How innovation is transforming the investor experience

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Vincent Joly: I am Vincent Joly and I have been the Head of the IT department at Ardian for the past 9 years. I have been an IT professional for 20 years, and I am now supervising the ARC (Aka Trustview) project for Ardian.

Michaël Brouard: I am Michaël Brouard. I joined Ardian about 6 months ago, and I was the project manager of the ARC Project (Aka Trustview) when I was working with McKinsey. I worked in McKinsey for 4 years, and prior to that I was a tech entrepreneur.

VJ: So Trustview – and the background of Trustview – is all about investor relations, and the idea is that after years of thinking about creating an investor portal, Ardian's Founder and President, Dominique Senequier made the decision in 2019 to actually build this portal, and create it by leveraging our expertise and focusing it on our clients. Dominique Senequier had a strong vision of what we have to do for our clients; clearly, our clients are our top priority, and we need to make their life easier and give them the best service.

The idea is also that if we want to grow the number of clients we have, and as our client base is growing – and growing fast – we have to put in place a tool to help our teams deal more effectively with their operations. So creating this portal was a lever to industrialize our operations.

MR: So at the end of 2019, we started with a 2-month scoping and designing phase where we basically did a lot of ideation and emerged with 6 building blocks to define a target vision of what the portal would be. Then, in early 2020, we started the actual building, and in July 2020, we launched the first minimum viable product (MVP).

Chapter 1 - **TAILOR-MADE FOR INVESTORS**

MR: What we tried to do was focus on re-mapping the pain points of our investors throughout their journey and their relationship with Ardian, so we focused just on those. The first one was the onboarding; we had a very painful process that was very paper-based and would take two weeks minimum to get through, with a lot of complex forms for the investor to fill in. We took a big bet that this process could be fully digitalized, and now we've achieved that. So now we have a fully online digital platform that allows investors to subscribe within 10 minutes, and that is really focused on their experience.

The second thing we worked on was to bring them more value in their reporting – before, of course, there was traditional paper-based reporting – but now with the digital form they have a much more dynamic experience. So we've provided an online dashboard that gives them all their financial reporting, which they can filter, and it's all dynamic. They can export them to Excel so that they can use them directly in their own internal reports, whereas before, they basically had to manually copy every number from the reports.

And the third aspect we worked on was the investor opportunity model. A lot of investors wanted more early-stage information about upcoming funds, so we took the opportunity when building this platform to also share a lot of content and a lot of information around the upcoming fundraising opportunities for our LPs. Now, most of the new funds that are fundraising are now on this new platform.

Chapter 2 - BUSINESS, IT, LEGAL CHALLENGES

VJ: We definitely had some challenges to overcome, starting with the IT side, where we made the decision to build this new investor portal as a brand-new full cloud platform, and that's something very new for us.

We were using Software-as-a-Service tools for this specific mission, so the decision to put in place a full cloud platform was something new; something we had to adapt to with the teams. I think now that it was a very good decision, and we've got the risk management part right, which was one of the key things. Building a cloud platform is OK, as long as you build it safe and secure by design. So that was one of the main challenges we faced from the technology perspective.

MR: One of the main challenges on the business side was that this was probably the first project to be so transversal, and we had to reach out to so many different stakeholders within a traditional organization where business lines work in a kind of silo mode. So the idea was to shape a governance structure and good relationships with all those stakeholders so that we could all push through the same efforts in harmony. Let me give you an example. It's not just about building a portal; it's also about how you align the organization and internal processes to support this new way of digital delivery. Take onboarding: paper-based onboarding is quite different from when you're actually digitalizing it, and the way we're doing it now is that we're asking LPs just the right number of questions, and then we take their answers to generate an automated subscription agreement.

So we had to work very closely with Legal to reinvent the process while, of course, maintaining a very high level of legal security and coverage for Ardian. But also to reinvent the way we create the subscription agreement, so in effect we did a bit of legal tech work around it, over and above building the portal.

VJ: The risk of putting in place an investor portal was something we worked on for years. When you use a tool that's not your tool, you're not really exposed to the risks, and that was the case when we were using Intralinks. Now we are using our own platforms, and we are exposing our LPs' confidential information over the Internet, so we have to secure it, because we consider our clients - again - as our top priority. We cannot put in place something that is not well designed and not secure by design where there is a risk of a hacker breaking in and stealing our LPs' information; that's something that cannot happen, something we don't want at all.

So the way we designed it with Michaël and the team was to embed security and risk management by design, and to discuss everything prior to development, because the more we discuss these issues before development, the more secure the portal will be.

So it was complex at the beginning, because there was a strong push from Top Management to deliver at a very, very quick pace, but I think we found the right pace and the right balance between the need to deliver fast and the requirement to deliver safe.

Chapter 3 - **ENHANCED HUMAN INTERACTION**

MR: Digital is everywhere, and it's growing everywhere, so if Ardian doesn't leverage the new technologies that can – and probably will – become a critical part of its way of operating its business in the future, then some competitor will, and then we'll ultimately fall behind. So it's strategically important that Ardian keeps experimenting and stepping up its game to always stay ahead of the curve and always master and leverage this technology ahead of the others so that it remains the leader it is today.

Design and user experience were central to the portal building philosophy... so it was a bit the Northern star. Everything we tried to build first and prioritize for the portal were things that we'd validated with our LPs as important for them. So it was a customer-oriented type of design principle; that we shouldn't build it from our point of view, but build it from our clients' point of view. To do that, we held a lot of interviews and feedback sessions with our LPs to constantly challenge what we were building and how we could better enhance it, and that's something critical. Then, that being said, we also put the emphasis on the fact that this portal is not a way of replacing human interaction, but rather a way to enhance and supplement it; enhancing the relationship by using the portal to handle a large part of the transactional relationship that doesn't contribute to much value, whereas the human interaction will remain when there's trust and important business decisions to be made, so that our LPs can actually just focus on that part, and not be frustrated about the other, more transactional interactions.

VJ: Our LPs are very happy with the portal. During the project, we were in touch with many of our clients, and the more we delivered, the happier they were. Our investor relations team is very close to our clients and gets regular feedback from them via e-mail and over the phone, and they are very, very happy. One said that Ardian is now setting the tone. We are the first in the world to put in place some of these new functionalities, including projected cashflows., or digital onboarding which is something very new and very appreciated by our LPs. So all the feedback we've had has been very positive.

In addition to that, we've put in place online trackers within the portal and within the pages to learn what our clients do when they're connected to the portal; which features are used or not, and the idea is to continue improving what works well and to enhance or redesign anything that doesn't work so well.

As Michaël mentioned, the idea with digital is not to replace humans, but technology helps us with data and we have the feedback from the LPs.

Chapter 4 - **TRUSTVIEW: THE NEW STANDARD**

MR: The way we actually got ahead of the competition is regarding our onboarding process, which is kind of unique, very customer-oriented, very streamlined, and it has been achieved by a mix of legal engineering and technical engineering. We've not witnessed anything comparable in the market so far, and actually our LPs told us so. And the second thing is that we intend to leverage an internal data system that will allow us to push a deeper level of data granularity as we go, so the data we provide our LPs with can help them in their own analysis and in their own industrialization processes.

If we keep on exploring this orientation, we believe that we'll always maintain a good distance from our competitors.

VJ: What we've done is to industrialize across all the front office and the fund finance teams. Within Ardian, we've industrialized the production of projected cash flows, and with this industrialization, we've been able to push the data within the LP portal, so it's no longer necessary to call the investor relations team to get projected cashflow data: you go directly to your portal and there you have it... and you can refresh it with our latest data.

So it's something we've put in place that was really appreciated by our clients before the portal. Now that it's inside the portal, it's easier for them, so it's fantastic.

MR: Three key factors that drove the success of this project. The first one - obviously – was the strong support from Top Management and Dominique Senequier herself, who oversaw the project advancement and was key in steering and making sure that some blockers were removed along the way.

I think the second key success factor was around the collaboration between IT and Business, where both really went the extra mile in this specific project, and worked together much more collaboratively with a very strong involvement from Business, which now has a better understanding of what digital is about and what creating a digital product is about.

The third thing is that since we were launching something that was new, we had to invent a lot of things along the way, and we also had to take into account some of the needs of our LPs that might be changing over time or that we might discover over time, we adopted an agile way of working that was particularly suited to this project.

VJ: To deliver such a huge project embedding Business, IT and LPs with no support from your Top Management, if the Top Management isn't there for you – not only once a month, but also when we need it – would be a nightmare. Our Top Management was there, and as Michaël mentioned, Dominique was there when we needed her to be, and that's very important. Then we also had support from the other top managers, and that creates something: it creates a cohesion, it creates the framework that ultimately delivers success. It allows, it pushes and it forces collaboration, and I think that collaboration is the key word.

We had a target, we had objectives coming from Dominique and the Top Management and we had a timeline to respect, and when your objectives are clear and when you have the support of your Top Management, then everything goes right.

MR: So in the pipeline we have a huge 'backlog' -- [which is] agile terminology to describe what is left to be done. We have some obvious features we need to deliver: the first one is the projected cash flows for Ardian's Customized Solutions. We also need to expand the onboarding process to private individuals, which is currently not available, and then we plan a lot of improvements around the user experience of the platform. And then we'll probably turn on to more advanced features, such as a simulation tool or some data sharing type of API, and those are more exploratory topics that we'll discuss with our LPs and structure ahead of time, so that we can keep using this project to innovate and bring more value to our LPs.