

Meet exactly.ai, changing the rules of how AI interacts with artists

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Tonia Samsonova, Founder of exactly.ai, about the power of AI, the creative market and manageable steps.

Temps de lecture : minute

26 June 2024

What was the catalyst for launching exactly.ai?

exactly.ai is a new creative design tool for professional artists who want to use the power of AI to scale and market their work. Unlike existing Gen AI platforms that aim to bypass human creativity with AI, exactly is purpose-built to allow artists to create and replicate more designs, more quickly, in their own unique style - and maintain full ownership and IP rights over everything they create.

We enable artists to build and train their own Gen AI models based on their individual artistic practice and original designs, producing brilliant work at speed without compromise or constraint. Using the platform, artists can enhance their productivity and accomplish more, faster, and hone their craft thanks to the ability to make rapid, limitless iterations on any design. We can also help them unlock new revenue streams by making it easier for artists to licence or sell their work to a wide range of organisations - from media outlets to creative agencies.

The idea behind the business stemmed from a clear need to address the

injustices artists face in the era of generative AI. It became apparent to me that a one-size-fits-all model does not serve the unique needs of artists, who have often seen their creative output unfairly exploited. My own experience with AI revealed its potential benefits but also the prohibitive costs involved. I envisioned a world where artists could use AI to their advantage, creating personal AI models that would enhance their creativity and income without the high expense. This was about changing the rules of how AI interacts with artists, making it a tool for good, enriching their work rather than diminishing it.

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

exactly is a platform where visual creators can train their personal studio assistants from as little as £40, enabling them to significantly cut down on mundane tasks and focus on creative pursuits. This not only boosts their productivity but also their potential income, as they can handle more client work. We cater to both established artists and those just starting out, helping to level the playing field in a market where visibility and reputation heavily influence pricing. Our growth is organic; we have 30,000 creators on our platform, attracted by the quality and utility of our AI tools which resonate even with those who were initially sceptical or fearful of AI technology.

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

We started *exactly* in November 2022, spending the first half of the year in closed beta. During this phase, we engaged visitors with an interactive game to demonstrate the indistinguishability of AI-generated images from original artworks, which underscored our technology's capabilities. This

set the stage for our full launch in the summer of 2023. Since then, our in-house development— a collaboration between art historians and computer vision engineers—has continually evolved, driven by a deep understanding of both artistic sensibility and technological potential.

Tell us about the working culture at exactly.ai

exactly is built on a foundation of outstanding teamwork from people across hugely diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds. With team members in multiple countries - from Kazakhstan to Canada - and only a small group in our London office, we exemplify remote collaboration, driven by mutual trust and a shared vision.

Our collective immigrant background gives us a unique perspective on opportunity and resilience - we don't take things for granted, we're self-starters and we're incredibly motivated to achieve our goals. All of this enhances our capability to innovate and execute with limited resources compared to our competitors.

I remember being at the very late stages of negotiations with a huge VC firm that ultimately declined to invest - but they said, we see hundreds of companies a week, we don't understand how you've been able to get where you are now with just £400K while your typical competitor would spend at least £4M to get to the same point. I truly believe this is because of the people I work with and the culture we share - we know that everything is possible if you really want it and are ready to work.

My team is truly exceptional.

How are you funded?

We are funded with VC capital and have been lucky to find investors who are not only excited about AI, but particularly excited by how it can solve problems in the creative industries.

Our funding journey hasn't been easy. Although I am a serial founder, this was the first time I was raising in Europe, during some of the worst conditions of the market in years. After speaking with over 400 venture capitalists and receiving numerous rejections, our perseverance paid off. We eventually closed an oversubscribed Seed round, a testament to our team's dedication and belief in exactly's mission.

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

The biggest challenge has been altering the negative perception many artists hold towards AI. Understandably, they tend to think this type of technology isn't for them - they feel like they have already been robbed by tech and they love to create art from scratch. Overcoming this involves demonstrating how the platform respects their creativity and enhances their ability to produce and profit from their art, rather than simply boosting productivity. This has turned many former sceptics into some of our biggest advocates.

How does exactly.ai answer an unmet need?

exactly resolves a fundamental inefficiency in the creative market, where demand for bespoke artistic work often exceeds an artist's capacity to deliver it at speed. By empowering artists to create and modify their designs swiftly with AI, we help them meet market demand more effectively and increase their potential earnings. This platform also

simplifies the process for both artists and those who commission art, making it less cumbersome and more fruitful for all parties involved.

Case in point - I once tried to commission an illustrator I was a huge fan of to create some images for a product I was working on. My turnaround times were tight - I needed to launch my product in four weeks but the illustrator was so busy his minimum lead time was eight weeks. It was a lose-lose situation - he was going to miss out on work because he didn't have enough hours in the day, and I was going to lose out on my designer of choice. It was so inefficient for both parties - and it's this type of issue exactly helps solve.

What's in store for the future?

Looking ahead, we envision expanding exactly.ai into a vibrant marketplace akin to Fiverr where artists can rent out their personal AI models, or a platform like Instagram where they can collaborate and showcase their creations; or a version of TikTok where they can publish their own models. This will not only foster a community of creatives but also provide them with new avenues for recognition and revenue.

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

To aspiring founders, my advice is to envision your desired outcome with absolute clarity and work backwards from there. This approach allows you to map a more direct and feasible path to your goals, turning what may seem like a daunting challenge into a series of manageable steps.

And finally, a more personal question! What's

your daily routine and the rules you're living by now?

I try to stick to a routine where I give myself a proper amount of rest. I tend to work a bit too much, so I've created a strict no-work-on-Saturdays rule! Working 14-hour-days isn't productive or sustainable long-term. I become unable to think strategically or creatively when I haven't had enough rest so I try to always ensure I make the time to stop, meditate and think.

I find it's also a good example to set for my team. I want to ensure they are performing at their best so I try to demonstrate that rest and time away from work is important and encouraged.

Tonia Samsonova is the Founder of [exactly.ai](https://www.exactly.ai)

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