Meet Xapien, AI-driven on-demand research on any person or company in the world, in minutes

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Dan Secretan, cofounder of Xapien about AI-powered research-on-demand, the need for transparency and a narrow focus.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching Xapien?

My co-founder Shaun and I worked together at a tech consultancy called Detica - now part of BAE Systems.

I had been developing systems to combat financial crime while Shaun was building IT systems to conduct large-scale online investigations, mainly for specialist law enforcement and national security purposes.

We felt there was a huge potential of using OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) and automated investigations to revolutionise the frustrating process of KYC (Know Your Customer) and other due diligence process, to help all organisations understand who they are doing business with.

We harnessed the beginnings of AI and emerging technologies to build a system that generates a report on any company or individual in the world in minutes, so you understand who you're doing business with.

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

Xapien uses artificial intelligence and natural language processing technologies to emulate the complex process of human-led research and report-writing. Our product is far more comprehensive than database screening checks and far faster than an analyst driven report.

It's as simple to use as Google; you simply say, "I'm interested in this organisation" and it will go off and do that research on demand. It will find and surface corporate records, PEPs (Politically Exposed Persons), Sanctions, and watchlist hits. It will also read all of the media, content, and blogs about whoever you're searching for, and it stitches all of those bits together to give you a comprehensive picture.

For many years, analysts have manually collated information from disparate sources together. It's the task of research, and it's time-consuming and difficult. The advent of natural language processing allowed us to develop technologies that could read and extract knowledge from articles designed for humans to read. The result is that our tool can now do the entire job of reading, understanding and analysing data, so that it can present it in a useful way for humans to use to make decisions.

We reach each of these sectors in different ways through digital marketing, direct sales and outbound calls, conferences, events, webinars and much more.

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

The company was started in 2018 but we really only went to market in

2022. Since then we've acquired nearly 150 customers across 15 countries.

Typically, our clients are Risk & Compliance professionals who want to gain a genuine understanding of their third parties. This spans from Ivy League Universities and charities who need to understand their donors and partners, to law firms and financial services institutions looking for greater insight into their clients, investors, or investments.

Our team has also grown massively. We started with just Shaun and I and then some brilliant scientists and technical engineers. Now we have a full team of nearly 60 people which covers product, engineering, research, ops, customer success, marketing and sales - everything you need to grow a business.

Tell us about the working culture at Xapien?

Culture is really important to us at Xapien. We underwent an exercise at the beginning of this year to set out our nine core principles that define how we do things when we're at our best.

I won't list them all. You can find them on our website culture page, but ones that I'm particularly passionate about are transparent, always decent and better together.

Our business is creating transparency in business relationships; so internally we are 'default share', even when it feels uncomfortable. This creates trust, and greater context makes for better decision making.

We are polite, thankful, and straightforward. Everyone is down-to-earth, informal and approachable. We challenge candidly and kindly, disagree well, always assume positive intent, and thrive on feedback.

We care about each other and go out of our way to help

colleagues succeed. We have each other's backs. We value relationships and take a genuine interest. Heroes need not apply.

How are you funded?

We're privately funded, originally through Angel Investors and in June 2024 we closed a Series A funding round of $10M led by YFM Equity Partners.

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

Being a deep-tech company you won't be surprised to hear that one of the biggest challenges was a technical one; to do research on the internet, you need to be able to differentiate between people of the same name. Without this concept of disambiguation, the system would be filled with false positives.

Our CEO's name is a great example. If you want to find information about our Chris Green, you can't just Google his name - you will get millions of results. So you need to refine your search and sift through results which aren't about your Chris Green. This is a process called entity resolution is intuitive (although complex) for humans and is really hard to teach a machine that loves just comparing exact text strings.

This is even harder when trying to do it over the world's languages and scripts, and working with AKAs and nicknames.

How does Xapien answer an unmet need?

Our clients across all sectors are not just asking, "Can we be in business with this third party?". They're asking, "should we?".

This is a nuanced decision and includes ethical and ESG related questions in their onboarding processes. It requires deep due diligence which takes time and money, which if done manually leads to slow onboarding experience.

Xapien provides onboarding teams with a super-power, enabling them to perform deep due diligence on all their counterparts in minutes, not days.

Philanthropic institutions use Xapien to do donor due diligence to protect their reputation. Law Firms use us for regulatory and reputation checks on their customers which involves Ultimate Beneficial Ownership (UBO) and other regulated diligence. We also serve large corporations. Commercial organisations onboard suppliers, and they really want to know who the supplier is, what their reputation.

What's in store for the future?

From a product perspective we want to design a full monitoring solution that will enable our customers to reach the holy grail of "perpetual KYC". Currently monitoring solutions are plagued by false positives which cost companies billions to review and risks missing the true positives. They are also very narrow in scope, non-customisable and only monitor against certain lists or databases.

Using underlying knowledge graph technology, Xapien will monitor the wealth of information from the entire internet and alert customers only on what is new, relevant and useful to them.

In the near future, we are excited to announce that we are working with a leading, global law firm - Pinsent Masons - to develop the world's first large language AI tool for Anti-Money Laundering compliance. This marks a watershed moment for the global AML compliance industry. The solution is forecast to reduce average onboarding times from weeks to hours and

reduce risk exposure by better deploying critical human-led compliance resources. Using AI to research and analyse data will allow analysts to swiftly clear low-risk clients, reallocating resources to the more complex task of high-risk client selection.

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

The piece of advice I was given early on is to focus uncomfortably narrowly. For Xapien, we considered that every company in the world needs to know who they're doing business with. While that's true, to be successful, we needed to be very specific in one narrow market. After evaluating many markets, we decided to target UK universities in donor due diligence. Some people thought we were crazy, saying there was no money in charities and universities, and that it wouldn't be a viable business.

But this narrow focus allowed us to tailor our approach precisely. We could do search engine optimisation, attend the right conferences, write relevant blogs and articles, and target the exact organisations that would buy from us. We could align our entire product to that specific use case. It was uncomfortably narrow, but it paid off. We managed to secure funding because we demonstrated a viable business with paying customers who were willing to advocate for our product. This funding then allowed us to expand into other markets.

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

One of the items on my daily routine involves reminding myself to step back and enjoy the journey we are on. Starting a company is risky, there

are many challenges every day which are emotionally draining and you question whether it was the right decision many times per day. But I will look back on this time in a few years and wish I was back here right now, doing exactly this.

One of my rules is to always work with brilliant, supportive people... the rest will sort itself out.

Dan Secretan is the cofounder of _Xapien_.

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