

Meet Kayrros, empowering decision-makers to make the best possible choices

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Antoine Rostand, President & Co-founder of Kayrros, about satellite imagery, transitioning to a lower-carbon economy and excellence.

Temps de lecture : minute

13 June 2024

What was the catalyst for launching Kayrros?

The moment I knew we needed something like Kayrros was when I was working in my previous role as President of Schlumberger Business Consulting. We worked with some of the world's largest energy companies and I could see at the time that many of them were woefully unprepared for the energy transition and the negative impact that their operations could have on the climate, and unaware that their participation in the energy transition was necessary.

At the time, one of the reasons that energy companies wouldn't acknowledge their own emissions was because there was simply no one to hold them accountable, and no way of tracking the emissions they produced with accuracy. It was a huge blind spot. I knew that if we wanted to slow global warming and turn the tide on climate change, we urgently needed to understand exactly what volume of emissions companies were putting out, and then to hold them accountable for that.

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

Kayrros is a global environmental intelligence company, and a world leader in Earth and asset observation technology. We take massive volumes of raw satellite imagery and use AI and geanalytics to process it. We then provide the insights we derive from that raw data to companies, investors and regulators so they can reduce emissions, protect people and assets from extreme weather, and accelerate the transition to a lower-carbon economy. We have a range of products, tracking climate events like wildfires, deforestation, biomass loss, and flood risk.

I'm proud to be working side by side with some of the best minds in energy and industry. We launched in 2016, and the founding team includes Antoine Halff, Laurent El Ghaoui, Alexandre D'Aspremont and Jean-Michel Lasry. They're a formidable group, and we each have our areas of expertise, which makes for a very good working relationship.

We're headquartered in Paris, but our work is global, and we have regional hubs in London, New York, Houston, Bangalore and Singapore. Our technology is currently used by the United Nations Environment Programme's International Methane Emissions Observatory and the International Energy Agency to analyse and verify methane emissions, as well as by many private companies.

We're proud to have been recognised for our role in supporting the world's climate efforts. Last year, we were named one of TIME magazine's 100 Most Influential Companies in the world.

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

Our initial aim was to provide robust data on the state of the world's energy and emissions. We have evolved significantly since, expanding our product offering to include the monitoring of many things. We've been widely recognised for our methane work, but we also offer critical climate intelligence such as solar project completion, wildfire tracking and monitoring, carbon credit reporting and project progress, jet fuel demand analysis, LNG supply monitoring and more. Increasingly, we're being noted for our work on deforestation. We recently tracked 80% of all forest conservation projects in the Verra registry.

We're also very proud to have partnered with some fantastic companies such as BNPP and AXA. We're giving them access to critical environmental intelligence and helping to accelerate the green transition in their industries.

Tell us about the working culture at Kayrros

The basic principles we operate by are excellence, trust and autonomy. Management is only there to provide scientists and engineers the right environment to thrive and deliver, not tell them what to do. This is something I learned when I was in the French Special Forces: to give people responsibility for what they do and trust them to do it without too much interference. We've been able to build a great team and we look to empower each member to deliver by giving them space, autonomy and respect.

We take this same approach among the executives and founders in the company. Each co-founder has their own specialist area. We don't tell each other what to do or argue over decisions. We trust that each person

will make the decision that's in the best interest of the company.

How are you funded?

Since our inception, we've raised a total of €72 million. In our latest round, we raised funding from the French government, acting through French Tech Souveraineté, the European Investment Bank (EIB); NewSpace Capital; Opera Tech Ventures, the VC arm of BNP Paribas group; and through Kayrros' private investors.

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

Our biggest challenge, by far, has been convincing global institutions that we need to hold corporations and countries responsible for their climate actions, from releasing huge volumes of preventable methane emissions to lying about carbon credit projects or progress on renewable infrastructure.

Although we've been successful, there's a lot more than we want to achieve. We're very proud to say that our company was behind the data exposé that revealed the enormous scale of methane leaks in Turkmenistan, prompting a diplomatic intervention by the U.S. government. We've also worked with the Guardian to highlight the more than 1,000 huge leaks of the potent greenhouse gas methane from landfill waste dumps since 2019. We want to build on this. Ultimately, we want to be the global go-to source for all critical climate intelligence.

How does Kayrros answer an unmet need?

Before we came along, there simply wasn't any way to get a comprehensive picture of the climate. You couldn't see methane

emissions. You couldn't see carbon emissions. So naturally, it was incredibly hard to bring them down. You had to go by what companies and countries said about the emissions they were putting out. Even assuming that they could accurately calculate their carbon footprint, there was no way to know if they were telling the truth - especially when they had a financial incentive not to.

Now, thanks to our technology, we have third-party, independent, empirical, verifiable evidence of what emissions are being released in the atmosphere. We're able to give a complete view of emissions and other climate events, in near-realtime, using satellite imagery and AI. Our insights empower decision-makers to make the best possible choices.

What's in store for the future?

We've been heavily focussed on methane in the past few years. When we started, people really didn't know much about methane. Carbon dioxide was the villain. That's changed. People understand the harm that methane does. We believe we've played a part in getting that message out there and - crucially - showing that methane emissions can be prevented.

In the next year, we'd like to take this same approach with other key environmental issues, like the efficacy of carbon markets. We want to bring greater transparency to carbon projects, restore trust in the carbon market, and help to encourage the flow of capital from big companies in the Global North to the guardians of our forests in the Global South. We've already tracked many forestry conservation projects and shown the majority have the desired effect.

Of course, this is just one area. There are many issues that we'd like to take on.

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

You can't be an entrepreneur and not take risks. That's what entrepreneurs do. At Kayrros, we've taken many risks. We've often gone against the grain. But our risks have paid off, the business has grown, we've informed sound climate policy, and we're very happy with that. I would encourage founders to recognise that success necessitates taking risks, and to get back up and try again if things don't go to plan.

You also need to have a vision, a north star that guides you. You'll face many competing pressures and challenges, and that vision keeps you on the right track and motivated to succeed.

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

As a founder, I can't have a routine. I have to focus on the one important task of the moment. One rule I always follow is to stay in good shape and have quality time with my kids and friends.

You can't achieve great things, navigate stress and manage risks if you are not in great shape, mentally, physically and emotionally. « Mens sana in corpore sano » should be on every founder's mind!

Antoine Rostand is the President & Co-Founder [Kayrros](#).

