

Meet Jena, everything a solopreneur needs in one place

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Jean-Michel Chalayer, founder of Jena about recent investment, backing solopreneurs and the importance of flex culture!

Temps de lecture : minute

12 April 2024

What was the catalyst for launching JENA?

Picture this: it's 11 PM, you're drowning in client messages, anxious you forgot to reply. Money's slipping through your fingers as you juggle countless apps - WhatsApp, Insta, Facebook, Tiktok, Emails... For too many solopreneurs, this is just another Tuesday.

I saw it myself working with hundreds of beauty pros at LeSalon. Nail techs spending all their free time playing "WhatsApp tag" instead of living their lives. It broke my heart.

Financial empowerment is my passion. Has been since my social work days in Argentina. It's what drove me to start LeSalon in the first place - to help solopreneurs succeed.

So when COVID hit and the number of solopreneurs skyrocketed, the problem was amplified tenfold. That's when the lightbulb went off - there had to be a better way!

We built an MVP, got traction real fast, and boom - JENA was born! She's not just an app; she's the ultimate sidekick for solopreneurs ready to take control of their time, their income, and their sanity.

With JENA in their corner, solopreneurs can finally say goodbye to the admin nightmare and hello to the dream of running their business on their own terms.

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

Think of JENA as the ultimate sidekick for solo business owners. She uses her superpower (or, you know, lines of code) to take care of all your business admin.

Website? Check. Bookings? Check. Payments? Check. It's like having a tiny but mighty personal assistant in your pocket.

Just ask Hannah, one of our superstar nail tech. She went from DM overload, missing out on 30% revenue to fully booked and turning away clients!

Our initial target audience are solopreneurs in the beauty and wellness. It's our world and where we have most users.

But any solo service provider is JENA's jam. Nail techs, hair stylists, coaches – if you're flying solo, she's got you.

We reach our customers through the power of social media (Instagram and TikTok) and good old-fashioned word of mouth. Plus killer content collabs with industry queens like my podcast co-host Suzanne Clayton and the wonderful Jo Tompkins.

Together, we're on a mission to empower solo business owners everywhere to achieve their dreams.

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

JENA's had a major glow-up since her MVP days in 2023. At first, she was a simple booking and basic website tool. But as our users put her through her paces, we saw her potential for so much more.

Since then, JENA has been on a transformative journey. One major moment came when we introduced "Consultation Forms". Users collected info during the appointment on pen and paper... Now they save 4 hours a week!

JENA is becoming a full-fledged powerhouse, packed with features that make running a solo business a breeze. And the best part? Every week, we're adding new superpowers to JENA straight from our user feedback.

Tell us about the working culture at JENA?

At JENA, our work culture is built on four pillars: customer love, flex culture, A-game always and trust.

We're customer-obsessed. Frameworks like Jobs to be Done / Timeline Switching Interviews are our bible. Every feature, every piece of content comes straight from our users' brains.

But to truly serve your customers, you gotta be you. That's where our flex culture comes in. No 9-to-5 grind. No face-time fakery. We're full remote!

With this flex culture, we punch above our weight. We may be a small startup, but we tap into global top talent that we couldn't afford full-time. Excellence is the name of the game.

Of course, none of this would be possible without trust. We trust our team

to put customers first, deliver on time and make smart decisions. In return, JENA's got their back.

So, what does this all look like in practice? From insights and ideas to virtual high-fives and GIF parties, our Slack's always popping with passion.

But most importantly, a team of passionate, curious, and creative individuals working towards a common goal: empowering solopreneurs.

We're not just building an app. We're building a solopreneur revolution.

How are you funded?

Exciting news: *JENA just closed a £1.2M funding round!* Our investors aren't just money; they're our strategic partners and our biggest advocates.

Many of them are seasoned investors who backed our previous startup, LeSalon, so they know we're in it to win it, and I'm grateful for their renewed trust.

And the new investors? They're phenomenal founders and visionary investors with a keen eye for game-changing ideas.

We've been intentional to surround ourselves with heavy-hitter who bring the value. Their expertise, guidance, and unwavering belief in our mission is a game-changer as we scale JENA to new heights.

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

With startups, challenges are part of the journey. JENA is no exception. For us it was rebuilding our platform in record time.

Our MVP was scrappy, and to scale properly, we needed a full reboot. The catch? We were mid-funding with a waitlist that kept growing!

Enter Nabil, our tech wizard. He whipped up our new platform in just a few months. His secret? Mad skills and sheer grit!

But let's be honest - this isn't our first dance. Our previous startup experience was the advantage we needed. If we were just starting out, there's no chance we could've managed this high-pressure situation. But we've been around the block, and that hard-won wisdom saw us through.

Thanks to Nabil's efforts, we launched JENA in record time: slick, smooth, intuitive, and ready to scale with our growing community of solopreneurs.

The lesson? Everything takes twice as long as planned. But with the right team and a shared vision, there's no obstacle we can't overcome.

How does JENA answer an unmet need?

When COVID hit, the number of solopreneurs exploded. We're talking 5M in the UK, with 400k+ in personal care alone.

But their tools were stuck in the dark ages. Too clunky for solo businesses, or too scattered to handle. Pen and paper ended up being the tool of choice (yikes).

JENA's here to bring solo businesses into the 21st century. No more juggling a million apps or drowning in paperwork - all your tools, one place. Run your empire from your phone!

What's in store for the future?

The future's looking brighter than a fresh gel mani!

We've got a jam-packed roadmap of exciting features in the works. Like two-way calendar sync and the ability to sell products directly through the app. We want JENA to be the only tool you need.

We're dreaming up features that'll make your head spin - in a good way. Like an AI assistant that books appointments for you while you sleep. Or a world domination plan - ahem, I mean, global expansion strategy.

But more seriously, we're on a mission to make solopreneurship sexy again. One business owner at a time.

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

If you're dreaming of starting your own business, my advice is simple: just do it!

Don't wait for the perfect moment. There's no "good time." Whether straight full-time or side-hustle, take action. No other job will prepare you for founder life like living it.

But starting's just the start. To truly succeed, you and your customers need to become one. Eat, sleep, breathe their problems. That's how you build something they can't live without.

And it's not about blindly following every feature request, but rather digging deep to uncover the insights that will guide your product development.

Last but not least, have a support network. Entrepreneurship's lonely. You don't have to be alone. Find your tribe of founders that'll inspire and support you when things get tough - and they will!

Since I've found my founders fam, it's been a game-changer. I couldn't do it without them.

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

Routines are my thing! Keeps me sane in this crazy founder life.

My day starts with a tiny alarm clock - and by that, I mean my daughter. After quality family time and nursery drop-off, I run to the gym (literally) for an hour workout. Gotta keep my body healthy to keep my mind sharp.

By 10am, it's time to "Eat That Frog" - i.e. tackle my top priority. I try to knock out 1-3 major tasks each day. Unless there's a fire to put out, then all bets are off.

In between, I will be connecting with customers in onboarding calls - keeps them top of mind, and creating content for socials.

As the day winds down, I catch up with my main man, Nabil, to share progress and learning, and strategise for the future.

In the evening, I (try to) ditch the devices and focus on what matters most - family. Dinner, bedtime, snuggles. After that, a little meditation, then it's lights out early. Because a well-rested founder is a happy (and productive) founder!

Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule, but I try my best to stick to this schedule: deep work, customer love, and owning my health. So if you don't hear back from me right away, don't take it personally - I'm just in the zone.

Jean-Michel Chalayer is the founder of *Jena*.

Article by Jean-Michel Chalayer