

**Episode 264****Nikos Patsis**

Founder & CEO, DisruptIQ

AI Innovation & Startup Growth with Nikos Patsis

In this episode of the [DevReady Podcast](#), [Anthony Sapountziss](#) speaks with [Nikos Patsis](#), Founder and CEO of [DisruptIQ](#), about his journey from engineering to AI entrepreneurship and building global technology ventures. Nikos shares insights from his studies at Harvard and his experience in financial innovation before founding [VoiceWeb](#), one of the early pioneers in conversational AI. He discusses how he scaled his companies across 30+ countries, navigated investor challenges, and built adaptable teams. This conversation explores real-world lessons in AI innovation, startup funding, leadership, and sustainable business growth.

Nikos began his career studying engineering at the National Technical University of Athens and later specialised in financial engineering at Harvard University. His research on exotic options pricing led to a role at a private equity fund in New York, where he applied his models to real-world investments. After gaining international experience in Bermuda's financial sector, he returned to Greece to launch his ventures, including a successful mobile value-added services company across Central America. Eventually, his passion for technology and innovation led him to found VoiceWeb, a company that would reshape the future of customer service through AI.

Founded in the early 2000s, VoiceWeb was one of the first companies to automate customer care using voice and chatbot technologies. The company worked with major banks and telecoms, transforming call centres through voice recognition long before AI became mainstream. Nikos reflects on the challenges of educating a sceptical market and how perceptions of automation have evolved. He also emphasises the need for governments and businesses to prepare for AI's societal impact as the technology continues to accelerate globally.

VoiceWeb's commitment to local market understanding helped it expand into over 30 countries across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, partnering with industry giants like Vodafone, Raiffeisen Bank, and MTN. Nikos explains how cultural sensitivity and adaptability allowed them to outperform larger competitors like Google and IBM. He also shares lessons from securing Series A funding, warning founders about the "time tax" that comes with institutional investors and the need to choose backers who offer strategic support rather than just capital.

Nikos distinguishes between passive investors and operational VCs: those who bring value through experience, networks, and practical guidance. He stresses that scaling from 0-1 is very different from scaling from 1-3, and operational expertise can make or break a company's growth. As an investor himself, Nikos looks for teams who build businesses, not just products. He believes that successful startups combine strong distribution, cultural intelligence, and the ability to adapt quickly to changing markets.

To close, Nikos offers actionable advice for founders navigating today's competitive talent market. He advocates hiring based on results rather than résumés, setting clear performance milestones, and making fast decisions when hires do not work out. Loyalty, he warns, cannot replace competence. Poor hiring decisions can weaken culture, reduce morale, and hinder scalability. For Nikos, the foundations of long-term success are decisive leadership, outcome-driven teams, and a clear focus on business results.

Topics Covered

- From Engineering to Financial Innovation
- Early Career in Private Equity and Global Finance
- Founding VoiceWeb: Early Conversational AI Pioneer
- Educating the Market on AI Adoption
- Scaling VoiceWeb Across 30+ Countries
- Startup Funding and Investor Challenges
- Choosing the Right Investors for Growth
- Building Businesses, Not Just Products
- Leadership, Hiring, and Sustainable Growth

Important Time Stamps

- From Athens to Harvard: The Engineer Who Mastered Financial Innovation (0:07 – 4:31)
- "We Were Too Early": Building Conversational AI Before It Was Cool (4:32 – 8:26)
- From Greece's Crisis to Global Success: How VoiceWeb Expanded to 30+ Countries (8:27 – 15:07)
- The "Time Tax" of Funding: What Founders Aren't Told About Investors (15:08 – 22:00)
- The Investor's Perspective: What Founders Should Really Look For in a VC (22:02 – 28:52)
- How a Small Startup Beat Google by Understanding Local Markets (28:53 – 32:54)
- Nikos Patsis: The Biggest Hiring Mistakes Startups Keep Making (32:55 – 36:20)

Useful Links

[Nikos Patsis | LinkedIn](#)[DisruptIQ | LinkedIn](#)[Voiceweb | LinkedIn](#)

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