NovaSquare, helping streamers engage with their audience on Twitch

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Mathieu Bayou, CEO & cofounder of NovaSquare about empowering creators to engage with their audience, human-to-AI interaction and the importance of listening.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Content creation is demanding: time-consuming, costly, and mentally taxing, especially solo. NovaSquare's 'ai_licia' revolutionises this space. With lifelike personality, role-playing, and engagement, it aids community management and acquisition, offering accessible, affordable support, empowering creators to thrive without burnout.

What was the catalyst for launching the product?

I have been a content creator for years, creating music, doing photography, with moderate success. In 2020, like many, I wanted to find new interests, which led me to pick up the saxophone, and I thought it would be smart to stream my learning journey on Twitch. This turned out to be much harder than I thought, facing again the same challenges that come with content creation. I spent hours streaming alone, questioning myself, and missing opportunities while I was focused on playing. That's when I called my friend and co-founder Nicolas to come along. He interacted with me, and my audience and built up retention when new

viewers came to my channel. It was a game-changer; the support I felt helped me to keep the right energy levels, new conversations were taking place in chat, and I could easily tune in and animate knowing that he would always be there.

Fast forward to 2022, I was streaming about 20 hours a week, Nicolas asked me if he could step down from my streams as it was a bit too much for one person. That's when I decided to mimic what he was doing with an AI. And ai_licia was born.

Over the weeks after the first MVP streamers from my community (music essentially), started to show interest in getting ai_licia on their channel. That's where it all started!

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

ai_licia is an AI-driven companion designed to enhance the digital content creation process, primarily for Twitch streamers. It aims to support the creator by improving engagement and interaction between them and their audience. In the long run, we aim to facilitate the content creation process, from generating engagement while live streaming to activating their community while they are offline and supporting them through the acquisition process.

All in all, ai_licia acts as a substitute for a team of moderators and community managers.

Community is a central part of our journey, as we move forward we want to bring our community with us, therefore we collaborate actively with content creators in the community, shaping the future of ai_licia. Additionally, we started creating partnerships with actors in the content

creation industry to increase our integration into the ecosystem.

In the past year, we went through different stages to reach out and find new users. Our primary source of new users is coming from our existing users, representing around 80% of the former. The last 20% comes from the content we produce; podcasts, social media, blogs and events (TwitchCons mainly, and raid train/community events we organise).

Our USP lies in ai_licia's core, her personification and customisation make an invaluable tool for community engagement, and support for the streamer. We are working with a sociologist researcher studying human-to-AI interaction, and how personification is the key to interacting with humans today.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

Just a year ago when we launched our open beta, we had a one-page dashboard with almost no customisation options. We tend to compare what the core of ai_licia was to human stages; at that time, ai_licia was an 8-year-old trying to mimic adult interaction.

A year later, we have a full platform allowing each content creator to craft ai_licia's personality from her way of talking to her character traits. Today, she has grown faster than any human and is closer to a late teenager, as we love to say.

Besides her evolution, we have now made different partnerships with already well-established companies in the streaming industry, including Pulsoid. Some of them are still being discussed at this time.

We also opened our API to let developers create integration with ai_licia, making her even more interactive in games.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

The main source of joy I am having right now is having the freedom to finally address the problems that truly affected me.

I have created many projects in the past, not many were successful I can tell you! All of them meant something to me and, even though they didn't make the cut, I have always learnt so much working on them, understanding my users, and what I did wrong or right. In founding and building a company I feel I am almost building a part of myself, or at least I let it express itself.

Which founders or businesses do you see as being the most inspirational? Which other figures in your life inspire you?

That's a tricky question; I do not have a role model figure or strong inspiration from someone. I have been inspired by less well-known people in my life, and it changes sometimes. I am more impressed by what people I know have achieved because I know what they have actually done, rather than famous figures like Musk or Jobs. The few names I have in mind would be Tomas Cerskus and Titas Sokolovas, the founding team behind Pensight, or Emmanuel Hadoux, A.I. PhD, behind Scribe.

What has been your biggest business fail?

We are both technical founders, we had little to no experience with pricing which led us to fall in probably the most common trap for founders; our first pricing. This was the biggest failure that happened. Looking at our current cost and financials, we put a price tag which would be considered a luxury product in the industry. We had a vibrant

community on Discord, active people giving feedback and all. We dropped the price model before opening the Beta, and it went full-on silence mode. This really put things in perspective; we thought okay, what have we done? Did we just kill our project? Are we done? Fortunately a few streamers reached out to us via DMs expressing their worries on the price. We went back to the drawing board, discussed alternatives, and came up with better pricing for the Beta phase.

What are the things you're really good at as a leader?

I think my strength lies in listening, either when I was the head of the platform at Unibuddy or now with our users. It took me a few years to actually be there, and other leaders like Kimeshan Naidoo or Kevin Goldsmith helped me develop this. I always have had fairly strong opinions on what we should or shouldn't do, and how we get there. However, if there is one thing I know, there are tons of things that I don't know, and others' perspectives and thoughts are actually the only way to be able to reach a greater good. It has nothing to do with role, experience, or skills; someone outside of your company can actually give you the advice you need to find your market fit. Don't belittle others and listen; everyone has something important to say, that could actually help you grow!

Which areas do you need to improve on?

I am quite terrible at gratification, including for myself; it takes me an effort to celebrate achievements. As a leader, it can't be sustainable to just move forward without taking a break to look at what we have achieved. I am putting that on myself too, and it is draining; a success lasts for a minute, just the time to focus on the next big thing.

We can find all the reasons we want to justify that behaviour, but it usually lies deeper than just behaviour to work on. I am actively working on this, as I have seen my teams suffer from that, and my mental health too.

What's in store for the future of the business?

We are on the brink of announcing a few strong strategic partnerships, one specifically which is going to open us to a brand new market. I unfortunately can't say too much yet.

In the near future, ai_licia will get new improvements; having a long-term memory, creating deeper and more meaningful connections with community members, a brand new voice sounding more human than ever, and some new integrations.

But ai_licia is just starting; Twitch and the live streaming have always been just the starting point, a place where we were confident to evolve. Tomorrow, our deeply loved ai_licia will be moving to support creators and companies to engage with their community over Discord.

What advice would you give to other founders or future founders?

I have quite a few actually but to stay short:

- Listen to your users, and if you don't have users yet, put a simple version of your product out there, get your first users and listen to them.
- Listen to your guts; if a partnership sounds fishy, don't go there, if an investor gives you weird vibes don't go there, if a decision seems

wrong, don't go there.
- It will be hard! Really hard! And for quite a long time. But hang in there, it is worth it!

And finally, a more personal question! We like to ask everyone we interview about their daily routine and the rules they live by. Is it up at 4 am for yoga, or something a little more traditional?

For years I have tried to get a routine, go for a walk at that time, etc. But it has always turned into a disaster.

At some point, I don't make it, and I get frustrated with myself. That's when I realised I have a problem with time, so I started to create ranges and give myself a break.

Waking up between 8 am to 10 am, then preparing the perfect iced latte (all year round). I haven't bought coffee outside for a while! Have an orange with that and check the news.

Heading to my desk (yup, working from home) and getting on with some work. I usually try to force myself to take a long break for lunch. Actually, my cats do that for me; it starts between 11 am to 3 pm depending on when I am hungry. Quick lunch, playing with the cats for a bit, and then going outside for a walk between 30 minutes to an hour.

Then the afternoon starts. I usually tend to have hyper-focus phases, so time just flies, and I don't realise it until it does. I force myself to stop around 9 pm to get dinner, unwind, and spend time with my partner.

The last phase of the day is the last hour or two before bed, which can be

between 11 pm to 1 am, but it fluctuates as my wake-up times do. I have never been a fan of reading; my mind tends to slip away from it, so usually, video games, movies, or series. One recommendation would be to watch "For All Mankind"!

Weekends are fairly different, but I try to stick to this principle: don't look at the time for your own schedule (obviously, meetings and all are quite different).

This approach helps me manage stress and maintain a balance between work and personal life. I think the most important part of any routine is understanding what works for you and allowing flexibility when needed.

Mathieu Bayou is the CEO & Co-Founder of _NovaSquare_.

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