

Meet Honu, the startup reimagining how companies operate

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Imad Riachi, Founder and CEO of Honu, about business creation, AI's power and the 'disagree and commit' culture.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching Honu?

I've spent over 20 years investigating and building human-centric intelligent systems. I'm driven by the belief in the symbiosis of humans and AI as an accelerator for the progress of humanity. *Honu's* creation is fueled by this belief and rooted in my experience across different sectors in the corporate world and in varied branches of AI and Systems thinking that goes all the way back to my academic years.

With Honu, our goal is to lower the barrier to business creation and make it possible for anyone with an idea to start a business at the click of a button. AI's power affords this, but only if it is made accessible in the right way. We at Honu are building a decision infrastructure that can give business owners superhuman decision making capabilities, and enables the creation and hiring of 'AI Agents' on demand - essentially placing a whole ecosystem of expertise at their fingertips.

There is not a business today that isn't trying to work out how to harness AI's power. But business owners only know to approach it with tactics in mind. We are bringing AI into the strategic level of a business³ that

reengineers how organisations can start at the click of the button and generate revenue with AI agents doing the heavy lifting.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Our quest is to build the next generation of intelligence by reimagining how companies operate. We don't see this leap coming through GenAI or throwing a trillion chips at the problem. Instead it comes from redefining the intelligence stack - and introducing a new 'cognitive' layer that acts like a nervous system for the enterprise. We dub this layer 'decision infrastructure' and it is at the core of our PaaS offering. It augments and compounds the intelligence of AI technologies and provides AI agents with the ability to understand business context and collaborate effectively, while giving business owners full control and visibility over what agents are doing.

Our approach levels up the benefit of AI within any organisation, in any industry and even whole economies! The decision infrastructure promotes autonomous collaboration and superhuman decision-making. As a result, various business areas like customer engagement, supply chain management, finance or digital marketing can become more autonomous, effective and better aligned to the business goals of the entire organisation, and also relieves the business owners from deep expertise in these areas.

No one else is taking such a holistic approach to AI in business. Fully autonomous businesses will be with us within the next couple of years and will be run on the plumbing we are providing.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

We are now emerging from stealth mode, having had a successful Proof of Concept and now planning pilots in the next few months. Our evolution has come quickly to match market readiness to our solution and growing belief that AI can take a more prominent role in decision making and operating a business. While our vision is that Honu will help leaders create a business at the click of a button, we recognise the technology needs to mature through the initial use cases - and pave the way for market readiness.

Tell us about the working culture at Honu

We're a small, remote team but work in a totally collaborative way. We are made up of passionate antidisciplinary technologists, who border on obsession and approach technology as an art form. As a group, we believe technology should be human-centric and a power for good in the world.

We are also inclusive and we highly value integrity, teamwork, and authenticity.

How are you funded?

We received a pre seed investment from Chalfen Ventures, the solo VC firm from Mike Chalfen as well as a handful of prominent business angels.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Our approach is very novel as we are redefining the 'intelligence stack',

creating a new category with our 'decision infrastructure'. It took a while for the wider ecosystem to come to some of the realisations we had early on in our journey about the limitations of current AI technologies - and the missing pieces of the puzzle needed to achieve the leap in AI to create the future we are aspiring to. The hype cycles only made this more complicated. We learned the hard way that we needed to be much more actively involved in shaping the conversations on the topics, rather than be solely focused on building our technology in isolation.

How does Honu answer an unmet need?

There is not a business today- from startup to listed company - that isn't trying to work out how to work AI into their organisations and harness its potential. But they are looking at organisational problems and inefficiencies in silos and seek out individual tools (some automation and AI-driven) to fix that. This fails to take into account the connected nature of the business - ie. changes in one area can have repercussions that extend to the entirety of the business - and, as a result, fails to provide a context for strategic reasoning across business functions. Our decision infrastructure allows AI agents to operate within an environment built on intelligence and reasoning as well as data and elevate their contribution to strategic levels.

On the other side, we also provide developers of AI agents with a toolkit that not only allows them to build agents that understand context, but we also take care of all the heavy lifting in terms of infrastructure, security data access - as well as providing them with a wide distribution and monetisation.

What's in store for the future?

We plan to run pilots in the next quarter and will be fundraising again for our seed round..

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Find a project that truly resonates with you. This will be an emotional journey. Surround yourself with bright people that you want to be working with, the journey is long with a lot of bumps along the way. Bring a diversity of people and experiences, and foster a culture of openness and of team members being able to challenge each other incl. leadership, while being able to commit. Getting the 'disagree and commit' culture right is quite hard and key to getting the right dynamic in place, especially with high achievers..

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

Early morning workout before work, and eating healthy. Otherwise it's all about laser focus and prioritisation both professionally, so that the team is focused on working on the important tasks that shift the needle the greatest degree, and personally, so that the little time I have outside of work is spent on what is also most important to me: close relationships, health, and time to disconnect to make sure I am able to have keep perspective and not lose sight of the big picture.

Keeping a healthy and clear mind is important to me as well. I have my own meditation practice, and spend little to no time on social media, TV or streaming services.

Imad Riachi is the Founder and CEO of *Honu*.
