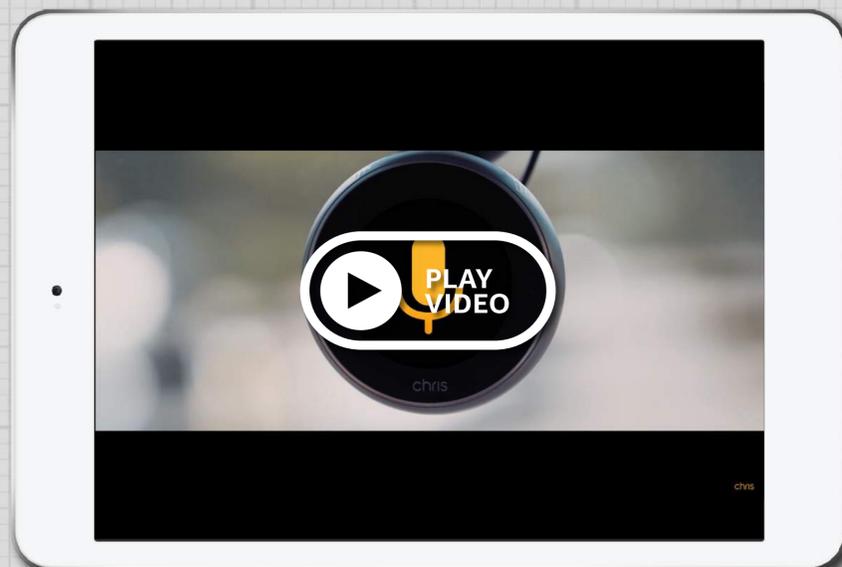
We need access to advanced tools to build our software, which is why our developers love using AWS. It's easy to use, globally available, and the support is great. We're using AWS to host Chris now and are looking forward to using some of the big data services in the future.

### 'Product development is a balancing act'

With a product this complex, you need to develop it with customers. That's difficult though, as the product has to be up and running for people to use it. But if you develop for too long, you can't action feedback from customers. It's a real balancing act.

Henry Ford said: 'If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.' This rings true with Chris. Some of our developments are based on customer suggestions, but a lot of our innovation comes from our team. We know what our goals are, but in order to get there, we need to perfect our retrofit solution. We're working on additional features and settings, including more languages and a smarter assistant that understands users even better. Alongside this, we're working on the first full integrations with businesses who can benefit from our product, like fleet operators and mobile carriers.

SOME OF OUR DEVELOPMENTS ARE BASED ON CUSTOMER SUGGESTIONS. BUT A LOT OF INNOVATION COMES FROM OUR TEAM



the team



YOU CAN GAIN MARKET UNDERSTANDING THROUGH A PLATFORM LIKE KICKSTARTER

### 'Kickstarter gave us the chance to evaluate our business idea'

We won the Best of Kickstarter Award at the Consumer Technology Association's CES 2019 conference. It's a great achievement and Kickstarter is a fantastic platform, although it doesn't find the funding for you. Fundraising wasn't the sole purpose of our Kickstarter campaign. €250,000 (\$280,000) is good money and we appreciated it, but we knew it wouldn't be enough to cover what we're doing.

For us, Kickstarter was more of a marketing tool, as it gives you the chance to evaluate an idea long before the product is available. If you can find people who will give you money for something they'll get in a year or so, there's a high likelihood other people will want to give you money once the product becomes available. We also learned that you can't guarantee who your customers will be. Our backers were older than we expected, with newer cars. You can gain market understanding through a platform like Kickstarter, plus you may get good exposure if you have a successful campaign.

### 'Fundraising isn't as easy as people think'

A lot of young founders completely underestimate the effort it takes to get funding. I think it's something to do with the hype within the startup environment. Stories in the press and on influential blogs make it seem like everyone reaches their €50 million (\$56 million) round. There's an impression that you have a great idea, you build a startup, then someone gives you lots of money until your product is done – and none of it requires that much effort. This is so rarely the case.

WE FOCUSED ON MAKING THE DIGITAL ASSISTANT AND APP  
GREAT RATHER THAN WORRYING ABOUT LESS CRUCIAL FEATURES

### 'The startup environment makes me afraid of being more open'

Sometimes, it's difficult to speak openly with fellow founders and entrepreneurs because all their stories seem to be the same. Maybe it's because there's this tendency to say everything is glowing and shining and always growing, whether it's true or not. There's also this culture of everyone working under substantial pressure. It's sad. It's like the stories of professional sportspeople outing themselves by sharing the fact they've had a breakdown or depression. We need more founders to be open about what it's really like to start and grow a business.

### 'Marketing is essential when you're building something new'

Daniel Mieves, our Head of Marketing, uses different platforms to build our audience. Social media works well, particularly Facebook, but to a certain extent, our product requires us to educate people. Saying that we've built a retrofit digital co-driver would mean nothing to a lot of people, so we have to teach people

about it and evangelize about the product on blogs, in interviews, and at industry shows. I spend a lot of time speaking at conferences, making it clear that we know what we're talking about and what we're doing. Traveling for work, hearing feedback, and opening people's eyes to our tech motivates me.

### 'Our product will change as drivers' needs change'

In 10 years time, you'll probably be able to use a smartphone while driving because the car will drive itself 95 percent of the time. So an assistant like Chris is a short-term need, but people will want a smart co-driver. It may do different things, like monitoring each passenger's heart rate via an in-seat sensor or using cameras to check everyone in the back is okay. We're very focused on reducing distraction in the car at the moment, but soon we'll dive deeper into the DNA of a companion or co-driver – the soul of future cars.

### 'German Autolabs has succeeded because we are so focused – less is more'

My first concept of Chris could do a lot more than it does today, but my team and I focused on making the digital assistant and app great rather than worrying about less crucial features. It's one of the reasons the company is doing so well – if you're not focused, you face more complexity and you're more distracted. Outside of work, I owe my success to my wife – that relationship is the most important thing in my life.



## AT A GLANCE



Holger Weiss founded German Autolabs with Patrick Weissert in 2016.



The Berlin startup's first product is Chris – an AI-powered driving assistant.



Chris is hosted on the AWS cloud.



German Autolabs raised €2 million (\$2.3 million) during its seed round and €250,000 (\$280,000) through Kickstarter.



[www.germanautolabs.com](http://www.germanautolabs.com)

### FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



Founder Stories



#### CONCENTRATE



Piano Concerto  
Nr. 5  
Beethoven

#### GET PUMPED



Happy  
Pharrell  
Williams

#### CHILL-OUT



I Put A Spell  
On You  
Nina Simone

Spotify account & internet connection required

WE NEED MORE FOUNDERS TO BE  
OPEN ABOUT WHAT IT'S REALLY  
LIKE TO START AND GROW A BUSINESS

# EMPOWERING WOMEN TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR HEALTH

Ava's fertility tracking bracelet has helped more than 18,000 women become pregnant.

The \$299 wristband is worn at night and uses sensors to measure temperature, breathing, sleep quality, pulse rate, and other variables. It syncs with a smartphone so the Ava app can analyze the data and help women work out when they're most fertile. Ava has offices in San Francisco, Zurich, and Hong Kong, and has raised more than \$42 million in funding since its launch in 2014.

## 'I moved to Bangalore at 22 to set up my first business'

I found a chocolate concept I really wanted to work on and wrote a business plan, but it seemed ridiculously expensive to do it in Switzerland. So, after I graduated from my master's program, I moved to Bangalore where I co-founded L'inouï – a business making and retailing chocolate.

## 'There are a lot of taboos around women's health'

At L'inouï, female staff couldn't work or join in certain religious ceremonies when they were menstruating. There are a lot of taboos around women's health in general and although it's very much on the surface in India, it's something I see in many other countries as well.

The shame and insecurity around women's health really impacts on our lives and work, because the things we're struggling with affect the way we feel and the opportunities open to us.

T H E R E   A R E   A   L O T   O F   T A B O O S

A R O U N D   W O M E N ' S   H E A L T H



Swiss entrepreneur Lea von Bidder started her first company making and selling chocolate in Bangalore, when she was 22, before going on to co-found a health tech company - Ava.

She was named in the 2018 Forbes list as one of the 30 most important entrepreneurs under 30. Lea, 29, shares a house in San Francisco with her husband and four of their friends.



**Lea von Bidder**

Co-founder of Ava



DO SOMETHING THAT GIVES YOU  
FULFILLMENT BECAUSE THERE'S A  
PRICE TO FOUNDING A STARTUP

### 'We all had a personal story that drew us to Ava'

When I got back to Switzerland, I was keen to start a business themed around education and making it easier to have open conversations about women's health. I met Pascal Koenig for coffee and talked about what I wanted to build. He'd started to work on a tech solution in the women's health space and I fell in love with his idea. Four weeks later, I became a co-founder of Ava.

All of us co-founders have a personal story that drew us to Ava. One of my co-founders and his partner were trying to conceive, two others were having issues with contraception, and I was on my third method of birth control I didn't like.

### 'Seeing a picture of the first Ava baby was overwhelming'

The most exciting moment for us was when the first Ava baby was born in summer 2017. To see a picture of him felt quite overwhelming. Since then, we've had 18,000 Ava pregnancies and we hear of around 50 pregnancies a day now. We have a tracker in our office, which updates the number every 15 minutes. It's not that we're responsible for all those babies – it's very much down to the couples, but that's the most beautiful part of our job and what gets us up in the morning.

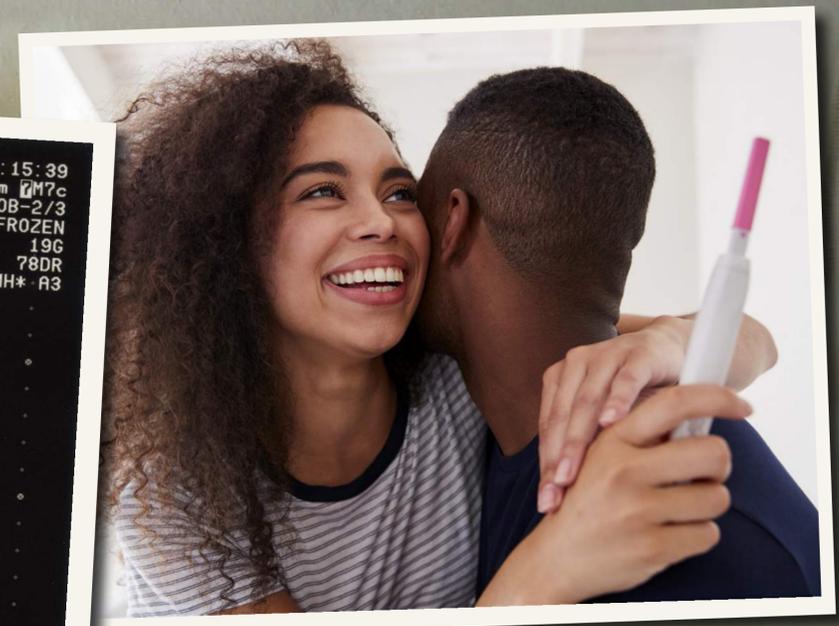
### 'Your startup needs to be doing something you really believe in'

Startups are terribly exciting, but they're also terribly hard and I can't imagine doing this for anything I didn't really believe in. It's so important to do something you have a strong connection to and that really gives you fulfillment, because founding a startup comes at a price.

At Ava, we feel under pressure to solve some of the issues around women's health, because we know that for every month we don't solve a problem and no one else solves it, it has a negative effect on women. It's almost like the flip-side of the coin – if you work on something you really care about, it will also be really important for you to succeed.

### 'You feel you're the only person not succeeding'

It's really important to have a network of other founders to talk to. It often feels as though you're the only person not succeeding at something when the reality is, everyone else is struggling too. I really appreciate having support here in San Francisco, because I know I wouldn't have that in Switzerland, where there's not such a strong startup community.



**'San Francisco is crazy but inspiring'**

San Francisco is such an inspiring place. Crazy, but inspiring. Trends form so quickly and things move fast. There's a big bunch of people who've moved here and are all trying to change the world in their own way and that makes for a really interesting dynamic.

**'I can pack all my belongings into two suitcases'**

I'm not a big fan of owning things and am always trying to reduce what I have, so never buy anything I don't really need. I live in a big house, which I share with my husband and four friends of ours. I love it. It's exactly the way I want to live. I've moved 15 times during the past five years and love that I can pack all my belongings into two suitcases and go on to the next place. That gives me a real sense of freedom.

**'I don't need to be faster than anyone else'**

Going to the gym is quite important to me. I don't do it because I'm super into exercising and want to be faster or stronger than anyone else – it's about having a life/work balance. I really love hanging out in gyms, listening to podcasts and doing a few exercises.

I like to go hiking sometimes and do a little bit of yoga. It sounds a bit weird, but I also sing in a palliative care choir for people in hospices. It's something that's very close to my heart and I wish I could do more of.

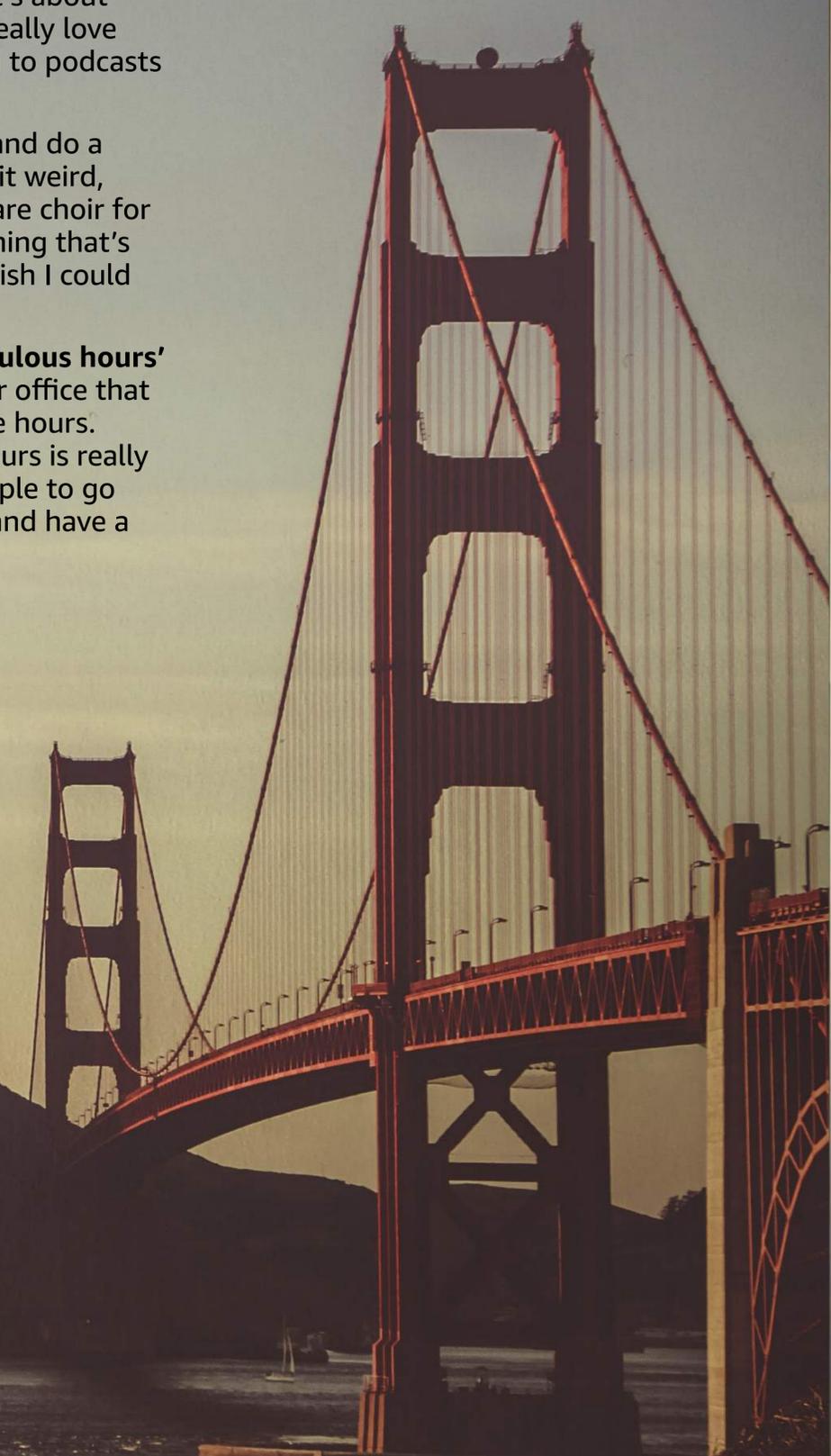
**'You don't have to work ridiculous hours'**

You will not find anyone in our office that stays longer than eight or nine hours. Sticking to normal working hours is really important to us. We want people to go back and play with their kids and have a life outside work.

IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO HAVE

A NETWORK OF OTHER FOUNDERS

TO TALK TO



### 'Chocolate is utterly useless, yet wonderful'

Chocolate is a real passion of mine. I also love the chocolate-making industry because it's fascinating. All that attention to detail, even though chocolate is so utterly useless, yet wonderful. Chocolate exists purely to make you happy. There's no other reason why you should eat it. It's a piece of luxury and comfort. People always think the more chocolate you eat, the more you go towards dark, but that's never happened to me. I still love milk chocolate.

### 'People are scared of coding, but they needn't be'

Bangalore's a tech hub, so when I was there, I became interested in learning to code. A few years on, I'm a terrible coder and don't know that much about it anymore, but that's fine. Having done it once is enough. People who are non-technical - and I'd include myself in that category, are scared of this coding world, but they don't need to be. You can build an understanding of what coding is and how the rules work. Everyone should try to get that because it's so important now.

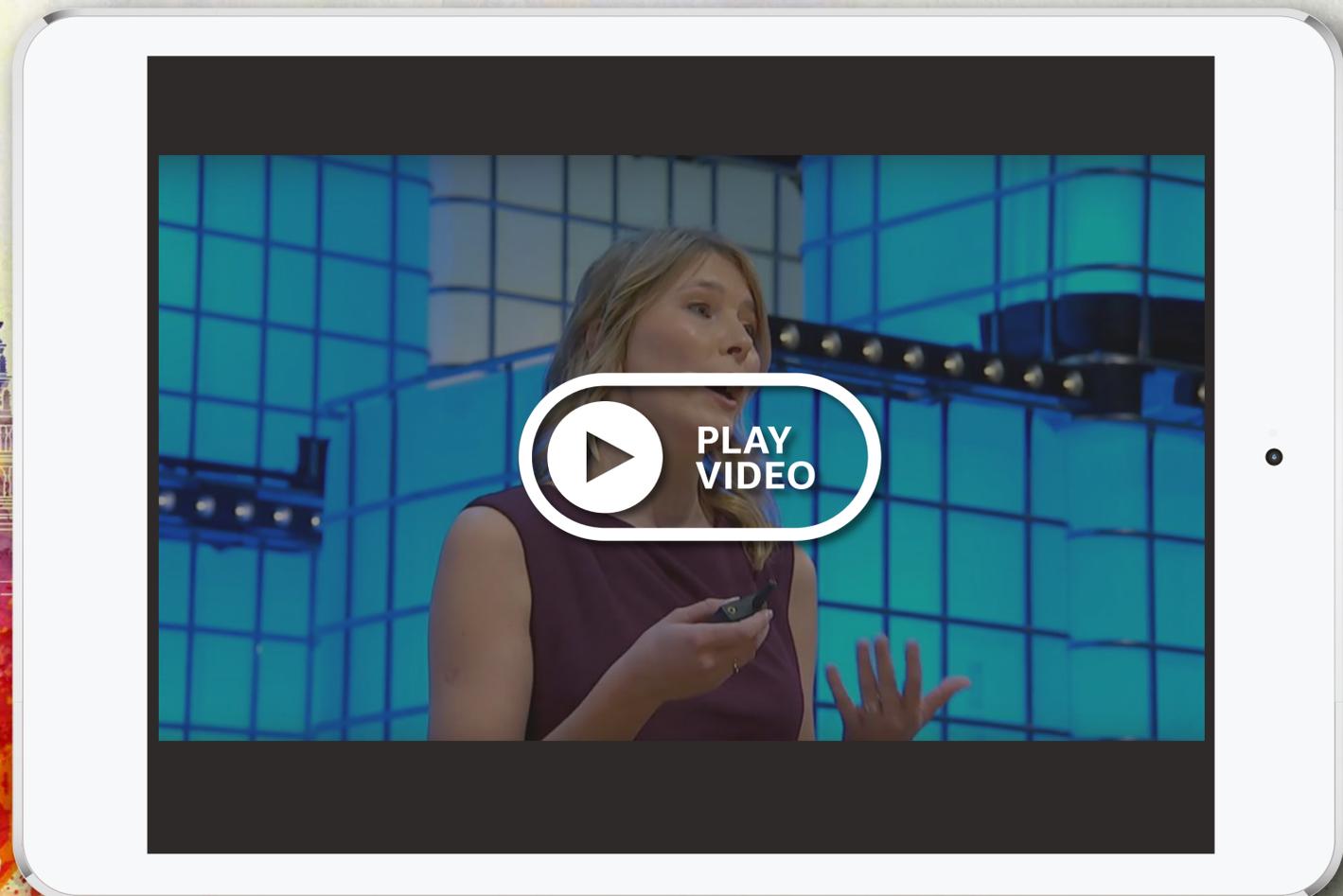
### 'We could never have pulled this off without funding'

There's a movement towards bootstrapped, self-funded companies and I understand that desire to keep control of your business, but it depends what you're trying to do. We're building a medical device company and spend around a quarter of our revenue on R&D, and have plans to tackle more areas of women's health. The rewards are huge, but the initial investment is significant and we could never have pulled this off without funding. What I think is wrong is when funding is used as a vanity metric. That's ridiculous. You should raise money only when you need it and when you can promise investors a good return.

### 'We wouldn't have been able to scale as quickly without AWS'

We use a number of core AWS services, such as [Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud \(Amazon EC2\)](#), [Amazon Simple Storage Service \(Amazon S3\)](#), [Amazon Simple Queue Service \(Amazon SQS\)](#), [Amazon RDS](#), and [Amazon SES](#). Without these, we wouldn't have been able to build our application in such a short time, or to scale as quickly. [Amazon CloudWatch](#) helps us analyze our log data and resolve any issues, while [AWS Elastic Beanstalk](#) has been useful for helping us manage growth. We're now looking at [Amazon Elastic Container Service \(Amazon ECS\)](#) and [AWS Lambda](#), so we're ready for future expansion.

FUNDING ISN'T A VANITY METRIC  
- ONLY RAISE MONEY WHEN YOU  
NEED IT AND WHEN YOU CAN  
PROMISE INVESTORS A  
GOOD RETURN





### 'Suddenly, you're 30 and you realize it's not as easy as you thought'

Our Ava online community on Facebook now has 25,000 users who ask questions, share experiences, and give each other emotional support. When you're struggling to get pregnant, or even if you're not struggling, it's nice to have other people around you. One of the big issues, especially when it comes to fertility, is that we've all been taught it's really easy to get pregnant. When you're 16, you're pretty much told that if you look too long at someone of the opposite sex, you'll get pregnant. Then suddenly, you're 30 and you realize it's not as easy as you thought.

### 'The idea is women can learn about their health'

We've also started a content platform, which has around one and a half million users a month. This includes science-backed, expert information through ebooks and webinars. The idea is that women can learn about their health, especially when it comes to fertility. From the beginning, we wanted to create a total environment around trying to conceive, not just a bracelet that tells you when it's time.

### 'I'm not worried about competition, I'm more worried about the lack of competition'

We welcome other companies coming into the women's health space. We don't have to win this, we just want someone to win it. What worries me is the lack of innovation in women's health. Five years ago, there were a lot of companies with big ideas and solutions, and everyone was talking about the 'femtech revolution'. Since then, we haven't seen much. That's why I'm not worried about competition – I'm more worried about a lack of competition. We don't need another 20 players doing the same thing and competing with each other – we need more scientists and researchers coming into the women's health space to innovate. I don't see that happening at the moment.

### 'Women have been treated as little men'

Women have not been well researched historically, but treated as 'little men'. That's a problem because there are certain things that work differently for women and men, and we still don't fully understand and appreciate those differences. A lot of women are sitting there at various stages of their reproductive life with inadequate and imprecise solutions. It's not just fertility. Contraception, menopause and miscarriage are also huge problems.

When I look at where we are with Ava right now, I can't believe we've got this far. The further we go, the more we see it has huge potential. Obviously, you always wish things would move faster and more smoothly, but you have to learn to deal with the fact that not everything is as straightforward as you hope it'll be.



## AT A GLANCE



Ava's bracelet has helped 18,000 women get pregnant.



Lea von Bidder's Ava co-founders are Pascal Koenig, Philipp Tholen, and Peter Stein.



Ava has raised more than \$42 million in funding, with a quarter of revenue going into R&D.



Ava employs 110 people in Zurich, San Francisco, and Hong Kong.



Ava relies on [Amazon EC2](#), [Amazon S3](#), [Amazon RDS](#), [Amazon SES](#), and [Amazon CloudWatch](#).



[www.avawomen.com](http://www.avawomen.com)

### FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



#### CONCENTRATE



Lie Alone -  
16 BL Remix  
L. Doblado

#### GET PUMPED



Roses  
Zaxx Remix +  
Chainsmokers

#### CHILL-OUT



Come Alive  
Wynne

Spotify account & internet connection required

# Bolt

At just 19 years old, Markus Villig set about shaking up the transportation world for good using ride-hailing technology. Bolt, an app that makes on-demand transport easier, cheaper, and safer, gained unicorn status in just five years. Markus lives in Tallinn, Estonia, where he grew up, and thrives on enabling positive changes for people in Europe and Africa.



## Markus Villig

Co-founder & CEO of Bolt

## OVERRIDING TRADITIONAL RIDE-HAILING

Bolt, formerly Taxify, connects those in need of transport to drivers and shared vehicles, with the aim of reducing public reliance on private vehicles for city-based travel. Launched by Markus Villig, Martin Villig, and Oliver Leisalu in 2013, the app is now available in more than 100 cities and 30 countries. Bolt's team is 850-strong and the startup has 25 million registered users making the most of the taxis, scooters, motorbikes, and other modes of transportation available through the app.

### 'No two cities are exactly the same'

I was born in 1993 in a small city on the island of Saaremaa, Estonia. Everyone knew each other; nobody locked their front door. When I was seven, we moved to Tallinn, the capital city, which was a huge change. I couldn't believe how different two small cities could be. Tallinn is still my home, as well as the location of Bolt's headquarters.

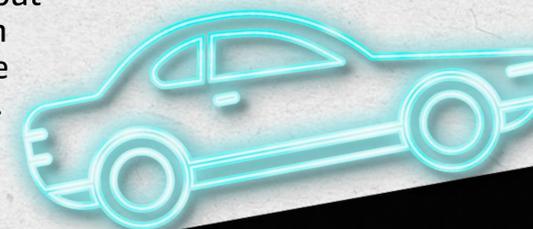
### 'Technology seems like the easiest way to make a positive impact'

I've always wanted to work in technology – it seemed like the industry where I could make the biggest impact and really improve people's lives. I thought about going down the academic route with science, but I felt I could create more change if I started my own business.

### 'As a child, I spent my spare time developing tech skills'

I learnt coding, built websites, and participated in hackathons while I was still in school, because I wanted to gain experience. In the summer, I'd do small jobs for neighbors, like mowing the grass, to get a bit of money. Then when I was 19, I graduated from high school and started Bolt. So founding the company is my first and only full-time job. I've been able to build a business that I feel is an amazing place to work, rather than just following what other companies have done.

# TALLINN



**'Youth is a strength, not a weakness'**

I'm the co-founder of a unicorn business, but at 25 I'm only at the start of my life. It's harder to take as many risks and be as tenacious when you get older and have a family, so I see my age as a strength. In the tech industry, people don't discount you because you're young. I imagine it's different in more traditional scenes.

**'My own circumstances informed my initial research'**

At 19, I didn't have a driving license or a desire to drive, nor did other people my age. I did lots of research and found that the transportation industry was going through massive shifts – autonomous driving was a hot topic, electric cars were increasing in popularity, and car ownership was falling.

What lit the spark for Bolt was the state of the taxi industry in Tallinn. There were 30 taxi companies, each with their own call center, and the service was awful. The

cars were in poor condition, passengers were often scammed, and you always had to pay in cash. As a solution, I wanted to aggregate these small companies into one platform where users could leave feedback to incentivize drivers to improve their services.

**'I Googled 'how to start a startup''**

Aware that I didn't have the money or development skills to build a platform on my own, I Googled 'how to start a startup'. Thankfully, it turns out there's a lot of great advice online!

I created a survey about the Tallinn taxi industry and shared it with old schoolmates and on social media. More than 600 respondents said the system was terrible and that they'd happily use a mobile app if it made things better. That gave me a lot of encouragement.

WEB SEARCH

how to start a startup



my brother

YOU CAN'T IGNORE

WHAT CUSTOMERS

WANT FOR LONG

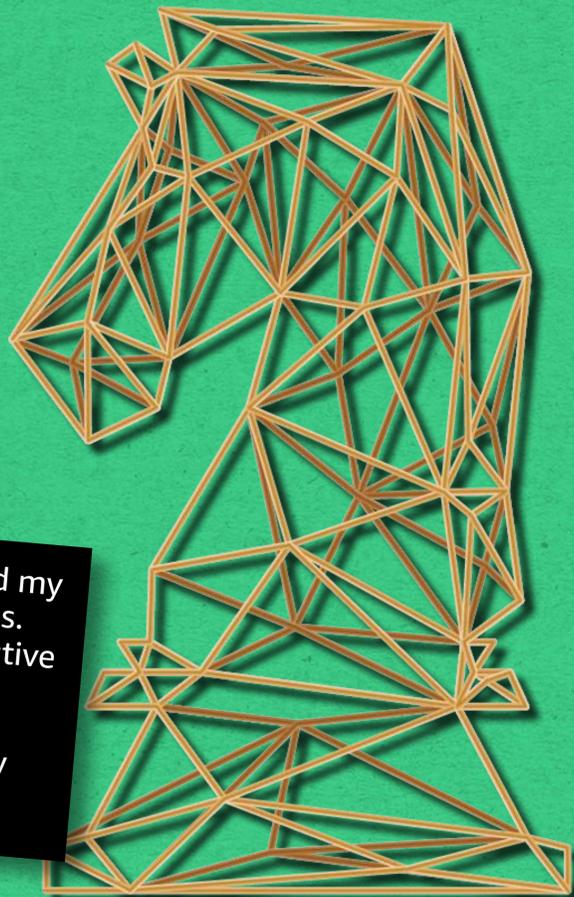
building a new company because I could see suppliers were basically ignoring what consumers wanted. You can't ignore customers for long – they'll get what they want in the end, whether you give it to them or someone else does.

**'My co-founder turned up to the interview with fully-built demos'**

The first version of Bolt was built with the help of a local freelancer and launched in Tallinn in August 2013. I then recruited two co-founders. One was my brother Martin, who's 15 years older than me and has worked for lots of tech companies. I found the other co-founder, Oliver Leisalu, on a local developer forum. Oliver replied to our shout out for engineers, and showed up to his second interview with fully-built rider and driver demos, and the first version of the back-end. That showed me he was really excited about what we were doing, and not just looking for any old opportunity.

**'Nine in 10 drivers turned me down'**

In 2013, it was hard to convince people to use an app in Estonia because smartphone penetration was low – both on the driver and passenger side. I spent a few months going up and down the streets, pitching the platform to taxi drivers and trying to convince them to join. I didn't actually have an app to show them at that point, so nine in 10 turned me down. But, one in 10 were interested, and eventually I had enough drivers on my books. The declines actually gave me more confidence about



'I've recently rekindled my childhood love of chess. There are dozens of active chess players at Bolt, so we organize online tournaments that allow us to play together.'

SEEING HOW WE CAN  
HELP THOUSANDS OF  
PEOPLE MAKE AN  
INCOME THROUGH  
OUR PLATFORM IS SO  
MOTIVATING

### 'We bootstrapped to start with'

Eight months in, we completed our first funding round of about €70,000 (\$79,000). Up until then, we'd been living off our savings and hadn't been taking a salary. The funding enabled us to hire staff and take the service to a few more cities. The product was already growing well in Estonia, with 20 to 30 percent more users each month.

The commission from rides generated revenue quickly, so we could keep investing in scaling the team. We grew from two to 30 staff in one year. At about 14 months old, in December 2014, we had a funding round of €1.1 million (\$1.25 million), which allowed us to expand beyond Estonia.

### 'Our drive inspires people to join us'

Hiring is hard, but people seem to like that we're in it for the long term, not just building something to sell on in a year or two to make quick money. They see we're trying to build a sustainable company that will do good for decades to come. Transportation is such a huge industry and has many problems – our employees are excited that they can change the lives of millions of people, which isn't possible in most startups. They stay loyal because of this.

When you spend so much time with your colleagues, you often end up doing activities together after work or on the weekend. We've had groups go on ski trips, hiking holidays, and football tours, as well as taking part in volunteering abroad. It's a great community to be a part of.

### 'We're forever outgrowing offices'

We've always been cost-conscious – we aim for low overheads so we can lower the commission charged to drivers and lower the cost of rides for passengers. We outgrew places so quickly at the start, because it was hard to know how big an office to get and how to plan team structures. Now, we just try to keep things as flexible as possible.

We have 850 employees and they're widely dispersed around the globe. Most tech companies have one or two offices, but we have one or two offices in each of the 30 countries we operate in. With a team this big, we prioritize clarity and autonomy for each team member – they know what they need to do, how they contribute to what the company is trying to do and how they're performing.

### 'In order to scale, we needed technical support'

To scale and have support in every country, we needed to replace our small local hosting provider with a large global provider – AWS. Our team would really struggle to manage tens of millions of customers without AWS – we use it for hosting servers, load balancing, data collection, communication, and much more. It's essential to how we operate.

### 'Traveling around our offices motivates me'

I try to travel to all the offices once in a while to make sure things are in sync, and it's hugely motivational. You see big contrasts between cities around the world and huge differences in living standards. Seeing how we can help thousands of people make an income through the platform is so motivating.



**'We tweak our product for each country'**

We have one global app, but the functionality differs depending on what's locally relevant. For example, the safety levels of drivers and passengers is a big issue in Africa, so there's an SOS button in the app that triggers an alert to local security services, just in case. We detect user patterns with the help of [Amazon Redshift](#) and [Amazon SageMaker](#) for data science and machine learning. This helps us identify irregular or alarming behavior and take action before an incident occurs. Patchy telecoms coverage in some countries is another thing we have to allow for.

**'We're showing that local champions can succeed in this sector'**

While it seems like there are other major players in the ride-hailing space, when you boil it down by geography, it becomes very clear that there are only one or two strong platforms in each region. Uber had the dominant monopoly for a long time, but we're proof that you can go against an incumbent if you're very customer-focused and very frugal. Bolt is on a path to become the leading transportation platform in Europe and Africa, serving over two billion people.

**'Don't rush to expand – do things properly'**

We're expanding slower than we could, but we want to do things properly rather than rushing and then having to make amends afterwards. We try to cooperate with each city and show them what we're doing works before we launch the service there. The strong relationships we've built with city councils are becoming more important each year.

**'You can learn from other industries'**

To effectively compete, you need to know where the market is going. I read about industry a lot, including the history of transportation and other sectors. If you know what's happened in one field, you can predict what might happen in another.

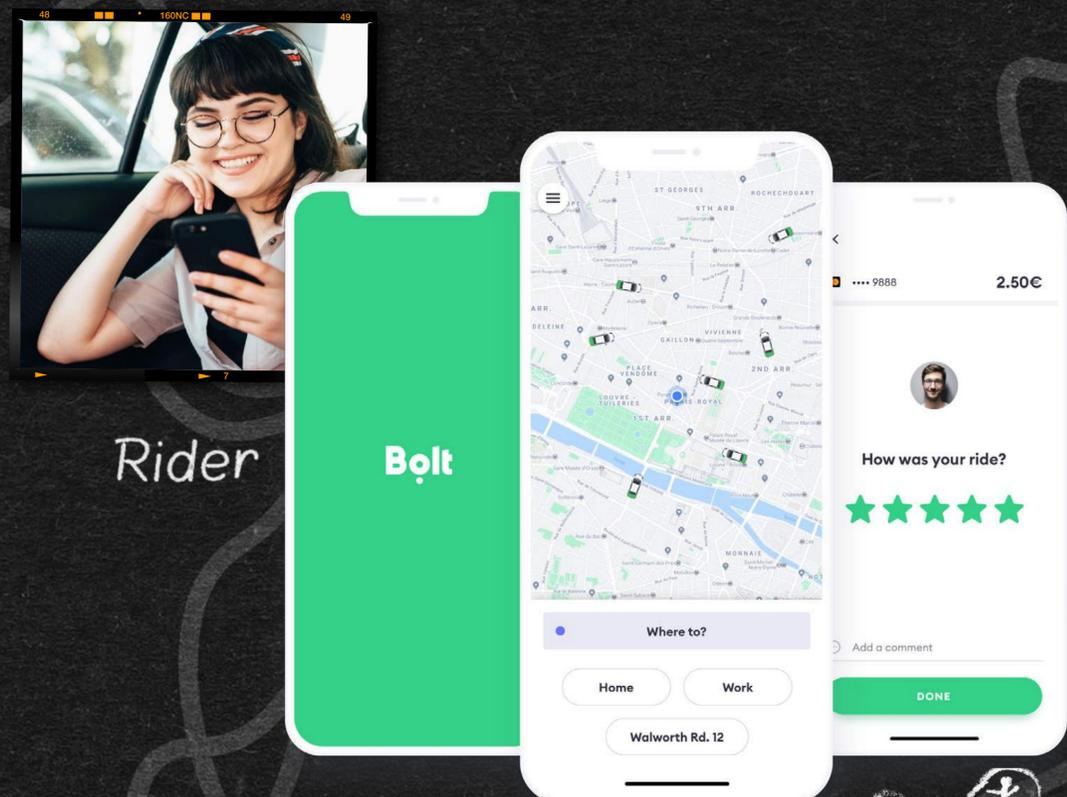
We also watch what's happening in our sector in different parts of the world, and try to improve on it. In Europe, the regulators have been slow to adopt ride-hailing innovation, so it's taking time for the market to catch up.

**'We don't believe in ploughing money into marketing'**

Marketing doesn't really work for us; instead, we focus on having the best product available, well-paid and happy drivers and great availability and pricing for passengers. About 80 percent of our customers come through word of mouth, which shows you don't need to invest much in marketing as long as the product is amazing.



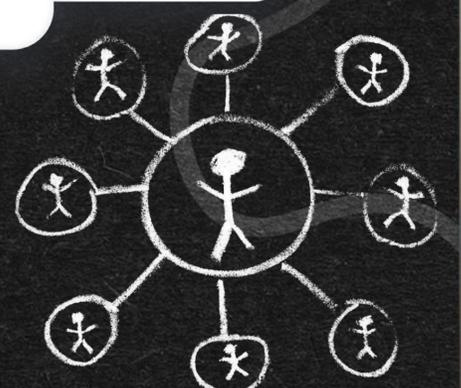
Driver



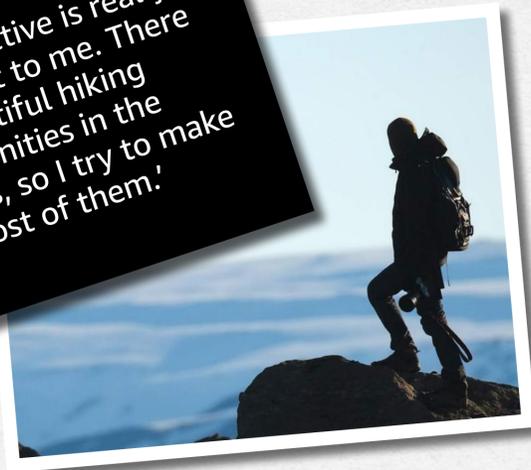
Rider

Think Globally - Act Locally

WE'RE PROOF THAT YOU CAN GO AGAINST AN INCUMBENT IF YOU'RE VERY CUSTOMER-FOCUSED AND FRUGAL



'Staying active is really important to me. There are beautiful hiking opportunities in the Nordics, so I try to make the most of them.'



GETTING A DRIVER'S  
LICENSE WOULD FEEL  
LIKE A FAILURE



### 'Changing our name from Taxify to Bolt set us up for the future'

The name 'Taxify' worked well for us at the start. But, as we've grown, we've added more transportation options to our ride-hailing app, including electric scooters and motorcycle taxis. We're addressing broader issues of transportation within cities by offering multiple modes of transport from one app. At some point, we'd like to develop a route planner that shows you how to get from A to B without using a private car, by combining transportation modes and public transport.

We realized we needed a new name, one that could encompass all we do now and all we're planning to do in the future. 'Bolt' works because it represents speed – people are spending hours every day stuck in traffic, which is something we want to solve. Secondly, a bolt is a symbol of electricity, and we are real believers in the future of transportation being electric. We're partnering with electric car manufacturers and charging networks to encourage our drivers to use electric vehicles at discounted prices.

'I never want to have a driver's license' I plan to be with Bolt for decades to come. If all goes well, I may never have to be employed by anybody else, and will never need to get a driver's license either! Private cars are underutilized; they cause traffic congestion and produce excessive emissions, which are not good for people or the environment. Bolt is helping people to move away from owning private cars, so if I was forced to use a driver's license, it would feel like a failure.

## AT A GLANCE

-  Bolt, formerly Taxify, was founded by Markus Villig, Martin Villig, and Oliver Leisalu in 2013.
-  The ride-hailing app connects passengers with local drivers and transport options.
-  Bolt has its headquarters in Estonia and offices in the 30 countries it operates in.
-  The unicorn has 25 million users.
-  Bolt uses AWS for scaling, storage and data science.



[www.bolt.eu](http://www.bolt.eu)

### FOUNDER STORIES PLAYLIST



Founder Stories



CONCENTRATE



Rooftop  
NOEP

GET PUMPED



Levels  
Avicii

CHILL-OUT



Can't Hold Us  
Macklemore

Spotify account & internet connection required

# FOLLOW THE ALTRUISTS



**MICHELLE KENNEDY**

## PEANUT

Peanut connects like-minded mothers and mothers-to-be, making it easier for them to exchange ideas and information, and meet up with a local support network. The app was launched in 2017 by Michelle Kennedy, and within its first year attracted over 500,000 registered users across the UK, US, and Canada. The London-based startup uses AWS for scalability and storage, including [Amazon S3](#), [Amazon Route 53](#), and [Amazon EC2](#).



**HOLGER G. WEISS**

## GERMAN AUTOLABS

German Autolabs is on a mission to make driving safer. Its AI-powered digital co-driver enables drivers to operate their vehicles safely through a gesture and voice-enabled interface. The Berlin-based startup was co-founded by Holger G. Weiss in 2016 and won the Best of Kickstarter Award at the Consumer Technology Association's CES 2019 conference. The digital co-driver (called Chris) is powered by AWS.



**AKINOLA JONES**

## AELLA CREDIT

Aella Credit is making it easier for small businesses and individuals in Nigeria to access finance. The company was founded by Akinola Jones and Wale Akanbi in 2015 and has since given out \$7 million of micro-loans to more than 200,000 borrowers. Aella Credit uses a range of AWS services, including [Amazon Rekognition](#) to verify customers' ID, [Amazon SES](#) for email, and [Amazon RDS](#) for operating its database.



**LEA VON BIDDER**

## AVA

Ava's ovulation tracking bracelet gives women a holistic understanding of their health and fertility. Ava has helped more than 18,000 women become pregnant since its 2014 launch. Co-founder Lea von Bidder started her first company when she was just 22 and has been named as one of the 30 most important entrepreneurs under 30 by Forbes. The Swiss startup relies on services like [Amazon RDS](#), [Amazon S3](#), [Amazon SES](#), and [Amazon CloudWatch](#) to power their operations globally.



**MARKUS VILLIG**

## BOLT

Bolt is aiming to reduce congestion and emissions, by connecting people who need transport with drivers and shared vehicles. The ride-hailing app was co-founded by Markus Villig in 2013, and now has over 25 million registered users. Its 850+ team is based at Bolt's Estonia headquarters and regional offices across 30+ countries. Bolt uses AWS for scaling, storage, and data sciences 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:

### AWS ACTIVATE

A dedicated program for startups, AWS Activate provides startups with platform credits, business support, and training services to make the process of onboarding with AWS easy.

### AWS MARKETPLACE FOR STARTUPS

The AWS Marketplace for SaaS Startups program gives startups the opportunity to be discovered by the 140,000+ AWS customers who use the AWS Marketplace each day. Sign-up to reduce time-to-market, gain brand visibility, and scale your business rapidly and sustainably.

### AMAZON LAUNCHPAD

Got a hardware product? Amazon Launchpad helps startups get to market quickly by providing access to world-class fulfillment, customer service, and Amazon Prime. Showcase your unique content and get discovered through a wide-range of marketing and PR opportunities.

### THE ALEXA FUND & ACCELERATOR

The Alexa Fund is a dedicated investment fund focused on early stage (Series B and up) startups in the NLP/AI segment. The Alexa Accelerator is powered by Techstars, working with companies that are building voice-enabled software and services.

