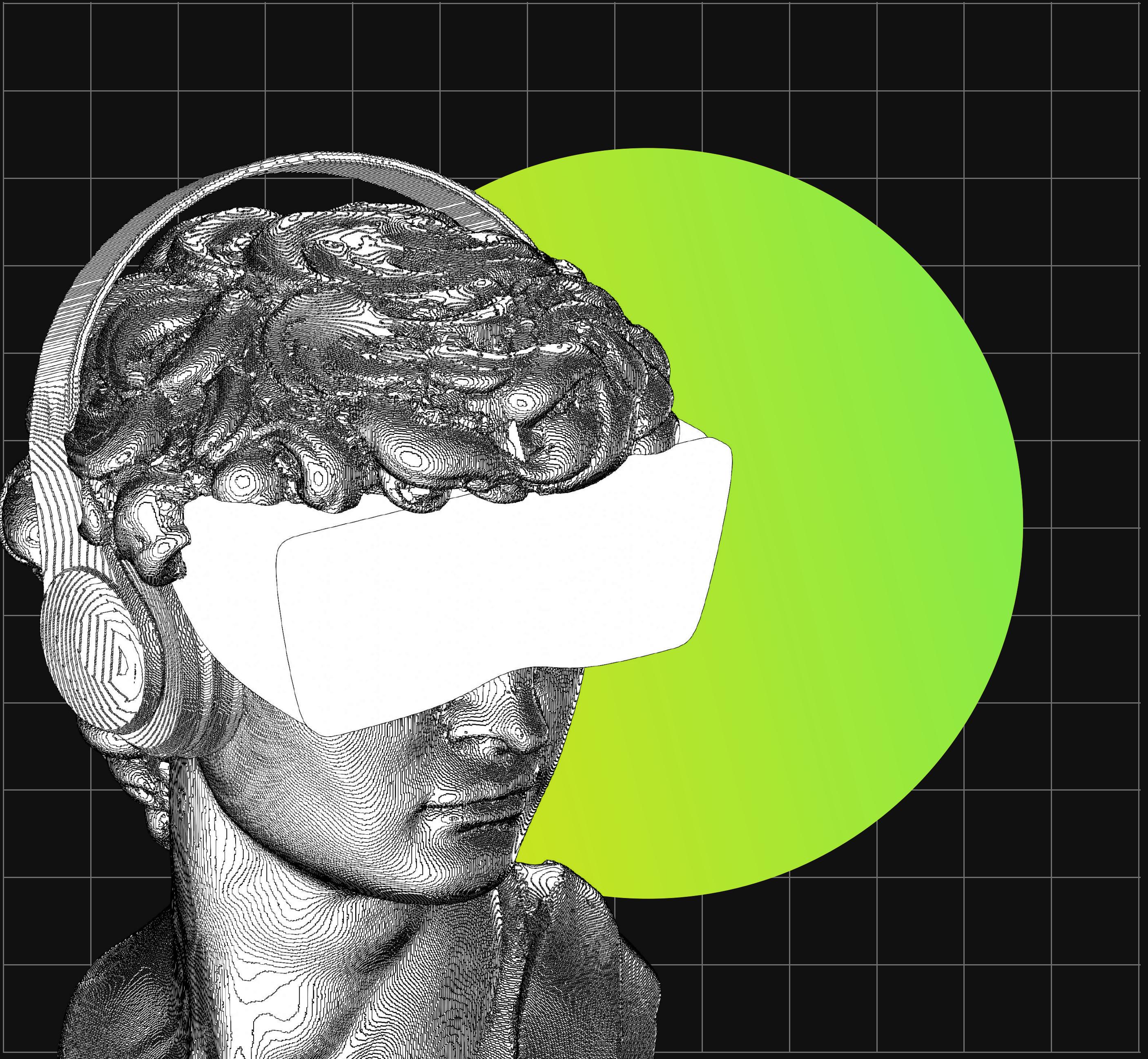




What **IT** is going to be about

SaaS & Tech
interviews
and 2023 predictions

The present and the future of IT products.
Product implementation and development.
Expert predictions.



What IT is going to be about

Introduction

We conducted and collected interviews with successful entrepreneurs, founders, CEOs, and directors from various industries. During our talks, we listened to their stories and learned about their failures, successes, dramas, and wins, as well as the love, life, and business lessons they have drawn and much more.

All the interviews are supplemented with various industry data and 2023 predictions from the industry insiders and interviewees themselves, trends dictated by the market, and forecasts from our experts, so that you'll have a full view of the topics. After reading this e-book, you will surely get inspiration, an idea, or a tip to start your own successful business! You'll also find insights to help you navigate the current crisis.

Apptension

We're Apptension - a team that turns ideas into world-class software using technology, design, and product management expertise. Our mission is to be the first choice in Central Europe for founders and investors who want to build and launch their digital ventures.





SaaS and Tech Interviews by Apptension

Featuring :

- / [Corey Morris](#) (SynergyXR)
- / [Brett Brohl](#) (Bread and Butter Ventures)
- / [Sophia Moshasha](#) (Meta)
- / [Wil Benton](#) (Metta)
- / [Lukasz Pawlik](#) (Lunching.pl)
- / [John Green](#) (Nada)
- / [Janek Nowak](#) (BOTWISE.io)
- / [Johannes Haux](#) (Sysmagine GmbH)
- / [Zbigniew Czarnecki](#) (Apptension)

>>



INTERVIEWS BY [NATHALIE KIM](#)

Table of contents

1	Taking advantage of the new technologies in SaaS business	4
	Metaverse: Amazing, immersive, inevitable	5
	Interview with Corey Morris	
	Bread and Butter of Food SaaS today	9
	Interview with Brett Brohl	
	AR/VR: platform of endless possibilities! Where to begin?	13
	Interview with Sophia Moshasha	
2	Understanding the startup's business philosophy	17
	Magic formula of investing in startups	18
	Interview with Wil Benton	
	What every startup founder should know about exits?	22
	Interview with Łukasz Pawlik	
	From rocking music scenes to financial entrepreneurship.	26
	How far can curiosity lead you?	
	Interview with John Green	
	How to find perfect product-market fit?	30
	Interview with Jan Nowak	
	Cloud vendor lock-in: Should you go for AWS & Co?	34
	Interview with Johannes Haux	
	Disrupting the Development Industry with a Unique Approach	38
	Interview with Zbigniew Czarnecki	
3	What IT is going to be about	42



1

**Taking advantage
of the new
technologies
in SaaS business**



Interviews with:



Corey Morris

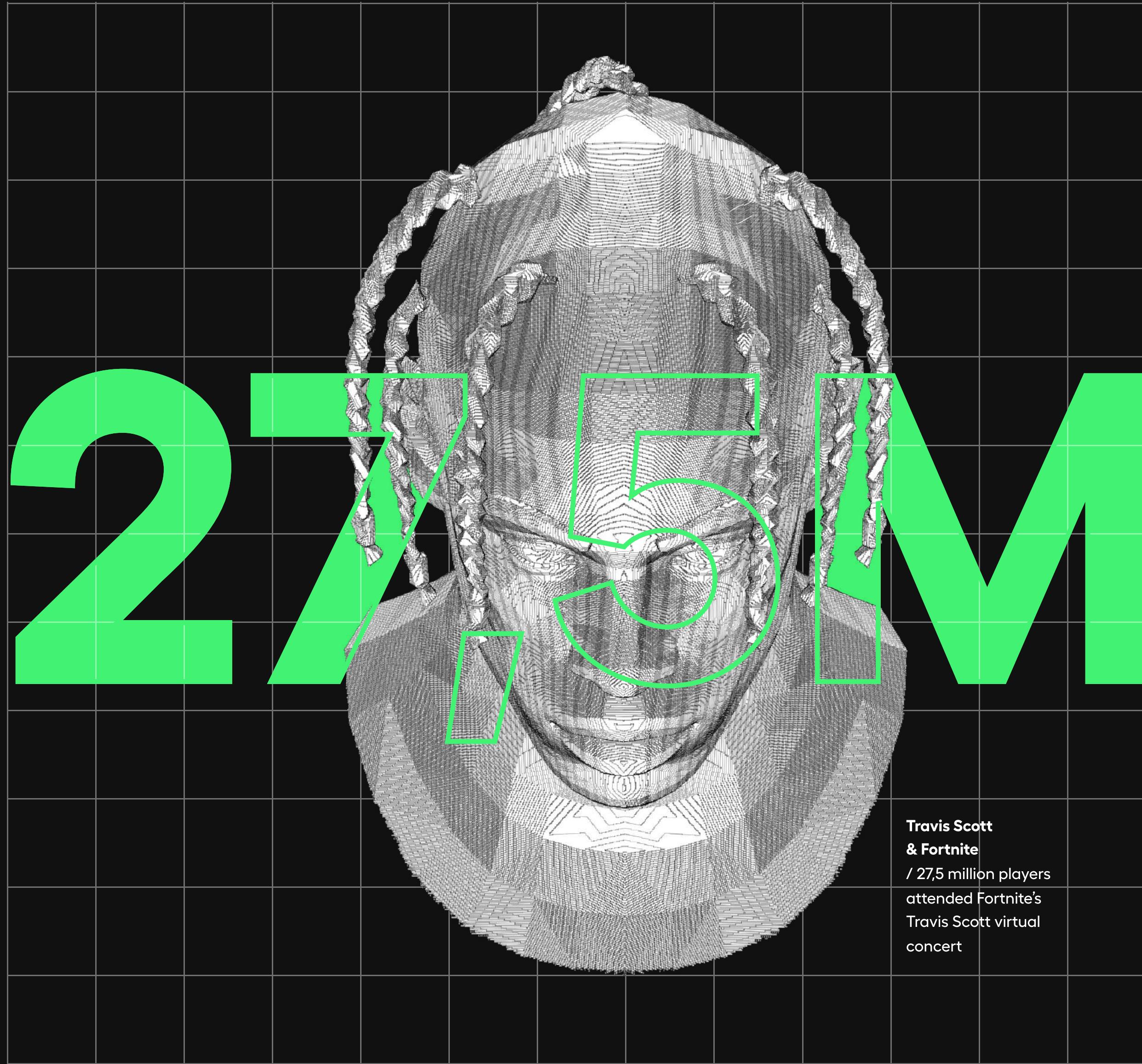


Brett Brohl



Sophia Moshasha





Metaverse: Amazing, immersive, inevitable

Interview with
Corey Morris,
CMO at SynergyXR



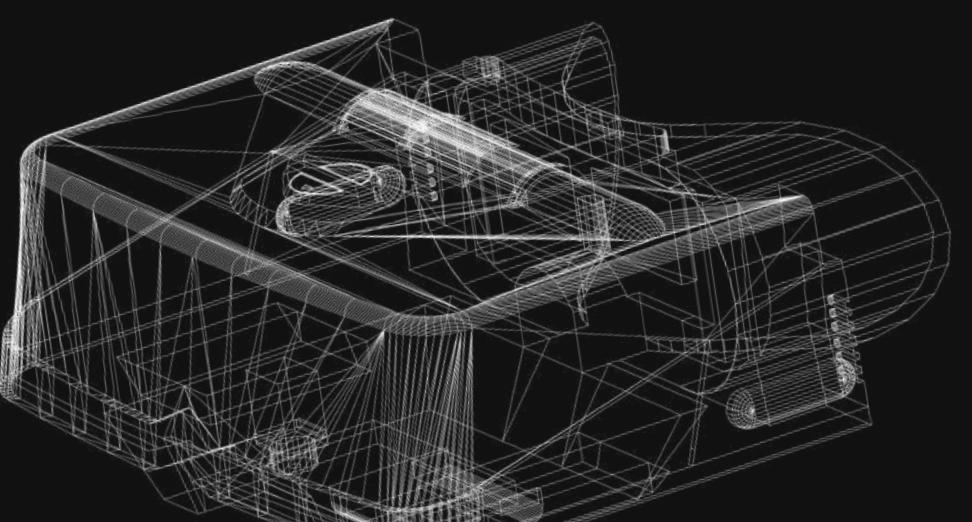


Corey Morris

is currently the CMO at [SynergyXR](#), however, throughout his entire career journey, he's had an impressive number of various experiences.

He was a co-host at a [TEDxAarhus](#), and the CMO of a startup called [Gaest](#) that was [acquired by Airbnb](#), where he, later on, became a Global Marketing Lead.

Now, he is the CMO of a powerful **no-code XR platform** that helps companies work smarter in the **Metaverse**.



Tell us about SynergyXR and what you're doing there.

I'm the CMO of this amazing company based in Denmark called [SynergyXR](#). Until about a year ago, we were actually called Unity Studios, founded by the same people that started [Unity Technologies](#). That's a unicorn company that makes 90% of the games that you have on your phone.

SynergyXR is a no-code cloud-based platform that basically lets companies work in the Metaverse - design, develop, sell, market, and support products across all XR (extended reality) devices. We like to tell people that it's effectively a content management system, similar to WordPress, or Wix, just in the Metaverse.

As the CMO of a startup called Gaest, you and your team were acquired by Airbnb in 2019. Was it a successful acquisition, in your opinion?

I joined the company and was with them for a year and a half. And throughout that time, we managed to expand to 17 markets just in a relatively short period. Gaest was a marketplace for discovering, booking, and listing creative spaces for meetings and events.

Then suddenly, we got a chance to become a part of this huge unicorn organization with 10,000 employees. For us, a small team with such an ambitious goal, it was definitely kind of a dream to come true.

What did you guys have that made Airbnb prefer you and not the others?

It comes down to a few things:
 / We had excellent traction.
 / We demonstrated how this idea could expand quite fast.
 / We were in an area that Airbnb had on their radar.

I think when you look in terms of growth, you often have two options: you can build it, or you can buy it. We were a quick way for them to get inventory and tech as we had an excellent team, a tech stack that was built from the ground up all by ourselves. All of those things combined made it much easier for Airbnb to buy - or acquire - vs. build.

From the marketing perspective, how is working in the Metaverse different from the way marketers do today?

The simplest way to approach this is to take a step back and understand what the Metaverse is. It is the next evolution of the Internet. It is where we'll be able to use technology like augmented and virtual reality to immerse ourselves in vibrant digital worlds.

We saw a similar thing back in 2005 when we had [Second Life](#). It was kind of a precursor to the Metaverse, but still, a very early 2D experience where you were interacting with the environment through a screen.

“Metaverse is a new opportunity for marketers to create a brand experience that connects with customers in new and powerful ways”



Metaverse rapid grow

The [Metaverse](#) at its core - is the next iteration of the Internet, just in 3D.

We're well past the hype cycle and entering the fascinating inflection point of rapid growth and development.

Hold on to your hats folks, it's gonna be a hell of a ride!

Corey Morris/ Chief Marketing Officer / SynergyXR



In the meantime, technology has advanced much faster and further. And now, we have devices like we didn't have before, which allow us to enter into vibrant digital worlds where we're going to see the physical and the digital world become combined. On the technical side, that is powered around the idea of spatial 3D. So information will be available in new and more powerful ways for marketers and for customers.

What's really exciting about the Metaverse for marketers is that it will become a new opportunity to create a brand experience and to put their products and services in front of people based on time, location, and maybe even feelings. It's going to give us the opportunity as marketers to connect with our customers in new and powerful ways.

The Metaverse is a relatively new idea. And the Corporate Metaverse is even newer. So, we're still discovering its possibilities, and some of them may haven't even crossed our minds yet. Can you please give some examples of how companies are already using it today?

I can spotlight a few. If we look at eCommerce, one of the things that we see a lot of focus on today is the whole 'try before you buy' movement.

For example, using augmented reality, Adidas has made it possible for you to take a phone and look through it to see how shoes will actually look on your feet. This feature is obviously boosting their overall eCommerce sales. It removes the pain point of having to buy five different pairs of those and have them sent home. It costs a lot of money, and that also has a huge environmental impact. Also, the 'try before you buy'

feature creates a much more powerful user experience enabling you to try different colors and styles with just a few button clicks. I think we're going to see an alternative to this in terms of virtual dressing rooms.

Anyone who has suffered from the fear of public speaking knows that the best way of overcoming that is through practice.

But in reality, it's hard to gather a group of people just to practice on. There's a cool company called Mursion that offers things like leadership training, presentation skill training, and mental health awareness. Using virtual reality, we can immerse people into these environments, oftentimes stressful ones that allow them to basically trick their brains into thinking that it's real life. And it helps them overcome some of these hurdles and challenges.

So this is really where we can use the power of virtual simulation to create another level of emotional connection that we're maybe not able to do in real-world environments.

"So when we are able to use this technology to save people's lives, that's what matters the most"

One thing is making it easier for us to buy more stuff, which we probably don't need anyway. The other is to teach us soft skills. But when you can save people's lives, that's where it matters the most.

This example is going to be from the healthcare industry. A group of physicians around the world was able to train in virtual reality to learn how to save the lives of these conjoined twins in Brazil. When you do an MRI or CT scan, you actually get a 3D model. What those doctors were able to do was meet in virtual reality, use those 3D models, and plan the surgery. It took over a three-month period just to figure out how they would do this.

The operation became one of the world's most difficult and complex conjoined twin separations. I don't think that VR is the only reason why they were successful, but it did allow them to go in and use a simulated environment to improve the way they were doing it. It was a more concerted effort of experts from all around the world, and a huge contributor to this being a successful surgery is to meet and see things in 3D and not in 2D. So when we are able to use this technology to save people's lives, that's what matters the most.

If you met a 10-year-old Corey, what would you tell him?

I'd say: "Don't worry about that girl that just broke up with you. Stop crying, you'll be fine. No, honestly, I'd say hey, we got this. Life is gonna be really, really hard for us. You're going to be tossed quite a few fastballs and curveballs. But at the end of the day, you're going to be fine."

Rapid fire round

What are you proud of the most?

What is your biggest regret?

I'm proud of who I've become.

Doubting myself that I couldn't have gotten to where I was.

I know, you're a runner. What is your longest marathon?

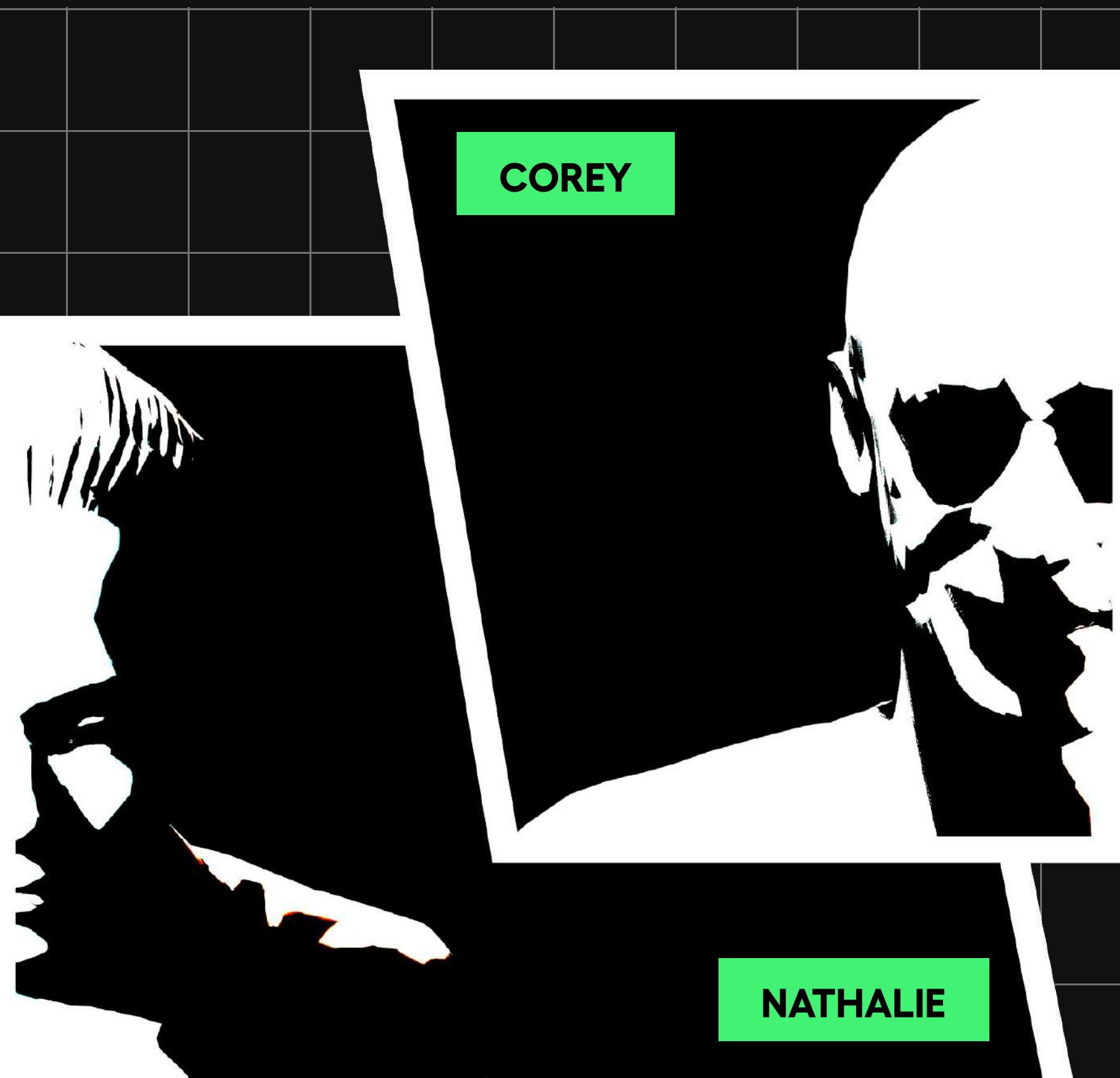
I signed up for an ultramarathon during Covid, but it got canceled. So I did it anyway, I ran a 100-kilometer run all by myself on a 5-kilometer loop. It took me about 9-10 hours overall, but I'm happy I did it.

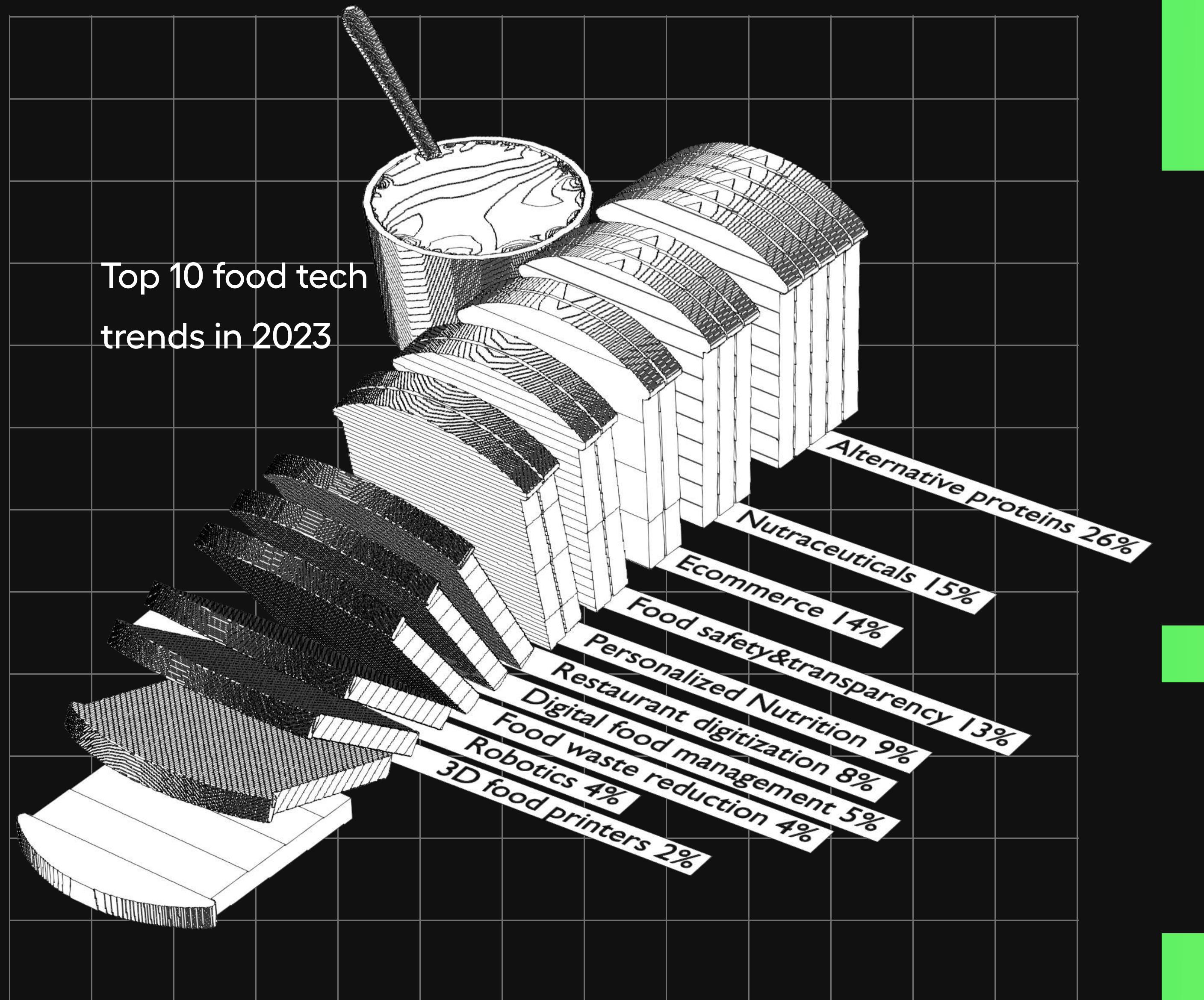
What is the main lesson you learned from the marathons?

You can do anything you set your mind to, especially when it comes to physical endurance.

Describe yourself with one word.

A fighter.





Bread and Butter of Food SaaS today

Interview with Brett Brohl,
Investor, Founder and Managing Partner of Bread and Butter Ventures





Brett Brohl

is a Managing Partner at **Bread and Butter Ventures**, and for most of his life, he's worked in the **startup world**.

He spends his days investing in and working with early stage founders as the founder and Managing Partner of The Syndicate Fund and the Managing Director of **Techstars Farm** to Fork Accelerator.

His core focus is companies solving problems throughout the **world's food system** - from robotics to kitchen tech to biotech to supply chain.

COVID was everywhere, and today's world is not the same; it's a new reality for all of us. How do SaaS products and SaaS in the food industry adapt to those realities?

It's really interesting. You could argue that COVID had a greater effect on the Food system than in any other industry outside of pharmaceuticals. I believe there was already a trend of digitizing the food system and bringing technology in software into the food system before COVID.

What I think COVID did was two things:

- It shone a light on some of the issues, especially in the supply chain - transportation, logistics, and food manufacturing and some of the antiquated systems used in that world.
- The other thing is that it forced technology adoption in the food system much more quickly than it would have happened without COVID. The rapid adoption of technology took place in large enterprises, like farms, food manufacturers, or retailers, to food retail, restaurants, and grocery stores. Suddenly, everything has to be touchless, remote, and you have to do delivery because people can't go out. And if those enterprises don't change the way they operate from a business perspective, they go out of business.

"I believe in founders. Successful investing is all about the people"

There are plenty of online food ordering/delivery services nowadays. Have you got a chance to observe how online ordering/delivery is diversifying to meet the new demands?

In the US, Amazon has had a huge impact on customer expectations; consumers are so used to being able to get something immediately when they want it. Amazon makes everything available at your fingertips.

The hard part is that many delivery companies aren't profitable, and if you're talking about restaurant food delivery, the restaurants are giving up 30% of their margins. Restaurants already don't make a lot of money on each of their orders. So is this sustainable?

We recently invested in a company called Carbon Origins, a robotics company. So, as a last-mile robotics delivery company, they are working on little robots that will go on sidewalks and deliver your food for you.

I believe that food delivery is a thing, and it's not going away. But I don't think the way we currently do it is economically viable. The reality is that we're going to have autonomous robots doing the delivery because, in the long run, it's far cheaper than having human beings do the delivery and probably more food-safe, more reliable. Some statistics say that 1 out of 3 restaurant deliveries are tampered with by the person doing the delivery as they'll look at it, touch the food, etc. When I saw that, I was like - "Holy crap, it's terrible!".

Having truly autonomous robotic delivery is the future of food delivery. So, it's a hard technological problem, and Carbon Origins uses a combination of VR to do it. So, it's a cool company. But that's a whole other conversation.



Food tech in 2023

In the 2023 world of food tech, we'll see **less total money invested** but an increase in the number of startups in the space, largely driven by a continued interest in the food system's role in **sustainability**.

One segment that will be hit hard is **plant-based protein alternatives**.

It's been hot, to the point of oversaturation, and valuations in the space have been so high that, in a more valuation-sensitive market like we're currently in, it will be harder to get new deals done.

Brett Brohl / Managing Partner / Bread&Butter Ventures

Could you dwell more about this startup? Will they use drones for delivery sometime?

They're not using drones. The reason I like ground delivery as an investor is partly because of airspace regulations. There are other issues like payloads, but flying things around big cities is hard to do because of federal rules, it can scare people in the United States.

So, we invested in a company that focuses on ground robots with wheels. The hard part is to make something truly autonomous, that is operating in an environment like a sidewalk. In my opinion, it's more complex than building an autonomous car.

Roads are structured with a grid, with stop signs and stoplights. It's hard to do, but you can train that AI because it's a grid. But on the sidewalk, you might run into a dog; you might see a fire hydrant; who knows what you could run into. All these possible events can happen to the robot moving on a sidewalk. Having enough experience to train that artificial intelligence will take years and years.

Carbon Origins is working to resolve this issue by building technology that enables remote VR workers. So, when a robot encounters an event that it doesn't recognize, like a fire hydrant, it alerts a VR driver and says: "Hey, I need your help," so the driver wears a set of VR sets and navigates the robot around that situation. And while the VR driver is navigating the robot around that situation, the robot learns from that.

When the driver navigates it 5 times, the robot might learn for the next one. But, again, that takes time and effort. But technology is enabling it. It's super cool!

What is your forecast for this industry? Should we expect any booming services? And if yes, what would that be?

Robots delivering your food sounds like fun. Another thing is the dark kitchen movement - it's almost like co-working spaces that exploded worldwide. Over the last several years, there has been a movement toward having dark kitchens for food producers and consumer packaged goods. You can also have Restaurant Brands that don't have a storefront. So, suppose you believe that food delivery will continue to be a major part of how people eat and get food experiences. In that case, there's no reason why you couldn't have one restaurant location where they have several different restaurants in one kitchen: Italian style, Mexican style, Burgers, etc. And the consumer might not even know that it's all from the same place. So, you can build brands out of one location without having as many expenditures upfront to build out a restaurant.

Another fun innovation that is coming. You know, the Keurig machine for coffee, right? Where you push a button, and coffee comes out. Well, I think there's a world in the relative near term, where you have a machine in your house, and you push a button and meat come out. If you want a hamburger, it comes out, or you want a steak, and steak pops down, or you want a chicken breast, and chicken breast appears. And it's all cell-based production, but it all happens in your home. I'm pretty sure something like that happened on Star Trek. And actually, there's a company in Tel Aviv, Israel, that's working on that right now.

I understand, it's still way out from reality. But it could happen in my lifetime. I guess it depends on how long I live.

A final thought is the "Fourth Bin". There's a company called Dispatch Goods, where we also invested. Lindsay, the CEO, is amazing. In many countries, you have your garbage, recycling, and compost bins, so you have three different bins where you put whatever comes out of your house.

Lindsay believes that there's going to be a fourth bin, which will be for reusable items. For example, if you order restaurant delivery, it's going to come in a glass or metal container, and you're going to eat out of it. You're going to put it in the fourth bin, and there's going to be a service that comes and picks up those reusable items, washes them, and brings them back to the restaurants.

And I think that's going to be a reality where households and enterprises will have four bins instead of using single-use plastics. It'll just remove the need for many plastics and improve the circular economy and food sustainability.

"There's a world in the relative near term, where you have a machine in your house, and you push a button and if you want a hamburger, it comes out, or you want a steak, and steak pops down!"

Rapid fire round

Your biggest regret?

I wish I had started my first startup younger. I started my first real company when I was 25, and I wish I had started when I was 18.

What is your best investment?

We've got an awesome portfolio. I've made probably about 90 investments over the last five years. I've also invested with TechStars, so we have a really big portfolio of companies from there, and many of them are performing quite well. Even sometimes, the ones that fail, I don't feel bad about the investments that we've made; they were good investments.

Your most extraordinary startup you've encountered lately.

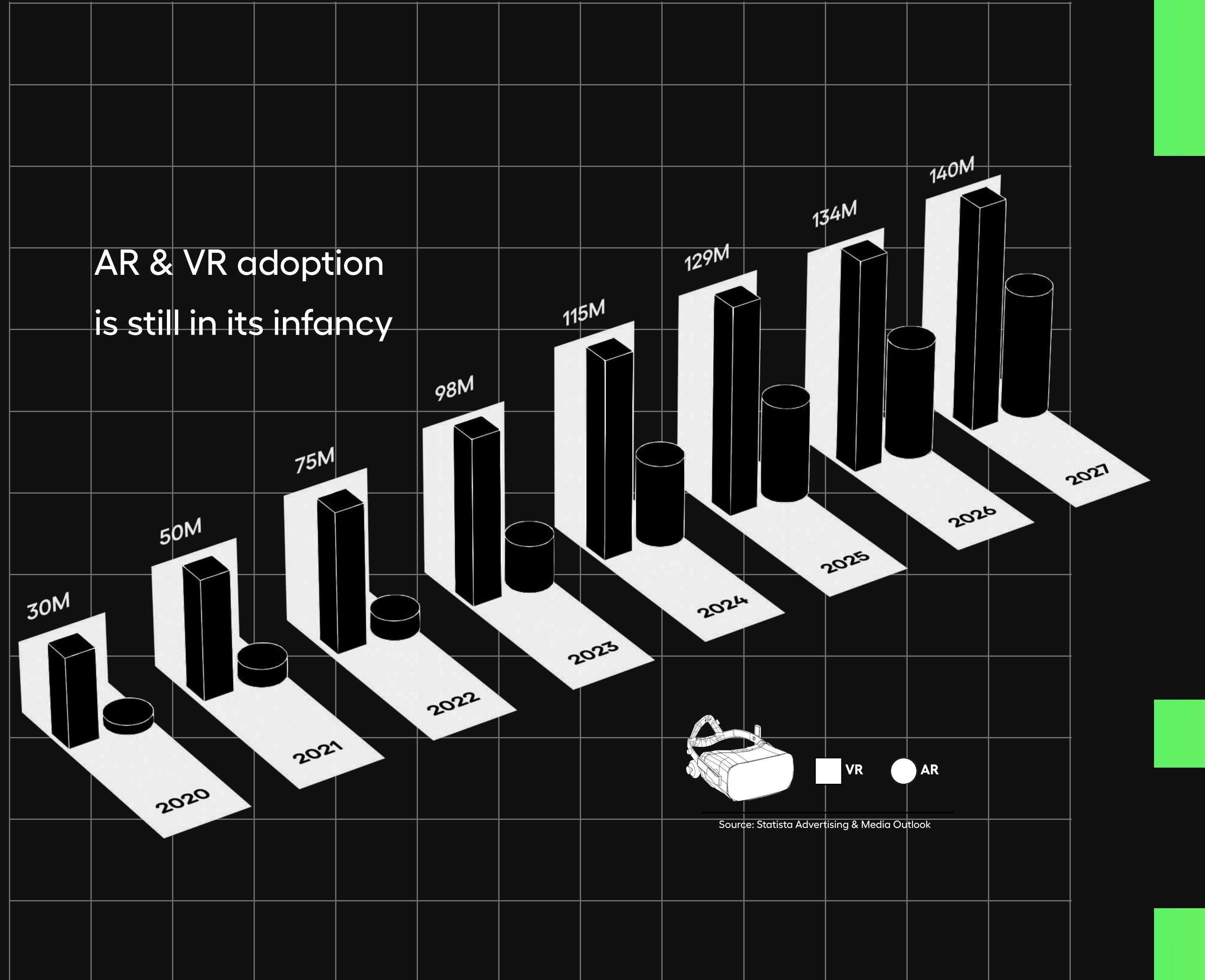
Carbon Origins Inc., the delivery company is pretty cool. And if you talk to Amogha, the CEO of that company, he's crazy. He's brilliant so that one's pretty cool from a pure tech and big business standpoint. I could probably pick some wild stuff like an airplane without windows, which is funny. I got pitched by movie studio production companies, even though I don't invest anywhere near that. The machine that you push a button and a steak fall out. Robotic chicken coops.

In-store or online.

BRETT

In-store. Personally, I like to touch, feel, and see the food. I think I'm so old, and in-store is something that I grew up with, but online is certainly a reality today and will continue to be a reality.

NATHALIE



AR/VR: platform of endless possibilities! Where to begin?

Interview with
Sophia Moshasha
Public Policy, Meta



Sophia Moshasha

is a **Metaverse & web3.0 Strategist** and a co-host at VR/AR Association podcast. She uses her ability to effectively communicate complex technologies into feasible solutions to create unique opportunities for brands.

Most of her projects are creating a significant impact utilizing the just-emerging **immersive technologies**. Among the most notable projects, she participates in, are the world's first virtual reality charity golf tournament, The Polys - WebXR Awards & Summits, and XR Women.

Nowadays, she is shaping the policy landscape for **Meta's** metaverse initiatives.

What is happening in the industry at the moment? How are you managing to follow it up?

For the XR, immersive technology, and just emerging technologies at large, I've noticed a real uptick of interest in various applications made of virtual technologies across different industry sectors. And I believe this has been coming for some time already. I've been involved in the industry for about six years, where we were trying to educate people on what augmented reality, virtual reality, and extended reality are. Now, not only due to the pandemic but also for other reasons, we're getting more people coming to us and asking about such technology. So there's been a big shift in awareness.

As you know, Facebook's rebranded to Meta as well, and people are already using the social platform. So they're becoming more aware, thinking more of the virtual technologies and correct Metaverse terminology due to that.

“Play a lot of games!”

Can you tell us more about the state of WEB AR/VR - how mature are those solutions, is it worth investing in such skills for developers?

Oh, absolutely. So there are a lot of developers that can grow their skill sets and start to develop for the immersive web. For example, the World Wide Web Consortium (the W3C) actually has an immersive web working group and a community group that meets regularly to get feedback from the community to help develop the standards. Or there's also the Khronos Group that is helping develop graphical standards for the web.

There are a lot of bespoke projects that both small businesses and standalone developers are working on, as well as some of the larger brands. So, there are a lot of exciting things going on in the industry.

I do recommend attending the Polys WebXR; there are five Metaverse watch parties happening across different platforms, where we're going to demonstrate portal links "to" and "from" those watch parties. I'll personally be there both live in the video as well as in Avatar format.

Also, make sure to look at the Polys YouTube channel. There's a lot of content from some of the summits put together, that basically describes all the work that's going on and how to get involved in both business operations and the creator perspective as well.

There are several ethical concerns regarding AR/VR implementation, such as facial recognition and privacy, mental and social side effects, and reality distortion. Is it still a threat, and what is the progress on measures on that concern?

Sophia: Yes, there is a lot of discussion going on around this topic. I think it's good that we're starting to recognize some of the potential complications that could happen in our future. So we can kind of get out of some of the concerns beforehand.

“Education is great, but the experience is even greater”



“Passion is where it starts, and that will ultimately lead to success”

Kavya Pearlman, who is leading an organization called XR safety initiative, is working day after day with significant groups that are a part of influencing society to make sure that we keep these ethical concerns at the forefront of creation. There are a lot of cyber hacking issues, things that we are commonly susceptible to today. They can also transfer to these virtual worlds but can somehow be more impactful and even more threatening. Perhaps, just because these virtual worlds are known to captivate us more, and we automatically put more trust in them. So, when those things are compromised, the trust in such environments and the people behind them are also compromised.

If the company is willing to work in AR/VR, which tools have it focused on in 2022? What would be your recommendations?

Many big gaming engines, like Unity, have their own training facilities and platforms that people can get involved with to start learning. And a lot of them are free to the public, at least to start with. There are a lot of web-based platforms and creation platforms as well, which are becoming more and more popular to democratize the creation of content, things as MetaVRse. It's a great example of a web-based platform. My good friends, Julie Smithson and Alan Smithson, founded that company.

You can also look up the web XR device API, which is coming from the W3C. I can't stress enough to watch the Polys or at least go back to some of the content repositories because there are many resources for people looking to get started.

And I would say, don't get threatened by the state of technology in the industry. A lot of us didn't come from technical backgrounds. A lot of us didn't come from immersive technology backgrounds since it's very new. Universities are just starting to incorporate programs and specific certifications for immersive technologies.

“You can definitely turn your passions into a career”

A lot of us are self-taught through collaboration through research, staying in touch with the community, and just learning about what's going on in the community. Those are the best ways to get involved and get started.

You know, we are living and breathing the SaaS industry, so I have to ask. How AR/VR can be turned or immersed into SaaS?

There are different products that different companies are building to turn this technology into more of what SaaS is offering. Either where they would help create content and programming for the client or to set up a platform and libraries where potential clients or individuals can do it themselves. So there are a lot of opportunities out there; it's democratizing content creation.

Once again, unless the technology is super complex and development-heavy, there are a lot of opportunities for individuals and companies to get in and do it themselves. For example, Adobe Aero is doing it. And it's making the cost of creation lower because now there are available asset libraries.

If you met 10 years old Sophia, what would you tell her?

I would say play a lot of games. Because that's where it's going, and I would say definitely, education is great, but the experience is even greater. Whatever you know, you can do to get your hands-on experience, even if that is through gaming (specifically, it works for the AR/VR industry).

Those kids are so tech-savvy and incredible in their games, and they're creating their own careers for themselves through that. And I generally think that if you can have more technical skills, even if you're looking to be on the business side of the BD marketing side of things, really grasp the technologies you're interested in. It will be very helpful.

I'm not a developer myself, but I took the Unity one-on-one courses. I'm researching as much as possible - the tech side of crypto, web 3.0, and all these different emerging technologies, because that's the only way for me to be able to better represent those technologies to end-users and clients.

For our industry, gaming is a great start. People are developing skills needed to transition to a real career through gaming. I work with people that are game developers, and they never thought they would have a career outside of gaming and creating games. And now, many of them are being hired for the top hires in companies looking to create immersive experiences. It is a hot commodity right now.

Rapid fire round

Your biggest regret?

I would love to finish my MBA. I've just been super busy with everything at that time. But education is always great because nobody can ever take that away from you.

Your best investment?

The best investment in my life is spending the time to participate in the community to build those deep-rooted relationships by just offering value to my friends in the community, both personal and professional.

Virtual or real experience?

Both. It's funny because I actually realized that I placed some importance on my virtual presence, almost just as much as I do on my physical presence.

NATHALIE

SOPHIA



2

Understanding the startup's business philosophy



Interviews with:



Will Benton



Łukasz Pawlik



John Green



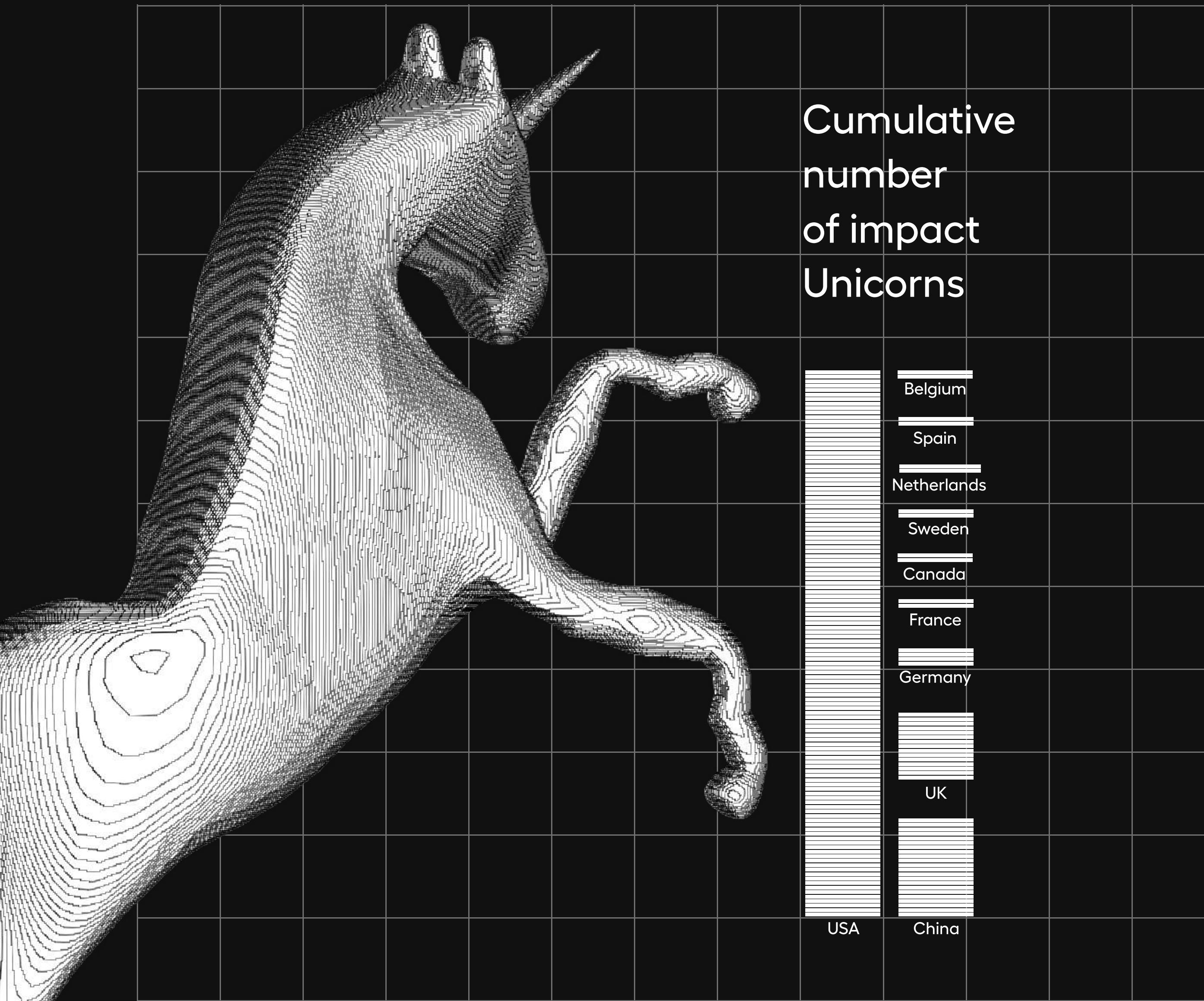
Jan Nowak



Johannes Haux



Zbigniew Czarnecki



Magic formula of investing in startups

Interview with
Wil Benton,
Investor, Co-founder
& Director of Metta

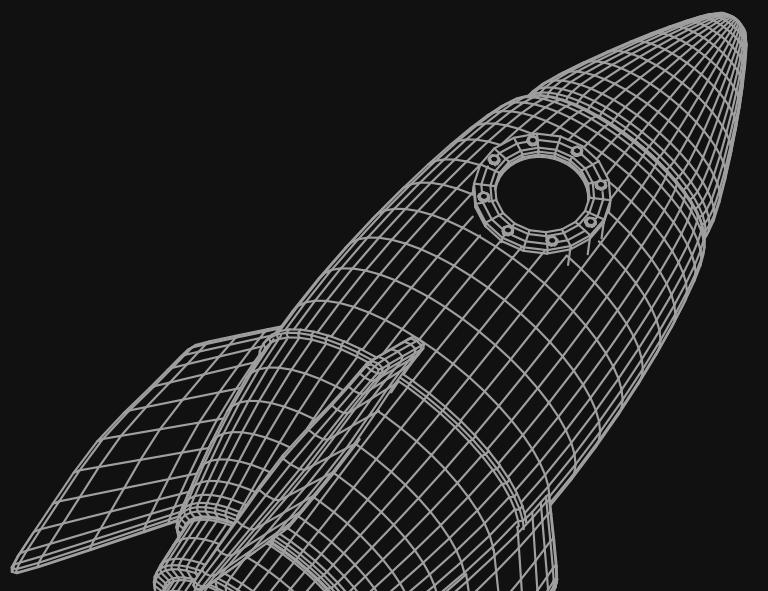


Wil Benton

is a Co-Founder & Director of **Metta**, the startup-supporting business, an Angel Investor with **35+ investments**, and a regular mentor for a variety of startups.

Over the last 5 years, Wil has personally worked with more than **70 early-stage** technology businesses and has helped invest over **£4M**.

Hobbies: **DJ in Glasgow**, chart-topping record labels, and award-winning digital publications.



Your career path looks impressive. Over so many achievements, projects, and roles you had in your career, what's your main role at the moment?

Thanks! I'm a Co-founder and Director at **Metta**. We facilitate transformative innovation as a force for good with startups, industries, and governments. I'm also an active Angel Investor (~35 investments to date), Venture Partner at Aerospace Xelerated, The Boeing Company's global startup accelerator program, and I run a few record labels in my spare time.

I know it might sound like a very standard question, but still. What are the main factors and criteria for choosing and investing in startups, your "sweet spot"? And do you have your own "magic formula"?

I generally tend to invest in the early stages, where my experience as a Founder is. At a pre-seed stage, I look for a great founding team (who are open to advice and feedback/ constructive criticism) working on something new and defensible; ideally, they're building something with experience in the market.

A large target market's the second most important thing I look for. Then, the product is generally last as it usually changes as the idea and team evolve into a business ready to scale.

"Know what you're doing, why you're doing it, and who you're doing it for"

"We don't do the work for them; we help them learn how to do it better themselves!"

You've supported numerous startups. And general statistics are brutal; 90% of startups will never make it. What does it take to be in the 10% of startups that are not failing?

Know what you're doing, why you're doing it, and who you're doing it for. That should be your laser focus. Be good at asking for help, listening to advice, and always be selling!

Once the startup is on board, what is your duty in terms of supporting them, and what's still on the company itself?

During an accelerator program, I work with the startups in each cohort around investment and networking. I also act as a mentor alongside the rest of the program team to support the founders through the accelerator itself and beyond.

"Always be selling!"

We act as impartial advisors, providing guidance that the founders can choose to act upon (or not) based on our experience designing and delivering accelerator programs (or as founders ourselves).



“Enjoy the journey, and don't be scared to see where you end up!”

We offer program perks from a broad range of startup providers (**Amazon, Digital Ocean, Stripe, Hubspot, etc.**) to help optimize the teams, their products, and their way of doing business.

Our job is to help train the teams to make their own decisions and have the skills/ experience to make decisions better than before joining a program. We don't do the work for them; we help them learn how to do it better themselves!

What issues/troubles are you going through while cooperating with startups? Do you get help from your Partners aside? What kind of Partners are you working with?

“There's lots of capital floating around at the moment, so helping startups navigate funding from the right investor is another area of focus”

We do what we can as a program team (as do I personally on the investment front) to find startups and entrepreneurs that want to work with us so we avoid any issues working with the startups when a program starts.

I'm fortunate to work with an amazing team and lots of great partners from across various industries. We do what we can from a collaborative - instead of competitive - working environment, so always keen to develop novel partnerships.

For issues the startups face, the tech market is stupidly competitive from a hiring point of view at the moment, so people power and being able to compete with the bigger/ more established competitors (or just Facebook and Google).

What are the qualities of a good Investor, what are of a bad Investor?

A good Investor knows their place, is open with their network and advice, and helps their investees to reach that next step. Head to Landscape to read the reviews of what makes a bad Investor.

If you met 10 years old Wil, what would you tell him?

Enjoy the journey, and don't be scared to see where you end up!

Rapid fire round →



The world's most valuable Unicorns

ByteDance **\$140 billion**

SPACEX **\$125 billion**

SHEIN **\$100 billion**

Fastest Growing Online Industries to invest in 2023

E-Commerce

iGaming

Streaming services



Your biggest regret?

Not knowing when to pull the plug.

Investor or DJ?

Both.

If I had a 2 mln \$, what would you suggest I do with it?

Invest 4/5 in sensible things, play with the rest.

A vinyl player or digital?

Digital, just for ease of use/ transport!

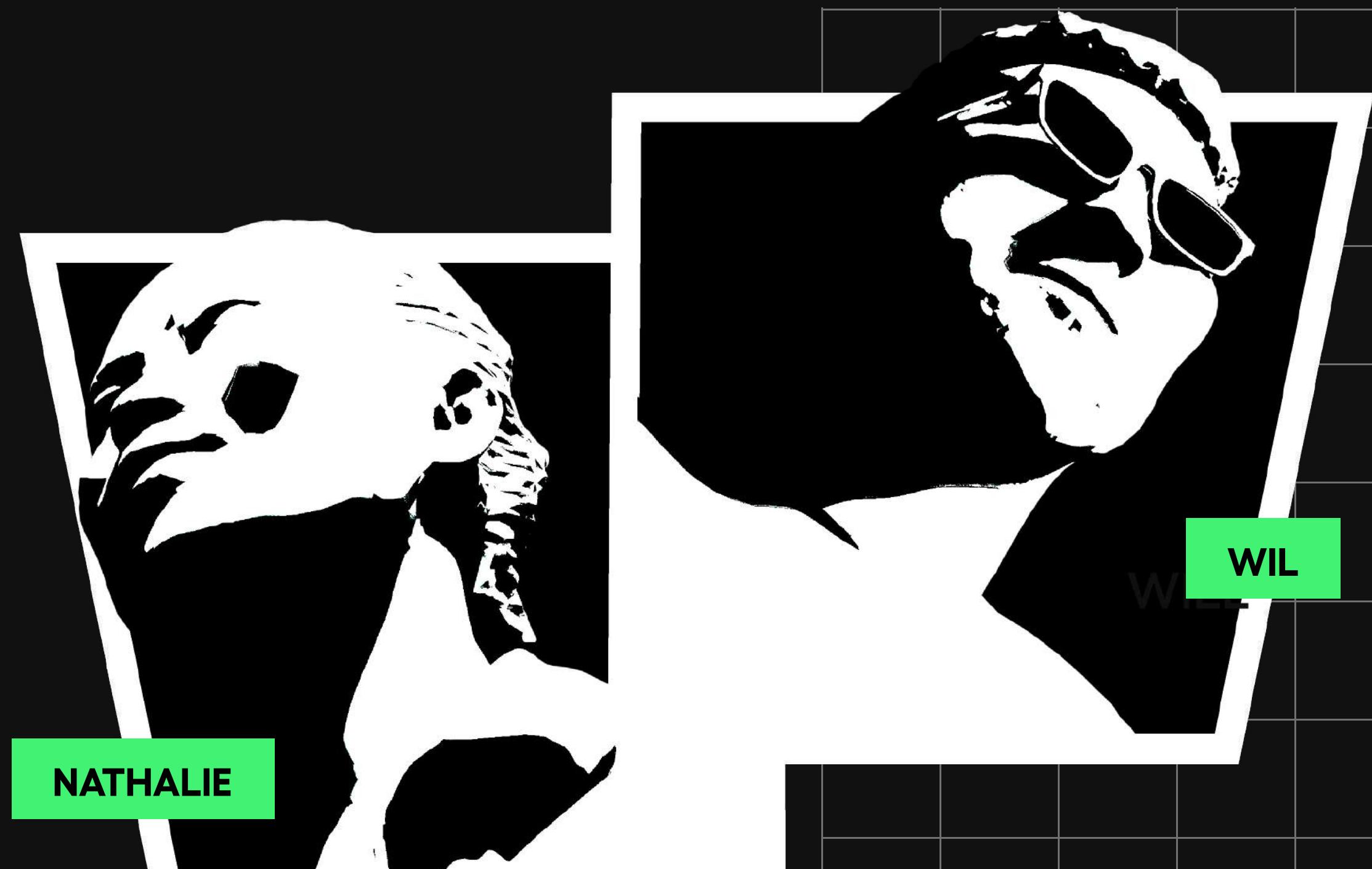
Small underground club or a big stadium to play in?

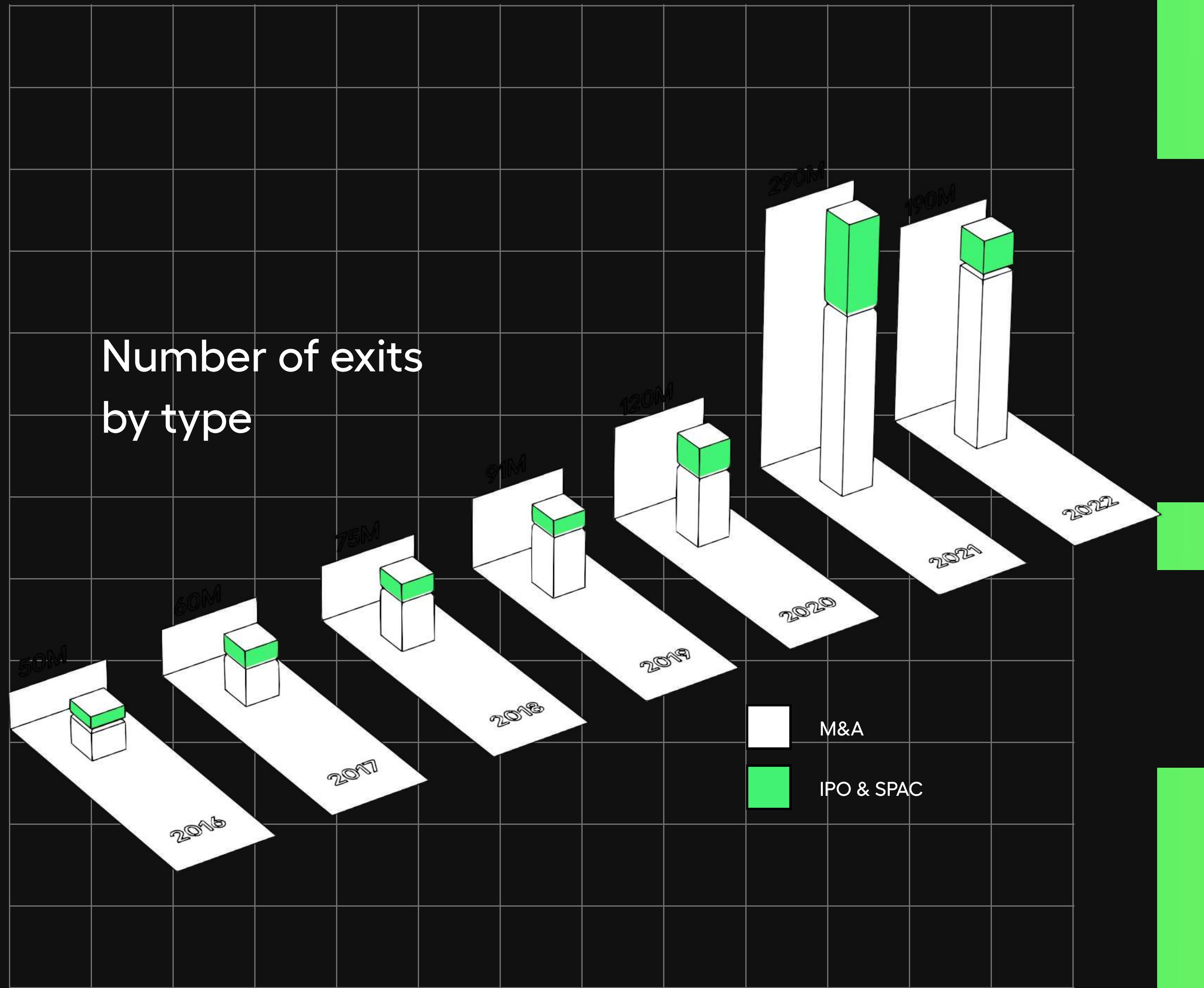
Small club, big sound system.

Rapid fire round

NATHALIE

WIL





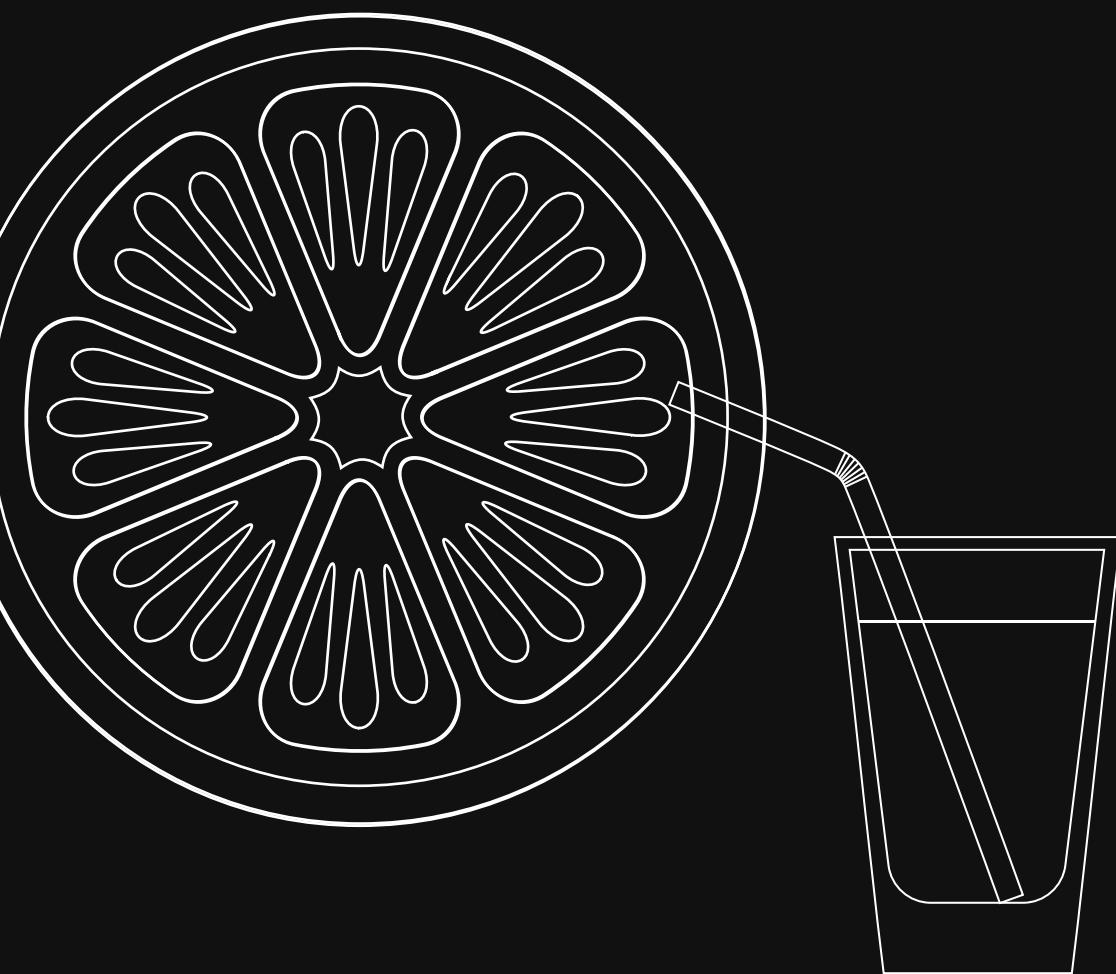
What every startup founder should know about exits?

Interview with
Łukasz Pawlik
CMO & Founder
of Lunching.pl



Łukasz Pawlik
is the CEO and Founder of **lunching.pl**. Lunching.pl subsides one of the crucial, daily-used employee benefits - warm and healthy work meals.

And recently completed the tricky procedure of **startup exit** and managed to sell a part of his startup with a **great profit**.



How did you build your startup? What were the milestones that ultimately ended up with a successful exit? And do you actually consider it successful?

Of course, but our story is not quite the standard one. Firstly, Lunching.pl was kind of a hobby project. But one day, my brother and I (who is running Morele.net) were speaking at a family dinner about how teams waste 30 minutes or more of their work time just to organize lunch. And it was my brother's spouse who came up with this business model. We noted that this process could be done by the system actually, so we first introduced it at our companies - a simple thing that worked quite fine.

For the next two or three years, it was developed by the founders, who were not very involved in it. The first CEO was my colleague, and the team was very small; we didn't invest too much, and we didn't think about scaling or a VC path/VC track at all. So that really was only a hobby project.

But, at some point, the other company's executives who were using our system came to us and asked if they could pay for a part of the employees' lunches. It was quite easy to implement our platform for them, and it was even more helpful and welcomed by employees. Soon enough, we noticed that we are actually doing breakeven, serving 2000 meals daily. And that's when we decided to scale it up.

At this point, I officially joined the firm to help make the first round with VC, which got us the money to start building a team, etc., in just half a year.

“Prove that every line of code in your platform belongs to you legally”

What was the main reason you decided it was the right time to exit?

Unfortunately, we lost like 90% of the demand, and eventually, revenue, because of the pandemics. Our product worked for offices, and people stopped coming to offices at all. We had to pivot quickly - we added industry clients to our portfolio and also started delivering to homes. While we succeeded for over a year afterward, we are growing rapidly now; the pandemic caused us to fall out of the VC path, which means that we couldn't raise money from VC funds, and create accessible conditions anymore. At this point, we had two choices:

1. to scale down and go for profitability,
2. or carry on with rapid growth but with some other strategic investor.

The strategic investor turned out to be the Benefit Systems company. For over a month now, we have been in the Benefit Systems group, developing new strategies and goals to grow fast and to ensure that as many people as possible in Poland can eat a healthy and real meal at work.

What should be a startup's go-to list of things to consider while preparing for a successful acquisition?

To start the acquisition process, you need to talk to lots of people and work on being networked. Of course, it may occur that you have such a unique product that strategic investors will come to you (as it was in our case). But, even in such circumstances, you should talk to more than one potential buyer.



Predictions from industry insider

Consumer trends have shifted to health and wellness; many consumers tend to care more and more about what foods they put in their bodies. I think the demand for better-for-you food and healthier versions of comfort food is going to an uptick in 2023.



Katie Wilson,
a Co-Founder and the CEO of the vegan-snack brand BelliWelli



Startup's go-to list to exit

1. Plan in advance.

I would give myself from nine months to a year just for networking, for talking to everyone that is a good potential acquirer. Firstly, you need to think about where you fit, which strategic investor could benefit from acquiring you, which strategic investor is buying right now, etc., forming a list of as many options as possible for you to pick the best one.

2. The other thing is the completion of the acquisition.

So firstly, you need to think about what the buyer is actually buying. So from the buyers' perspective, it's what a startup company has right now: its revenue, clients, stability, and growth. So work on those things before pitching to an investor.

3. Make sure you have all the rights to your technology.

When starting or running a startup, check all your contracts for how the IP rights are written down there. Then, spend money on a lawyer to audit it. It's crucial for you to prove that every line of code in your platform belongs to you legally. If you're neglecting this at the start of your company, it'll be really hard to go back and repair it. And that's what a bigger company would definitely consider while buying a startup.

4. Keep in mind that what investors are buying is actually your team, too.

They will conduct an audit, considering how good your people are and how probable it is that they will stay. You're good to go if you have some rare talents in your IT team and in other departments.

5. You're going to need an excellent transactional lawyer on your side.

In theory, founders like me can deal with contracts by themselves. But those have so many clauses that are not in use every day that really, so there was a lot of correspondence and work between legal teams on both sides. And if I didn't have good support, I don't know where we would be now.

How much did you earn from your startup exit?

Lunching's valuation was around 17 million PLN. Not a unicorn, but considering how pandemics influenced the company, we were really happy with that. Also, it wasn't a complete exit - Szymon (the other co-founder) and I still have a substantial part of the shares. They are transactional constructions called "earn-out," which means that the investor can buy those shares in the following years based on company performance.

"Actually investors are buying your team, too"

That's a great motivation to ensure that the main team is intact and doing a good job. Because if we replaced the highest managers, who didn't know the company and the market that well yet, it would be a major setback.

If you met 10-year-old Lukasz, what would you tell him?

I guess I would tell him to train more and do more sports. I was very active as a kid but wasn't actually training in any sports. So, I would work on hand, eye, and movement coordination. Because now, even though I do like sports, I'm really bad at them.

Rapid fire round



Rapid fire round

Your biggest regret?

I wish I had traveled more when I was a student.

Three main qualities you have to see in a person to hire him or her.

1. Ambition to develop, to grow, to learn.
2. Honesty. Just be transparent.
3. People who have made up their own minds, which are not dependent.

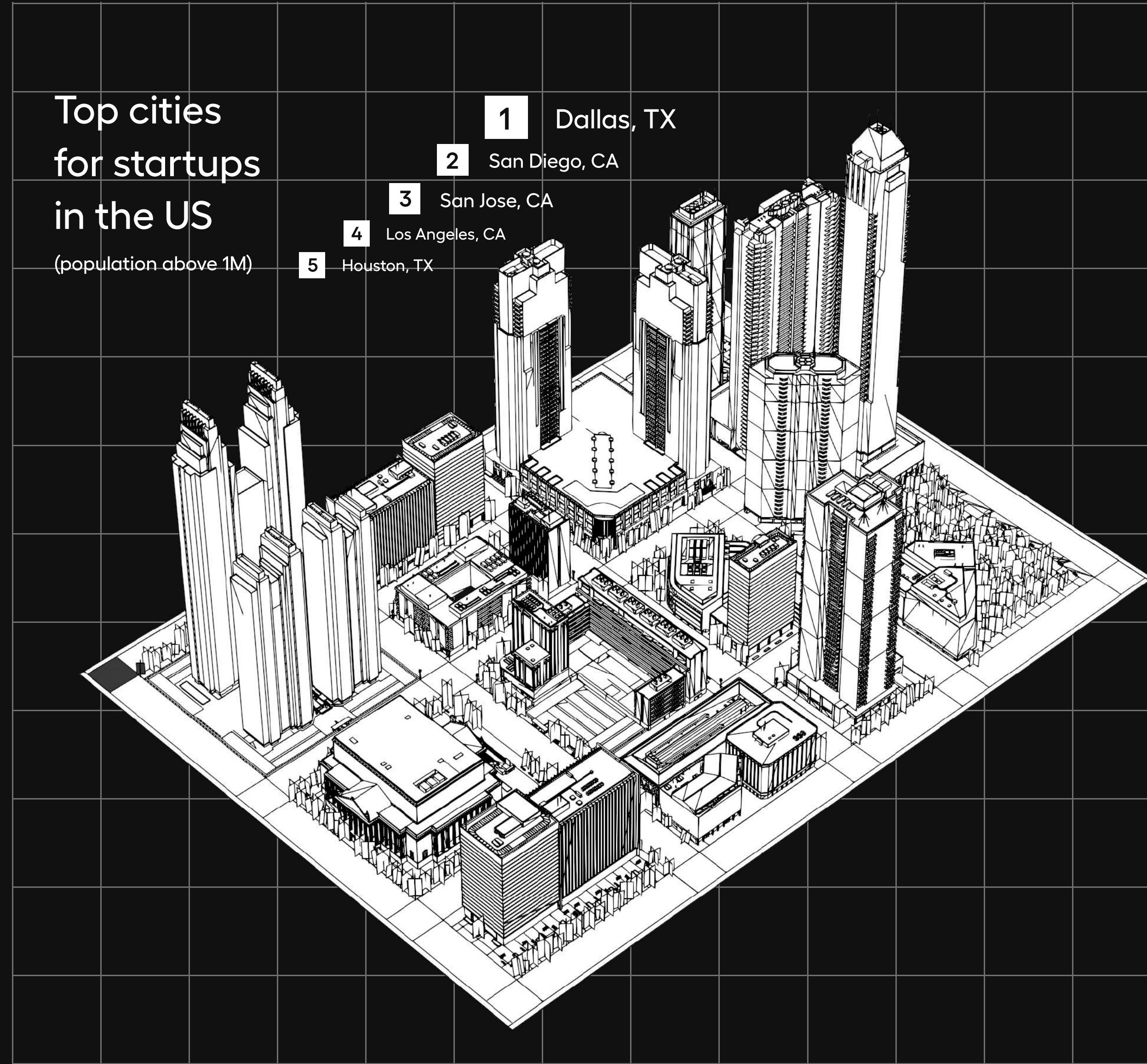
Who is your business hero?

I think that would be my brother Michał, he created Morele.net, a billions-of-revenue company. They started with just two people, and now there are 600 employees in the organization. And he did it with such honesty and ethics that it really inspires me. I believe that you really should know a person for them to become your hero.



ŁUKASZ

NATHALIE



**From rocking music
scenes to financial
entrepreneurship.
How far can
curiosity lead you?**

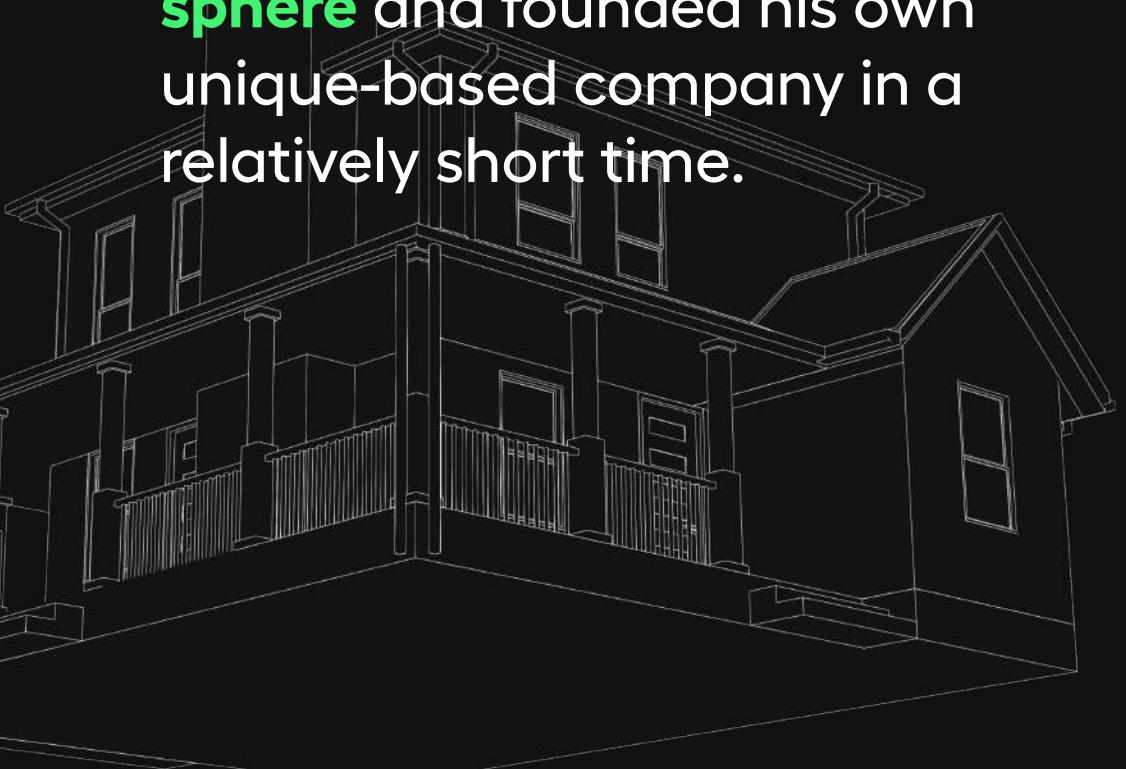
**Interview with
John Green,
CEO & Co-founder
at Nada**





John Green is a CEO and Co-founder of an outstanding **Dallas-based startup** called **Nada**. It's a platform that redefines the way to own and access real estate assets.

Recently, the company closed a **seed round with \$8 million**. Starting as a **punk rock** musician, John opened a **real estate mortgage startup** and paved his way to the top of the **financial sphere** and founded his own unique-based company in a relatively short time.



Please tell us more about what Nada is and what your guys are doing there.

Nada is a real estate finance platform that makes real estate ownership more accessible for everyone. Our goal is possible through a couple of key innovative financial products that are delivered and experienced with technology.

"It makes real estate ownership more accessible for everyone"

The first such product is [Homeshares](#) which allows homeowners to turn their equity into cash and use it for everyday spending or other expenses without the burden of new debt.

There are no monthly payments or exposure to interest rates in the product. And, of course, the homeowners don't have to move out of the home to get the funds.

Our other key product, to work in concert with Homeshares, is [Cityfunds](#), - a family of real estate funds. And they make it possible for everyone to own a piece of a top city's residential real estate market.

It's an index-like fund, which is meant to represent a single city's real estate market. In this case, we connect the homeowner with the Homeshares product. The products include equities from Austin, Dallas, Tampa, and Miami, and we pull them together in real estate funds.

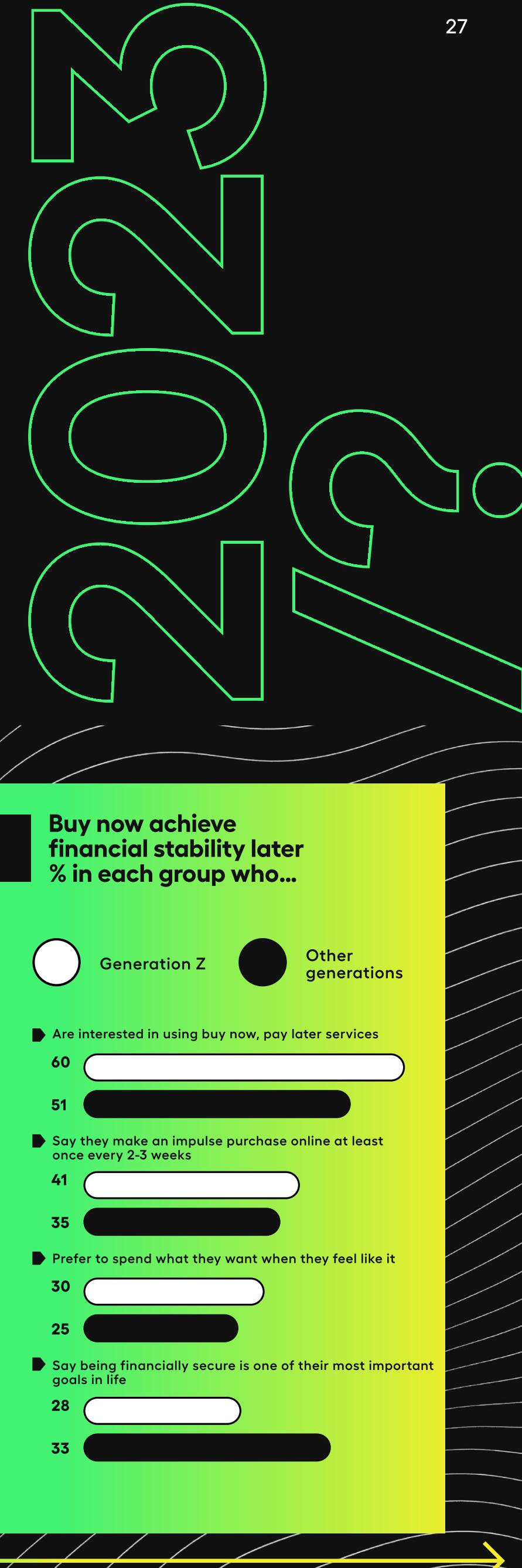
"Just \$250, someone can own a pool of homeowner equity in Austin without going through all the challenges of homeownership and financial burdens or be an accredited investor"

So, for just \$250, someone can own a pool of homeowner equity in Austin without going through all the challenges of homeownership and financial burdens or be an accredited investor.

We're making ownership and access to the assets as means of creating wealth. We tie them all together, so Cityfunds is a pool that owns and finances our Homeshares product. And that's how we're going to work in contrary on two sides: on both the owner's and the investor's side.

You were a part of a punk rock band. What is that experience of your life? And how did you end up in finance afterward?

In my early 20s, I was a vocalist for a punk rock band. And I had the opportunity to do that as a full-time job. We recorded our own two albums, we published those, and we just toured non-stop for 5 years. And that was how we made money back then.



“I am perpetually curious”

But everything is a journey. That background gave me my best virtue: curiosity. I am perpetually curious. Also, being the punk, you get very comfortable being uncomfortable.

Even if you have a bad day or don't feel the best about yourself, you still have to go out and perform in front of a bunch of strangers. And you want to do well. That pressure and drive to get out of my comfort zone helped me.

What experience from being a punk rock musician helped you in what you're doing now?

I applied those same principles to my work in finance - I knew I needed to be very curious, I needed to be driven to create, and driven to try to build an established network or community. And I probably agitated a lot of savvy, experienced people in that space early on because I was just asking every question I could and tried to be involved in everything I could.

“Being the punk, you get very comfortable being uncomfortable”

And I didn't see this as a climb-the-ladder type; that's just what I wanted to do at that moment.

That's how I understood the value of networking, and that helped me quickly absorb that space. In financial services, or to be more specific, in real estate mortgage, plenty of information and the tools needed to maximize that market are at the very top. Usually, only industry experts or wealthy advocates have those.

And that was always so agitating to me - I wanted to make it more simple, more accessible, and I tried to do that throughout. It helped me prepare for what I'm doing now.

Thanks to my past career, I have these dueling voices now. I spent over a decade in financial services. So, I'm mainly in risk management and a strategy-type role. They're pretty structured roles for restructuring, process design, and regulatory navigation.

So, I also have this non-conformist punk rocker voice in me pushing the envelope, and those two voices help to balance me out. As a band going out, writing your own music, practicing it with your team - that's fun. But as soon as you get in front of a bunch of strangers and perform it, it takes a lot of conviction and understanding of how to get that from here, with this team, and build an end-product that we will deliver to the public. It's so much the same as what I'm doing now. And there are so many little things like the release of our app. Right now feels very much like the release of our albums.

How did being in Texas help you, or did it make it harder for you to start your business? Is there a particular environment or aspect that influences startups?

Nada is headquartered in Dallas, and most of our team and investors are in Austin. From my experience, Texas as a whole has a great community for startups. Some of our early supporters were the University of Texas at Austin. We were part of a program they did at the university, and they sponsored it. At this latest round, our largest investor is also Austin-based, with deep connections at the University of Texas at Austin. Dallas is not very startup-like yet.

It's not very communal in that way, but we're trying to play a role in that. There are great startups here, but they are more scattered. What Dallas has is a very structured finance sector.

So, a lot of independent mortgage companies are here, a lot of established real estate companies. So, Dallas has an abundance of finance, whether it's the banking side or the real estate side - that's available to us here, and it's been tremendous. So, as a startup, you'll have to balance it between Austin and Dallas.

“If you're a startup looking to come to Texas and raise capital - get to know the history of Texas venture capital”

Start really understanding the network first. It has always helped me to find where people went and what has popped up. In Texas, it's so much about personal connections, understanding the journeys, and trying to identify with what people can help.

If you met a 10-year-old John, what would you tell him?

I would say: "Get curious faster."

Rapid fire round



JOHN

Your biggest regret?

We could do a second album with my band. We wrote some excellent stuff, but we got too lazy, and later, we just didn't do anything with it.

Once punk - forever punk?

Yes, yes!

Who is your business hero?

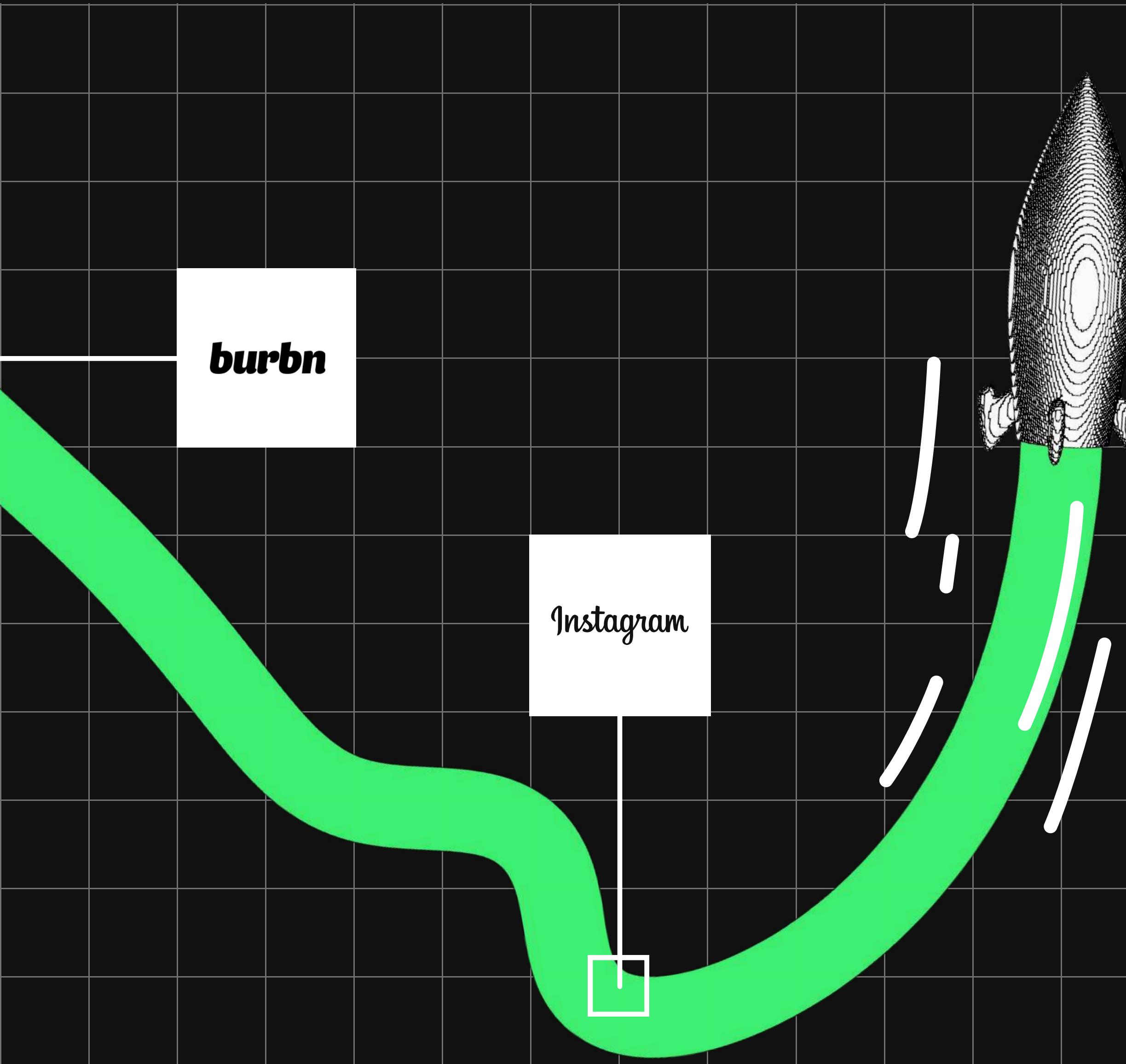
I like purpose-driven companies and journeys like Patagonia's story. E.g., John Mackey and his journey with 'Whole Foods' and the concepts with a "purpose-built into business logic and thinking" mindset. For me, it's more of an idea than this individual person.

Who is your personal life hero?

Dave Grohl, Foo Fighters.



NATHALIE



How to find perfect product-market fit

Interview with
Jan Nowak,
Founder at [BOTWISE.io](#)



Jan Nowak is the Founder of a company called **BOTWISE** - a dedicated knowledge base for customer service.

The idea behind BOTWISE was to **speed up access** to distributed company knowledge from a single place, **saving even 90% of the time** spent on searching and gathering information.

And currently, they are more focused on customer service, where the speed of accessing the information is **the most important**.



You chose today's topic: "Finding a perfect Product-Market Fit." Why exactly this very topic?

Finding a product-market fit issue was very close to us, mostly because we've been struggling at this stage. We've been trying and experimenting for a while before settling on a profitable idea. And that's why I'd like to discuss and dwell a bit more on how it actually looks from a startup perspective, as we didn't have any investors by choice. And, actually, we're still bootstrapping.

What comes first - a chicken or an egg? Do you choose the right market for your product, or do you adjust your product to the needs of the market?

I think it works both ways. In our case, it was a massive coincidence that we ended up doing what we're doing.

It all started when we attended a hackathon organized by a bank. It was a great opportunity, especially meeting a lot of people that came through with their needs and ideas. As we talked with people there, we came up with the idea to build a chatbot that would support the customer service teams in answering clients' questions much faster. We were neither customer service experts nor banking experts. So, that was a pure coincidence that we were interested in AI and knew how to build software that could fit their needs.

It was actually a good starting point because we already had the needs and the customer. And we thought if at least a few people in one of the biggest banks want that, there's a probability that everyone else with a similar profile will be happy to have it.

How do you identify that BOTWISE is doing something right? And, vice versa, how do you understand that you're in the wrong place?

At the moment, we're definitely not in the right place. We don't have a strictly product-market fit and are struggling with scaling up at the moment. I'd say that we're still looking for the right product-market fit. Our route from the beginning was different, and we didn't pivot as quickly as we should have. But we have our lessons learned, that's for sure.

As I mentioned before, we started as a chatbot for the customer service teams. They could upload their documents and ask the chatbot to retrieve the answers quickly from those. At some point, we even thought we successfully did this proof of concept in implementation for the bank, as back then, we reduced the average handling time by 7%. For 400 agents, that's actually a lot.

But after that, we struggled to get other customers who have similar profiles with similar needs anyway. It actually took us too much time to notice that probably we were not in the right place with the timing and that our functionality was more like a 'nice-to-have' feature. And the teams we were targeting still needed to solve more basic needs first.

Only later on did we go into the corporate search and come to the conclusion that everyone usually has multiple means of storing information. For example, we have SharePoint, Dropbox, Drive, Slides, emails, etc. And everyone who works for the company is browsing through all those applications every day to look for an answer. So, the news was pretty clear - and everyone was excited about this idea.

But, at this stage, we encountered the problem in a different place. During implementation, the security of connecting different systems within an organization was a lot of risks, a lot of paperwork, a lot of compliance work, and a lot of API setups.



So, even though it appeared like a good idea for everyone when it came to the implementation, it was too hard to do. Especially with our strictly limited resources, as we still were not very pursuing VCs actively, at that time, we wanted to bootstrap.

Once again, it took us too much time to realize that this is probably not the solution that we should pursue. For the last few months, we've been focused on the dedicated knowledge base for customer service.

Mostly because we've been working with the customer service teams for most of the time. In terms of software, it's still similar to what we did before, but now we're more focused on building not only the search that is smart and can extract information from thousands of documents, but also on features for managers to track the team performance and managing the knowledge base.

What is a step-by-step process of finding a product-market fit from your experience?

Step 1: Start with creating a landing page and a promo campaign to see if there is any traction.

Also, do some surveys, and research the market before even starting to code anything. You already have a user base that you reach out to on a regular basis, send them any updates, and ask them for feedback. This way, you'll get valuable information to build the MVP that people will actually use and like. Don't go to the basement with your developer team, sit there for the whole year, and then go out to the market to see if this is actually something that people need.

Step 2: When you launch the MVP, talk with as many users as you can.

At BOTWISE, we're doing a whole set of different exercises to see what's happening in our app. For example, we organize interviews with our users.

This way, we're both onboarding the company and talking to its agents - the actual end users. Apart from the interviews, we do surveys using Mixpanel to track how much time users spend on the app and what features they use.

This provides us with valuable data that will help in developing future updates, for example.

Step 3: Prioritize the feedback in a proper way.

It's really important for us to make the right call and work on the features that are useful for the majority of users.

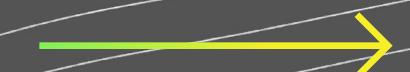
From our experience, users don't actually know what they want. Sometimes you need to give them hints and ask appropriate questions to lead them to the answer they are looking for.

"Don't go to the basement with your developer team, sit there for the whole year, and then go out to the market to see if this is actually something that people need"

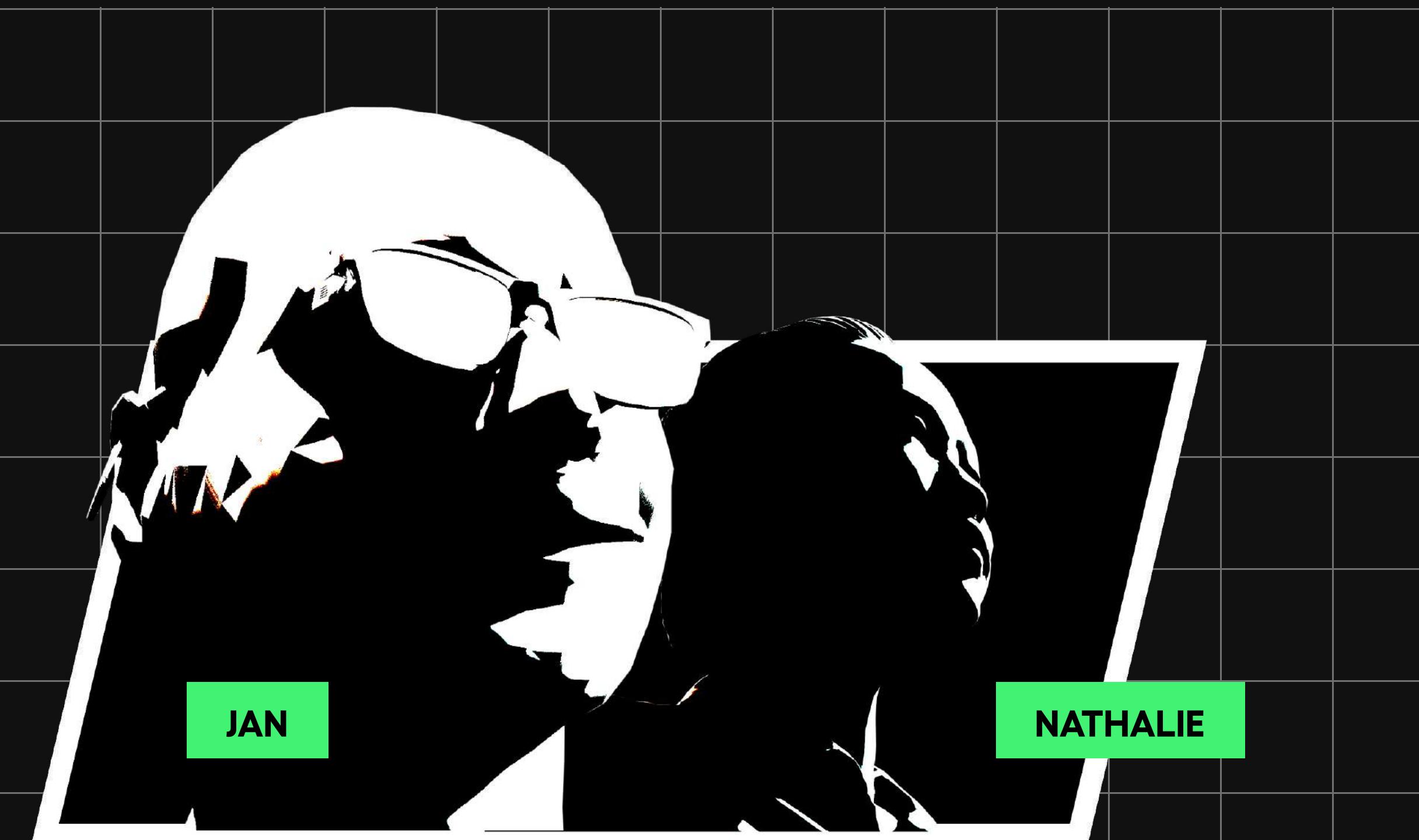
You mentioned that even after finding a product-market fit, you still need to constantly make some changes. So, how can one adapt to those ever-lasting changes?

I would say to do the things I mentioned on a regular basis. Talk with your users all the time - both new and old ones - to find out if the tool is better now and if they see a difference. Be in a continuous conversation with all the users to grow your customer base because you'll need to make sure that not only the new customers are joining, but the current ones are staying. And their retention is the most important SaaS metric that you want to track closely.

You cannot actually dwell on achieved success. It's a constant improvement.



Rapid fire round



Your biggest regret?

My biggest regret is that we didn't pivot quicker.

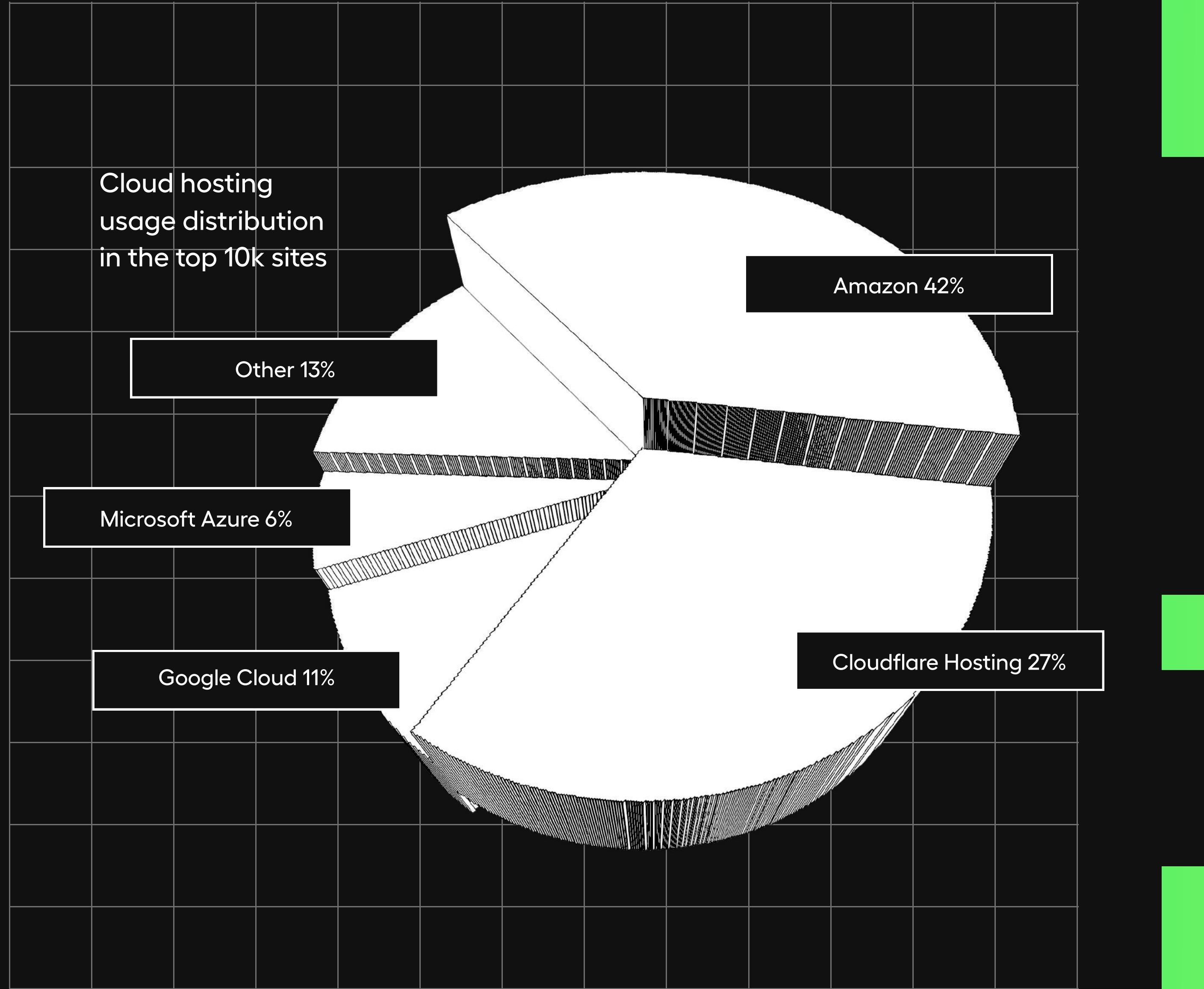
Who is your business hero?

Probably Elon Musk. I think this is the answer for a lot of people, but this guy is really exceptional.

You've recently become a father, could you give one survival advice for future dads?

Be patient and consistent. And this can also apply to startups and businesses. It's not about working very hard because you will burn out quickly and quit after a few mistakes and not have success for a while. So, being consistent is the key for success, in my opinion.





Cloud vendor lock-in: Should you go for AWS & Co?

**Interview with
Johannes Haux,
Co-founder and COO
at Sysmagine GmbH**



Johannes Haux
is a former Co-founder and COO at **Sysmagine**, helping users optimize their **code review** workflows with his tool MergeBoard. Even though he's just recently gotten out of his uni days, he's already **helping companies relieve the pain** caused by inefficient code reviews.

Having developed software himself in the past, he know first-hand the pain caused by inefficient code review tools.



Could you tell a little bit about your company Sysmagine?

We, as Sysmagine, are developing a code review tool called MergeBoard. With MergeBoard, we help teams of developers to faster code reviews without compromising on review quality with some intelligent change visualization.

The topic for today that has been chosen is "Cloud vendor lock-in, should you go for AWS?" while building your tool. So if you had to convince me in one sentence about why to avoid vendor lock-in, what would it be?

Johannes: I'd go for: "Avoid vendor lock-in to keep your freedom to switch to any provider you like, to the cost-benefit that suits you best, to the cost-benefit ratio that suits you best at any time".

What are the best practices to avoid vendor lock-in?

To answer that question, I think we have to take a step back. First, think about why vendor lock-in is so common? What we see is that companies like AWS and Google Cloud Services pitch you this idea of having the tech at your fingertips to build this scalable app, just like that. And, honestly, you can get started super quickly with those tools. The thing is, if you build an app solely based on those cloud services, you're building something very complex with a lot of black boxes. And yes, it's super optimized for being scalable, usually. But this beautiful quote from Sir Tony Hoare says, "Premature optimization is the root of all evil."

And I think this is something we need to take into account here. Usually, when starting to build something, you don't know your bottlenecks. So, you really need to think about this question first.

Do we need something complex and scalable when we start building a product or a service? And if the answer to that question is "No," I'd say the best practice to avoid vendor lock-in is just to go with open-source alternatives. The GitHub repos are full of alternatives listed to AWS services, Google Cloud Services, etc. And you can run those on any provider if the answer you're not locked in.

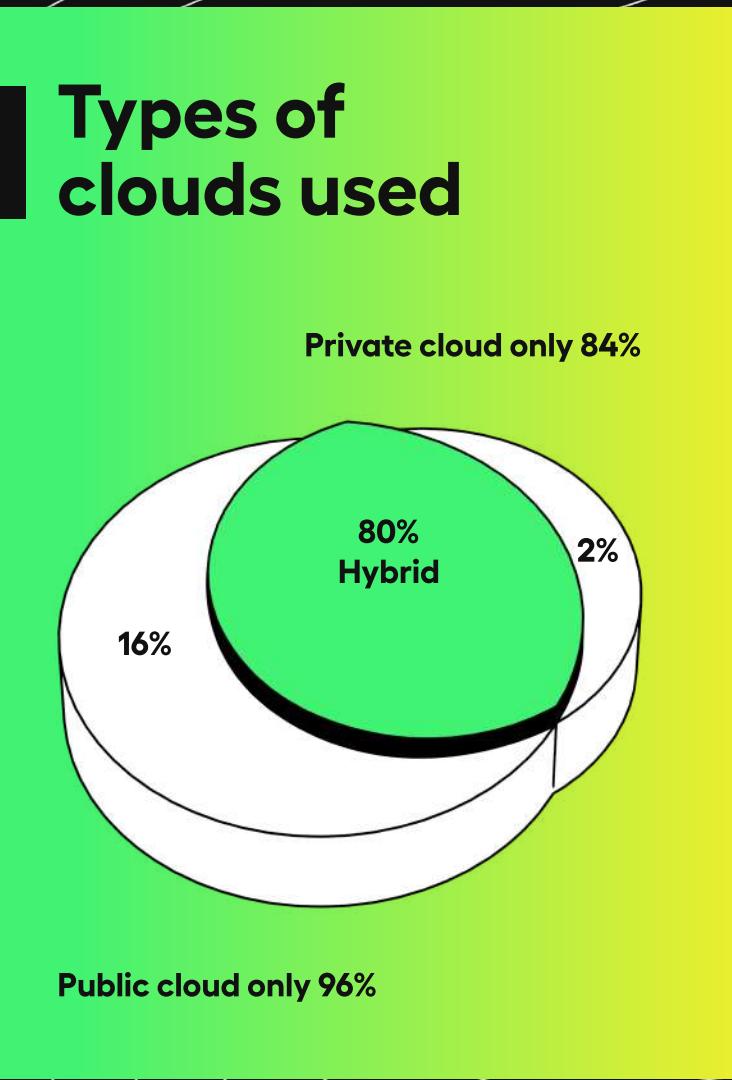
But, if the answer is yes, we'll need something scalable. Right now. One way to avoid lock-in would be to go for services that use an API that is shared between different providers. For example, Amazon's S3 object storage shares an API with other providers. And, when you want to switch the provider, you can do that very easily without having to rewrite all your code. So you're not very locked in into that part. So I think that those are some practices that can help you not get locked in so easily.

Is it cost-effective to avoid vendor lock-in? How would you compare those costs of developing a system using managed AWS services versus unmanaged alternatives?

That's the core question, right? Should I build it myself? Or should I buy it? And I think one interesting aspect is that this question implies the way we compare those AWS and unmanaged services.

On the one hand, managed services give a low-barrier entry and a whole bunch of functionality that can be used right away. And, at least, in the beginning, they're super cheap to get started with. What I mean is even if you're a student or a startup, you can just start building stuff for free.

"Premature optimization is the root of all evil"



“Should I build it myself? Or should I buy it?”

If I compare that with "I have to write my own software, maintain my servers and Docker containers, run updates" situation, I'd say, let's go with AWS. But that's too superficial as a comparison. Because what is not mentioned there is that using managed services introduces a whole lot of complexity.

First of all, you cannot run it on your local machine. So, if you have to run tests in your own CI pipeline, you'll always have to connect to the cloud service and run all the logic there first. And that's not only some kind of hassle to set up, it's also expensive because service providers will charge you for that.

But, the other thing about AWS is that you're introducing a whole lot of black boxes into your software stack. And it can become a problem over time. Of course, you can read the API documentation. But building something you're on your own, having that box cracked open lets you work with code far differently than if you just book the service and be done with it. Moreover, even if you have a managed service, you will still have to configure and maintain it by yourself. So, it might be easier to start out with managed services. But it's still a lot of work to be put into.

What are the pros and cons of avoiding vendor lock?

One of the pros is that you can always choose the best provider based on features and price down the road. Also, keep in mind that you don't have to build a whole app. With Amazon services, for instance, you can also use just one small part that needs to scale. And once you've figured that out and know your bottleneck, you can really choose and go for the right service there.

Another "pro" is that you have control over the complete infrastructure. I'd say it gets way easier without black-box components. You know, the documentation is good. But if you can take a look at the code itself, you can see what's actually happening.

Sometimes funny stories come out when you're trying to avoid costly mistakes. I recall there was this one story where a small startup went on television and said: "Hey, we have this app, check it out" And then a whole bunch of people went to the website, and Amazon Cloud build price went to \$10,000 per month, but they didn't actually convert anybody. They didn't gain any customers! Of course, it's nice that the website works smoothly, but it cost them a whole bunch of money, and nothing really was gained. You don't always need the kind of scalability that AWS offers. And sometimes, it's okay if the site just runs a bit slower. And even if you notice that you need a performance upgrade there, you can still upgrade later on, especially if you're a startup.

“Sometimes funny stories come out when you're trying to avoid costly mistakes”

Now, to the "cons" or "reasons why you might want to log into a vendor", I'd say. For example, if you use a bunch of services from one vendor, you usually have a nice dashboard or tool to manage those services altogether. That is something really handy. It's super easy to get started and is especially beneficial if you want to do rapid prototyping and test with real users out there. I think that it just makes sense, even if a small team tries that. Also, if you're about to make a business decision, don't be afraid to face vendor lock-in.

Knowing that there's going to be high fluctuation in demand, it's a great decision to go with a managed services provider if you're ready to pay for it.

Are infrastructures as code tools like TerraForm capable of providing a true non-vendor locked-in experience. Is it possible?

To be honest, I haven't used TerraForm myself, but I actually checked out the product. It looks really great to me. What TerraForm offers you is a spin-up of cloud servers. For example, Docker containers on those servers use a simple config file. And then, you can specify which provider you want those servers from and on which server, you can just run your Docker images. This actually helps you not get locked into any one of those providers.

Now, the moment you start using services by providers in your Docker images, that's a whole nother story. You have to be careful there, you have to differentiate. But if you're only using this spinning-up service simple feature, that's really cool. I think that's where TerraForm can help you not end up being locked in. Tools like TerraForm and Kubernetes help you build scalable apps. You can set automation in Kubernetes, and if your load is increasing, it spins your Docker images. And TerraForm lets you do this by hand.

But again, I think you have to ask yourself first: "Do I need to be scalable right now"? Because resources on-demand are always expensive in the end. And if you can use a bunch of dedicated servers, as Stackoverflow does, I think this wouldn't be a great solution.

But if you know what your demand is, and that it will increase steadily, and you want to spin up the service easily on TerraForm, it looks like a good solution.

What is your biggest regret?

During my bachelor's, I studied physics, and I was more into partying than studying. And that was a bad thing. But during my master's, I realized: "Wait, if I do my homework, this could be fun because I can also learn a whole bunch of stuff. I got this realization late.

Who is your business hero?

I'd say, my wife, is my successful hero.

What's your great achievement that's not on your CV?

When I was still going to school, I was really into filming. So I filmed our theater thing. Eventually, the DVD of that sold really, really well. This got me into this mindset of "if I do something people want, I can charge them money for it."

Which profession would you choose if you weren't a COO of Sysmagine?

It's tough. Working with people is something I really enjoy. So, I think this aspect I would focus on in the future.

NATHALIE

JOHANNES



Disrupting the development industry with a unique approach

**Interview with
Zbigniew Czarnecki,
Co-founder and CEO
at Apptension**



Zbigniew Czarnecki
CEO of [Apptension](#), Co-founder of
[Teamdeck](#) (Resource management SaaS),
and SaaS-building advisor.

Zbigniew and his team are working on [SaaS Boilerplate](#) - a tool to develop SaaS products faster with maximized development comfort.

He worked on projects for companies like [Netflix](#), [Google](#), [BCG](#), [Heineken](#), and more. Zbigniew's passion is testing new cutting-edge technologies and developing modern interactive UIs.

He founded [Apptension](#) with two university colleagues in 2012. The company focused on [SaaS development](#) right now, works with [top startups](#) and consulting agencies and has 93 people on board.

apptension

You started a company at 22, it's relatively early. Do you remember your major mistake/-s while running a business? And if yes, what were those?

Oh, there were at least a dozen of them. The major ones are probably related to communication.

I think my biggest mistake so far was that I didn't understand for a long time how important communication with the team / in the team actually was. Everything that you do at work, how your processes work, and how efficient you are - depends somehow on good communication. I often failed to deliver a clear message, which led to doubts and extended the process painfully. This is especially important now in IT - people working remotely need to re-invent how to communicate efficiently with their peers without direct eye contact, no gestures, no facial expression, just text on Slack.

The second is that for a longer time, we didn't follow a long-term strategy, we had some kind of a vision of what we wanted to achieve together (as business partners), but the strategy was not clearly set. So today, we plan each year carefully, ensuring we assess the risks and define the priorities that can drive our growth.

"We are brutal in tracking our key metrics"

Another mistake was that I should have valued the power of a strong team structure when you grow. On different levels of the company evolution, you refine your structure. And it's often too late, and you just fix a lack of competencies with hires of the skills you need "now" that, sometimes, don't fit the team no matter how senior they are.

Today, I think you should know your expectations regarding the future of your company structure at least a year ahead. Our P&C team does a great job preparing Hiring Plans and Career Paths but polishing every Job Ad we release - these make the desired structure transparent for leadership and the teams and set clear expectations for candidates and employees.

Well, I could think of a couple more, but I made most of the common mistakes, but somehow, we survived and will probably do a lot of them again in the future.

With talks of global recession, we can observe the massive layoffs and hiring slow-downs in the IT sector worldwide and in Poland. The report said that tech companies announced job cuts for 2022, with 97,171 planned layoffs in USA alone. That is up 649% from 2021 ([source](#)). I know for a fact that Apptension is hiring. How come?

Yes, indeed, it's projected that there will be cuts and layoffs in the IT market, too. But let's make it clear - this is a broad statement, as the IT sector serves dozens of niches, markets, trends, and so on. They will always be winners and losers.

"CSAT = 100%"

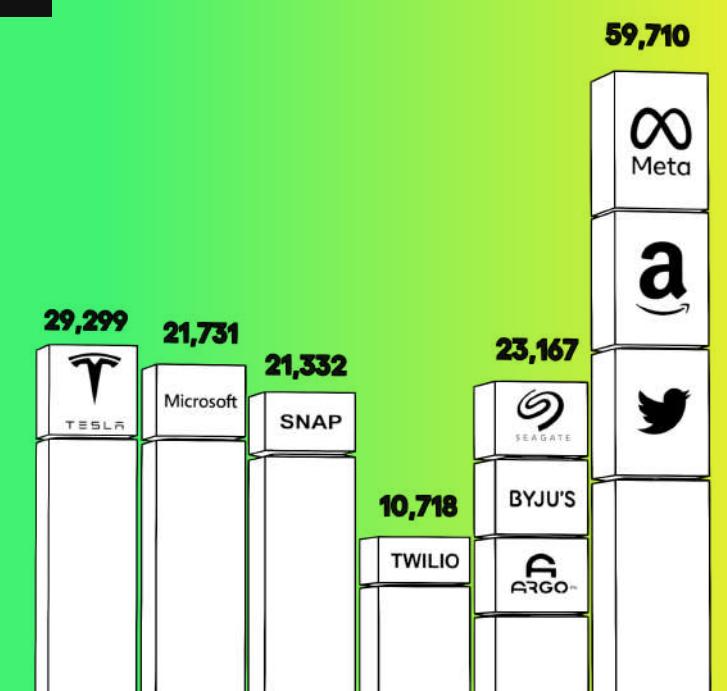
Often, these layoffs are part of the plan - in GE, Jack Welch stated that leaders should cut around 10% of their staff each year as a part of their continuous improvement process.

It depends on the market you serve and if:

- This market is projected to increase its value over time.
- On the offering you have and if it fits current market needs - and these change rapidly.



Tech layoffs in 2022



And, obviously, "how good are you" at serving your customers and if they stick to you for longer. Proper strategy planning that is evidence-based and properly measured is crucial if you plan to grow in a recession. But what's most important - you should have reserves/resources to do it already in place.

We try to follow a similar strategy at Apptension. We are brutal in tracking our key metrics. We don't track a single metric, which is headcount or revenue. Instead, we currently track the seven most essential company objectives and over 20 crucial metrics (related to the team, finances, processes, and clients), which gives us the ability to ensure a healthy organization. As methods, we adopted OKRs and BSC - the two systems we liked the most.

We also analyze the data and our growth correlation through the years. This makes our decisions more data-driven and evidence-driven than going where the wind blows.

"Deliver amazing projects to the most famous brands, including Netflix, Heineken, Uber, Canopy Growth, Boston Consulting Group, Google, and more..."

I think all of these and our plans lead us to the decision that hiring is needed to execute it :)

Since we're already speaking about what you and your team in Apptension do differently, could you name things that differentiate Apptension from the other dev shops of a kind? Differs for better or for worse.

I would say: We strive for performance but don't compromise on quality. Meaning we build our products that improve the internal development processes to be more performant and deliver better quality of service and products to our customers. We also learn from our mistakes and wins; we share them and apply them in every possible way. And we have battle-tested production processes that are efficient, and that led to creating products serving millions of end-users.

But overall, I think it's best to base it on feedback from one of our customers:

"The SaaS Boilerplate Apptension built was a huge reason we were so successful because all these seemingly unrelated tasks and integrations needed to happen. If we had been working with anybody else, It would have probably taken months to do the same work."

"The SaaS Boilerplate Apptension built was a huge reason we were so successful"

For worse? Maybe we don't offer too broad a stack - meaning we do not do "everything in everything" - we took this path to master technologies and methodologies we loved through the years, which allowed us to build for performance and neat app experience.

We have mastered React, React Native, Python, Django, and AWS; We try to be picky with defining our technical stack, for example, we explore low-code but are less interested in no-code solutions.

What about your company and team makes you feel proud? Generic answers are not accepted 😊

But I am proud of whatever we do because you can see that clients are really happy with the outcomes and see us as a long-term partner. I am proud of seeing how the company has evolved through the years. I am proud of the people that grew with us, left, and now are working in top companies. I am grateful and proud of all current employees for the work they do every day, who constantly learn new product development practices and share them. But also proud that we continuously work hand in hand for the last ten years as a team and deliver amazing projects to the most famous brands, including Netflix, Heineken, Uber, Canopy Growth, Boston Consulting Group, Google, and more...

What was the most difficult thing you had to do in your job for the last 10 years?

It's always the same: letting people go. Fortunately, we do not do that often.

If you met 10-year-old Zbigniew, what would you tell him?

It will be okay. IT should be your way. There will be flaws. With some hiccups. But always get up. No matter what :)



ZBIGNIEW

Your biggest regret...

That I did not continue Karate. But it's never late to restart ;)

If not a CEO of Apptension, then...

A CEO of something else. I just love making apps.

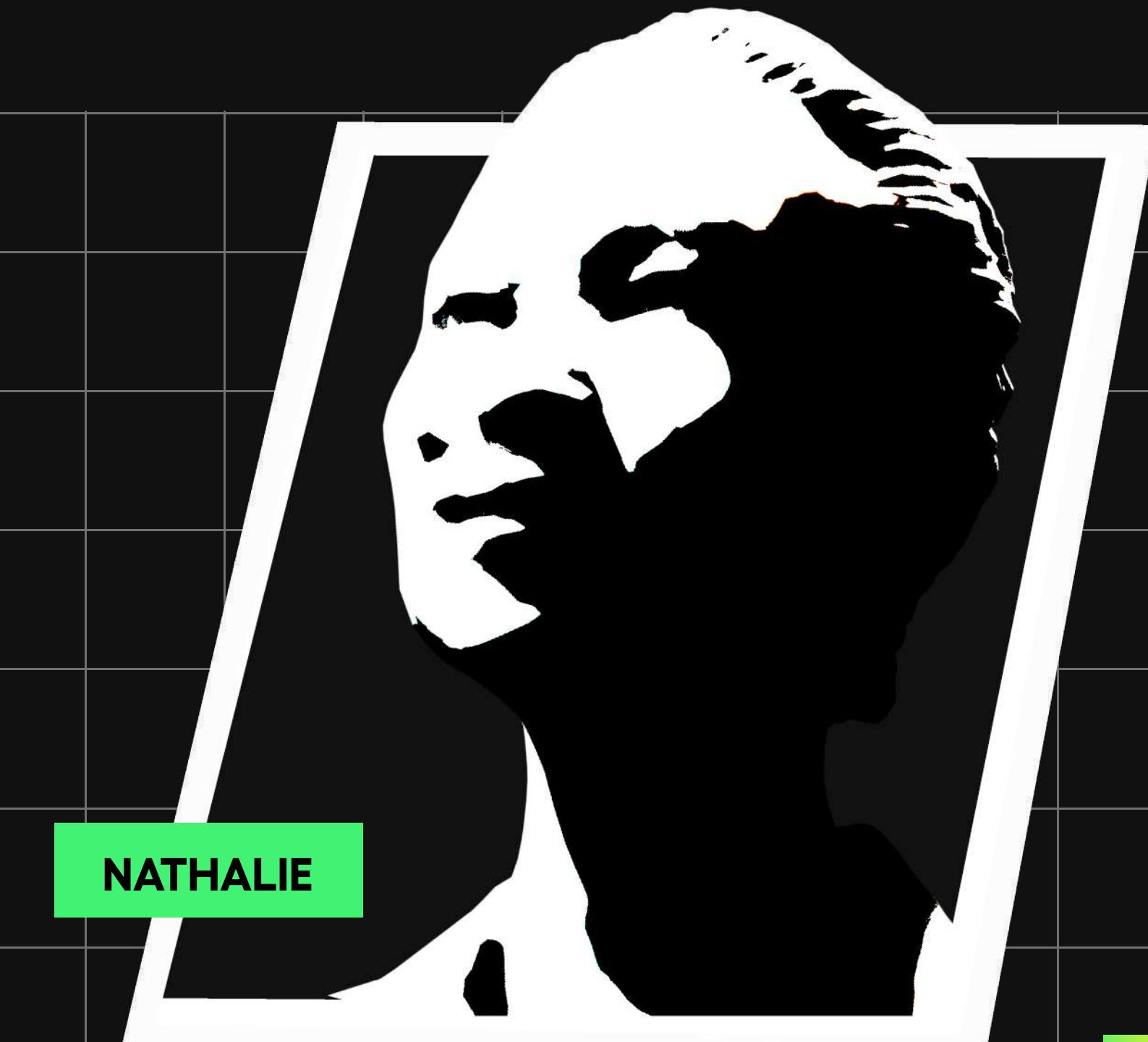
Apptension in 10 years...

The first choice in central Europe for founders and investors who want to build and launch their digital ventures.

You in 10 years...

Still be happy...

Rapid fire round



NATHALIE

"Now with flaws" of "Perfect never"?

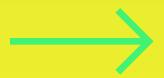
I can say I am more of a perfectionist, but I built a habit of asking myself if I do not push too hard on the things that ultimately don't matter :)

3

What IT
is going
to be about



2023
predictions



>Predictions from insiders

>



Corey Morris
Chief Marketing Officer / SynergyXR

/1

Apple will enter the market with its first XR device

Most have heard by now that Apple's been planning its foray into the XR space for some time now. Rumors have spread that its XR device department is second to only the iPhone. And since Meta just released its prosumer version of the market-leading Meta Quest - which could be seen as a preemptive move - the pressure is building.

What's more interesting is that Meta and Microsoft are teaming up to bring Microsoft's enterprise software to the Meta Quest hardware. This is the first time we've seen Big Tech joining forces to win the Metaverse race. It won't be the last.



Jan Nowak
Founder at BOTWISE.io

/1

"**ChatGPT** will be one of the leading technology that might reshape our future. This will not only be a nice-to-have gadget for customer service teams, but it might totally transform it. It might change the way we browse the internet - it will be real competition to the traditional **Google** search box."

/3

What we "see" in the Metaverse will look more realistic

Not only are XR devices becoming faster, which allows for more realistic graphics (pro tip: not all 3D models are the same), but the tools that we use to create 3D objects are also becoming more available and user-friendly. We've recently seen the same wave with graphic design (think Adobe Creative Suite vs. Canva), which I suspect we'll also see with 3D design and development. It may not be to the same effect in just a year, but in 2023, we'll see significant progress in this area.

Similarly, we're also seeing new 3D marketplaces like Turbosquid and Sketchfab make it easier to find and work with 3D models in much the same way we saw stock photo libraries nearly 20 yrs. ago.

/2

In SaaS B2B market, we will definitely see a big slowdown and it's not only about VC funding.

We are already in the recession, companies hire less, and do layoffs.

There will be smaller room for upselling as companies **bunker for worse times**. We will need to carefully track CAC as it will be going up. **Growing 2x next year will be more impressive than growing 3x last year.** Challenging times ahead.



>Predictions from Apptension



/1 I am hoping that 2023 will be the year of Evidence-Based Management. EBM is not an entirely novel concept as it was first proposed by Ken Schwaber, co-creator of Scrum, in 2015, with consecutive updates in the following years.

/2 Its main premise is that organizations can and should base their decisions on more empirical evidence, in turn making smarter investments and reducing the risk of financing initiatives that hold little promise of success. Such an iterative and incremental agile approach with experimentation at its core fosters an adaptive business culture is something we all very much need in the uncertain socio-economic times.

/3 No wonder the framework has been getting traction for a couple of years, having been adopted by technological giants like Google itself. I believe that the usage of EBM will soon start peaking as more and more digital products and technological companies start favoring exploring their ideas in small, relatively risk-free spikes that can provide empirical and customer-centric evidence of potential value.



Aleksandra Leończyk
Head of Project Delivery



Anna Rosłanek
CPO

/1 Coming into 2023 certainly brings a lot of emotions surrounding change. Our world is evolving and so does our expectations for what we are responsible as leaders making our impact even more complex. Hence why the priority for many organisations will be to manage that. A people-first approach, which focuses on their development and well-being is essential in navigating employees through the impact of digital transformation, economic uncertainty, and other factors at play. As leaders, it's crucial to remain grounded in reality and to find internal opportunities within the organization. This means being aware of the potential risks and challenges, and developing strategies that are realistic and achievable. It is essential to maintain a balance between building commitment and courage, and remaining human in our approach to building a stable future.

/2 Companies will prioritize employee well-being and mental health, with a greater emphasis on work-life balance and flexible schedules.

/3 The use of virtual team-building activities and events will become more common to maintain team cohesion among remote teams. The use of artificial intelligence and automation will increase, leading to a greater focus on reskilling and upskilling employees.

/4 2023 will bring a wide range of tasks that we must navigate with a complex landscape of priorities. By focusing on these we can help to ensure that the organization is able to attract and retain top talent, promote employee engagement and satisfaction, and navigate through changing business surroundings.

/1 As we look ahead to 2023, one trend that is sure to have a significant impact on the marketing industry is the continued evolution of AI technology. From chatbots and personalized email marketing campaigns to automated ad management, AI is becoming increasingly integrated into the marketing toolkit. Despite concerns about data privacy, it's clear that the development of AI in marketing will only continue to accelerate in the coming year.

/2 On top of that, we can observe the growing power of AI also in content-creation tools. From text and speech generators to video and design production, these tools are making it easier than ever for businesses to produce high-quality content at scale. However, it's important to note that while these tools will undoubtedly change the way we work, they are not a replacement for human creativity and insight. On the other hand, the power of the internet and the rise of influencer marketing is expected to continue to be a major trend in 2023. As consumers form deeper connections with online creators, businesses will need to focus on personalizing their brands and being transparent in order to build trust and credibility.

/3 The key will be to create real relationships with customers and to show the human side of the business. In summary, 2023 is poised to be a year of significant change and growth in the marketing industry, with AI and internet-based technologies playing a leading role. As marketers, it's essential that we stay ahead of these trends and adapt our strategies to make the most of the new opportunities they present.



Hanna Dawidko-Chudziak
Head of Marketing



>Predictions from industry

>

/1

Web3 technologies squared

The further development of blockchain, cryptocurrencies, NFTs, DAOs will enable new types of interactions and applications, such as decentralized finance.

/2

Quantumania

Quantum computing will continue to advance, shortening the execution of complicated tasks from years to seconds, opening new possibilities for optimization and secure communication.

/3

Making technology even greener

Technology will continue to focus on reducing the environmental impact and promoting sustainable practices. The key will be to reduce energy consumption further and use as many recycled materials as possible.

/4

Remote work taken to the next level

Remote working and virtual collaboration will become even more prevalent with the increased use of cloud-based SaaS solutions, distributed work, and video conferencing.

/5

The emergence of more ‘Superapps’

Starting with WeChat and Alipay in the early days, we expect to see even more features added to platforms such as Whatsapp, Uber, Tiktok, and Amazon or banking apps.

/6

More smart city in the city

The development of smart cities will continue, with an increased focus on using technology to improve urban infrastructure and services and reduce environmental pollution.

/7

The twilight of the Fintech Boom

Data from investment management firm Finch Capital shows fintech funding hit \$6 billion in 2020 and \$19 billion in 2021 – only to drop 25% across 2022.

/8

Technology x Sustainability

Advancements in technology will focus on reducing the environmental impact, minimizing the carbon footprint, promoting sustainable practices, and using renewable energy.

/9

More and more nature editing

Technology will enable more precise manipulation of natural systems, such as gene editing and synthetic biology, to solve previously unsolvable problems and slow climate change.

/10

Robots replacing humans

In 2023, we expect to see robotic automation development unfolding in numerous sectors – in fact, the global robotics market is set to hit 215 billion USD by 2030.



Bring **IT** on,
2023!
We're well
prepared!

