

Storyby, discovering rising star authors and turning their novels into short series

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Leo Ovdienko, cofounder of Storyby, about the key role of authors in the business, the snowballing trend of bite-sized content, and the resilience that shapes the team’s spirit.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Storyby has two products that complement each other: the online novel marketplace AlphaNovel and the short series streaming app DramaShorts. At AlphaNovel, we aim to eliminate the middleman, overhaul the traditional publishing process, and deliver original content directly to readers. Readers, not publishers, should decide what novel is worthy of attention.

Thanks to the data we have from AlphaNovel, we have a pretty good understanding of the stories that really captivate readers. This understanding was the basis for launching DramaShorts. We've observed that the market for vertical short series is growing, so it was a logical step to start creating series based on our top-performing novels.

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

We launched in January 2022 with AlphaNovel ([*iOS*](#) / [*Android*](#)). For the MVP we needed the reader app and the [*writer platform*](#) – a space for authors to create and publish their work. 2,5 years later, both the writer

platform and the reader app evolved dramatically: we have an AI model that evaluates the potential of the book based on only 100 readers, the best novels receive an audio-version, our writers can easily withdraw their earnings, and soon we'll launch statistics for the authors to see how their novels perform overtime. Since launch, we have grown to a team of 60 people, 12,000 authors who trust our platform, and millions of users from all over the globe.

In April 2024, we launched our next product - the short series app DramaShorts (*iOS / Android*). The context: people already got used to vertical content, but the format is dominated by short Reels and TikToks, and people craved longer videos. We selected the top-performing novels on AlphaNovel, signed the agreement with their authors, found a production partner, and began the pre-production process for our first title. Suddenly we found ourselves in a place where we not only work with authors and readers but are also involved in casting, location scouting, and thinking about whether this dialogue between two characters is convincing enough. We have already released 3 series (5 by the end of September) and aim to release ten by the end of 2024.

After DramaShorts' launch, Storyby finally became a content ecosystem where users can engage with various forms of content: books, audio novels, immersive stories, and even ecranisations.

Tell us about the working culture at Storyby?

We value a data-driven approach in every aspect of our business. It's counterintuitive since novels and movies are considered art—how can art be data-driven? Even though we work in the content niche, the numbers are really the ones making the difference for us. Our competitive advantage is that we can find the next bestseller faster, evaluate books within the first 100 reads, and understand what score and potential they have.

You can work at Storyby without a particular interest in our content, but it's much more interesting to develop products if you're excited about content technology.

From the team perspective, we also cultivate open communication and a direct approach where each contributor can challenge and suggest new ideas and approaches.

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

Let's list not one but two challenges.

In the beginning, the challenge was to acquire authors for AlphaNovel. This business relies heavily on reputation, so it was quite hard to convince the authors to publish their work on the newly created app. Our motto is 'Authors - First', so we believe we successfully overcame this challenge by being open to communication with our authors. We shared all the product news, created an author community, and made sure they understood how our platform works.

The second challenge (that we are arguably still overcoming) is finding the product-market fit. For us, PMF involves numerous complex but intriguing questions:

- how to find the best novels for different audiences;
- how to find new novel categories that the market lacks;
- how to increase the number of exclusives;
- how to provide more value for authors;
- how AlphaNovel's audience is different from DramaShorts' audience;
- how to better adapt novels to short series.

How does Storyby answer an unmet need?

All marketplaces solve the very basic problem: letting two sides of the transaction meet directly. In our case, we understood that the books and novels market is huge but still heavily dominated by publishers.

AlphaNovel allows readers and writers to connect directly. We allow readers to decide what novel should be popular and writers to receive direct feedback from the readers.

50 years ago, publishers determined what book the reader would love tomorrow. Due to subjective opinions, publishers deprive writers of book publishing. Harry Potter might not have happened because J. K. Rowling was rejected by 12 publishers.

With DramaShorts, we cover the need for higher quality, deeper content in the vertical format. 'Bite-sized' is arguably the main word of the 2020s – you can find bite-sized everything, but the market lacks shows in this format. With DramaShorts, we fill this need.

What's in store for the future?

The content market is basically limitless in terms of development possibilities. We don't know what kind of stories people will like in a year or five. So we'll continue to look for the new genres.

Also, immersive novels with various scenarios where the reader controls the plot are for sure the future. Marketplaces have let people find the novels they want, the next step – give them the opportunity to create the story themselves.

Talking about DramaShorts, we have tens of thousands of novels available on AlphaNovel, and we just started with the short series. So, there are a lot of stories left to be shown.

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

Be strict with yourself data-wise. Always check and know your numbers, both product and financial. Get feedback from the users as soon as possible. Don't just rely on your experience — you will be wrong a lot of times. And always test hypotheses that will move the needle regarding product metrics or revenue big time.

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

When you're the founder, challenges always find you. Once you solve one, another will pop up. You have to be resilient to succeed, so discipline is key here. I do three workouts per week to keep my mind and body in shape. On Sundays, I dedicate time to be with my family. I'd like to say that I have one 'no meetings' day per week, but at the current stage of our business, it's actually impossible - things change too quickly. As a Ukraine-founded company, we focus on preserving the team's strong spirit amid the current unstable times.

Leo Ovdienko is the cofounder of *Storyby*.



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