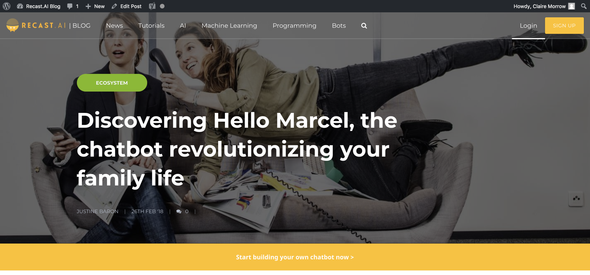

ECOSYSTEM

# Discovering Hello Marcel, the chatbot revolutionizing your family life

JUSTINE BARON | 26TH FEB '18 | 0

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Hello Marcel was founded a year ago by Sandrine Thery and Marie-Anne Decaux. We met with Sandrine Thery to understand her journey and the value of their product.

## Tell us a bit about the funding of Hello Marcel

"Hello Marcel has been a reality for a year, but we started thinking about the project eighteen months ago. I am a co-founder and in charge of product development, business development and digital marketing.

I met Marie-Anne Decaux, co-founder of the company, when working at M6, first in mergers, acquisitions and strategy, then in digital replay. The turning point that changed my professional life was a world-round trip in 2014 with my family after leaving M6. This made me want to start my own business. My relationship with Marie-Anne Decaux had developed quickly prior to my departure and we really wanted to build something together.

We both had many ideas, but nothing concrete. We then decided to focus on the things that could be improved in our daily lives, our needs, wishes and expectations. We are both struggling to live a fulfilled parent life, especially in the city, and to manage the guilt that goes with not being as available as they wished for activities with the kids.

By studying offer and demand, we discovered that there where many solutions available in the Parisian area, suggesting and organizing activities between parents and children, as well as a big demand, but nothing connecting both. Our company had just began.

## What does your product do?

Our mission is to make parents spend great moments with their families. Hello Marcel is the tool that helps, coaches and accompanies parents in a personalized way. The product is positioned as a new type of media for parents. As Hello Marcel touches a very personal topic, it was very important for both founders to create a personalized and likable interface.

## Why do you believe a chatbot is the best interface for Hello Marcel?

In March 2016, Facebook announced the opening of its API to developers, hence allowing the creation of bots. As we dove deeper into understanding the powers of chatbots, the idea of an app or a website was discarded. An app is very reactive and allows for more different features, but is very complicated to sell when you're not a major company. A bot is simple, easy to access, efficient immediately, fun and fast: everything we wanted.

## How is your bot received by the public?

"Very well! People usually start with small talk and then move on to the core of the bot. They really see the benefits: time saving, quality of the outings suggested, all combined with an addictive personality.

Our audience is very mixed, 55% of women and 45% of men. Most are between 25 and 45 years old, with more than half residing in the Parisian area. Half of our user base is subscribed to our push notifications. Overall, people seem pleased!

I believe it is because we've put such an emphasis on the bot's identity. The first thing we did was making the logo, and immediately tackled the question of "tu" or "vous", humor, tone, and it is something we are constantly doing. Our audience is moving, and we're always striving to adapt."

## How did you meet the Recast.AI team?

"We met the team in June 2016 at VivaTech, a major tech conference held in Paris. They were very helpful and quickly understood our project. The platform being already available, performing, free, supporting French, and a friendly, helpful and qualified team made our NLP provider decision very easy.

We benchmarked other solutions in the market and from a technical point of view, Recast.AI was among the best. The last choice was between Recast.AI and API.AI. We eventually went for the fun, collaborative and frenchie side of Recast.AI, as well as the proximity of the team. In Spring 2017, Recast.AI was in our product roadmap, and development started in the summer. "

## How did you build your bot?

"We first started by building our own framework and architecture. We didn't want to depend on anything public, we wanted to have full control. Then we developed our back office allowing us to manage JSONs ourselves. We didn't want to depend *our* our developer at all times. We are capable of fixing things ourselves, only calling a developer for new features. Everything is in NodeJS and we're using MongoDB for our databases."

## Any tips for someone who'd like to build his own bot?

"Using Natural Language Processing (NLP) is essential to create a true loyalty from your users. A bot without NLP isn't capable of holding up a conversation, and therefore has no added value. In the future, we want to include recommandation algorithms and others areas of AI, because it can do so much!

My two cents would be that if your bot is the core of your business, do not use a framework. It's better to internally build your own bot to be more agile and independent. Work on your bot's identity from the beginning and always keep improving it! Adopt a humble style in your bot's answers, be welcoming and walk the user through the conversation to avoid any frustration. Good luck!"

*You can discover Hello Marcel on Messenger or visit their website.*
*Many thanks to the team for their valuable insights! Share your thoughts in the comment section.*

Want to build your own conversational bot? Get started with Recast.AI !

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