

ASA Ventures: Not Just Another Venture Capital Company.

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Editor

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A hybrid VC model which combines aspects of a venture capital, private equity, accelerator, and an incubator.

Traditional venture capital involves providing funding to early stage startups. However, Funding is not the only ingredient to ensure a startup's success. **Startups need transformational venture capital, operational partnership, and a holistic business ecosystem to develop into a successful venture.**

Please tell us a little bit about yourself? And what you did prior to launching your own venture capital company?



I am from Portugal and was originally a software engineer. **I worked with Microsoft for a short period of time and switched lanes to entrepreneurship soon after that.** I've always been interested in jump-starting ideas and turning them into reality, especially those that will help change the way we do things for the better.

I've always wanted to empower the people whose ideas can make things easier for everyone in the long run.

Back then small businesses were already starting to understand the importance of having a website, **but web development prices were astronomical.** We made web development and hosting accessible and affordable to a good number of entrepreneurs, **eventually becoming the third largest web development company in Portugal in terms of sales volume, and made a fruitful exit.**

Which one entrepreneur has inspired you?

How did the idea to come up as a venture capital happen?

I started a web development company in Lisbon in the early days of the Internet some time in 2003. Web development and software engineering were some of the things I knew inside out so it was natural for me to open a company that offers services along those lines.

Since then I started investing in other startups that had a clear vision of adding value by providing what the market needs.

As an investor, I learned that sometimes, while entrepreneurs can be really good at the core services their companies offer, they need a hand in other aspects of the business. I understood that in order to create a positive impact in the market and the rest of the ecosystem, I need to offer something more, something that an entrepreneur really needs.

ASA Ventures is a product of understanding that to achieve success as an entrepreneur, it's not just about monetary capital. **Sometimes startups are able to rake in funds but can severely mismanage many other aspects of the business.** This is where ASA Ventures steps in.

Tell our readers about 'ASA ventures'?

ASA Ventures is a global venture capital 2.0 that is sector and stage agnostic. We are based in Dubai, **UAE with offices in 6 other countries in Europe and Africa.**

Whenever we hear 2.0, we understand that it is a better, much-improved version of the first iteration, **so our model is a hybrid venture capital model which combines aspects of a venture and incubator.** Through the years, we've built internal processes and established in-house synergies to ensure exponentiated growth for any startup under our umbrella.



Currently, we have **30 startups in our portfolio**, from contact center services to modest fashion. We recognize that every startup has varied needs that require fulfillment in order to become successful in the market. Again, it's not always just about funding, so on top of that we provide operational support.

Unlike the traditional venture capital model, ASA Ventures is **hardwired to give an entrepreneur all the tools it needs to become successful**, may it be corporate strategy and mentoring, customer happiness, financial structuring, technology, strategic marketing and PR, or international networking.

What are the 3 main criteria you consider when investing in an early stage company as a venture capital and why?

It's always about the idea, the team, and the ensuing social impact should we decide to rev it up.

When we talk about ideas, it can be a simple solution to an everyday problem or a revolutionary way to treat a disease, but a startup should have a solid business plan and the numbers must make sense.

It also goes without saying that it should be an answer to an already existing problem, because **when an entrepreneur loses sight of that, then everything becomes pointless.** Like any investor, we need to understand what we are investing in. It's also

important to see who we are joining hands with. **A business relationship is built on trust and knowing who we will be working closely with is crucial.**



ASA Ventures is a hybrid venture capital firm established in 2003 in Portugal and is currently headquartered in UAE.

Lastly, it's essential to see what kind of legacy we will leave in this world. **Venture capital in my opinion has always been about planting the seeds of tomorrow today**, so we want to work with startups that will positively impact the future.

Are there specific strategic decisions or measures you've taken to ensure high customer satisfaction? Also, do you have a business tool or resource?

ASA Ventures, along with its partners, have always been aligned when it comes to **holding customer happiness as a priority**. One of our startups, Callix, is solely dedicated to this agenda. Callix is a customer happiness solutions provider, **ensuring that every call is answered at any time of the day.**

The service relieves the startup founder or SME business owner the burden of taking care of their phone calls and lets them concentrate on other aspects of the business. It's a tricky business, trying to close new deals while your phones are ringing off the hook. **Even with your mobile phone glued to your hand, you could still miss important calls.**



I know, because I've been there myself. Another tool that we use to make strategic decisions in Pulse. It's an **AI company executive we created in-house, and that has been collecting data for the last 15 years, learning what we need to make decisions for the companies.** It allows me see the status of every startup, every project, every campaign all in one interface. Because of AI, it detects redundancies in our processes and raises red flags to ensure that our companies are running at peak levels. **It's like we have our own JARVIS.** 😊

What is your company's work culture like? What according to you is the best way to keep employees motivated?



The best way to keep them motivated is to make them feel that they belong, no matter which department they are in. We try to engage everyone in monthly activities and sporting events, and of course we give recognition to top performers on a monthly basis as well.

Most of our team members are expats and are away from their own families so we try to keep a family atmosphere in the office where each one can feel they are not alone.

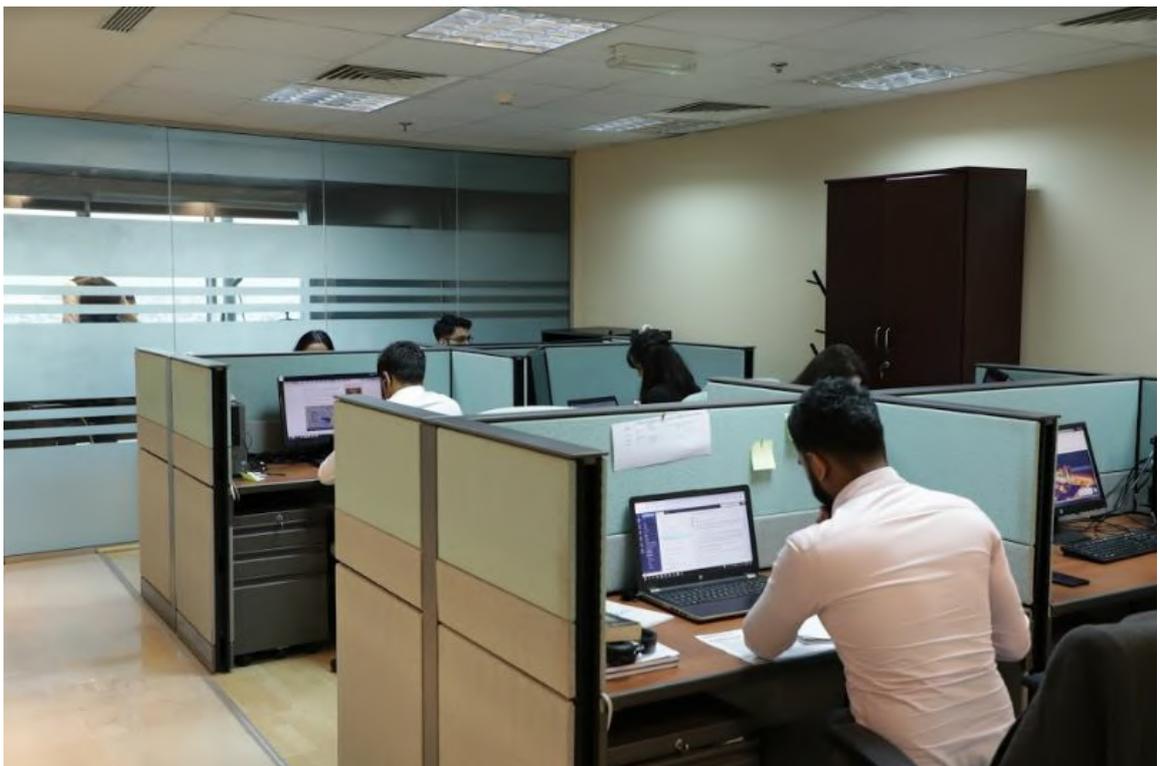
Also, one rule that we've always kept to is that Fridays are sacred here in the Dubai headquarters. I personally believe that everyone needs to recharge, so no phone calls on Fridays, no urgent assignments.

What are the hottest Tech market segments you are currently looking at as a venture capital?

In your view, what is the value a start-up accelerator can add and why?

Startup accelerators have long-term expertise so they can provide some perspective that a founder might not have considered as he is building his business. **Mentoring is an important part of the process, and accelerators can provide that readily.**

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What do you do in your free time?

I spend time with my family, exploring something new in the city or having some “No Gadgets” time with my kids. We’d often play board games, so we can develop some skills while having fun.

Walk us through your typical work day looks like?

First thing I do is check Pulse to have a general view of how the companies are doing. Once I get to the office, I do a quick roundup with the core team. On a slow day, we

hold 2 to 3 meetings investors, and partners, whether here in Dubai or over the phone and maybe 1 or 2 startup meetings. On a busy day, we listen to 4 to 5 pitches.

Many venture capital 's have a lot to offer to start-ups in addition to capital. How do you work with the companies in which you invest?

We become operational partners that have more skin in the game because we are involved in the day-to-day activities. **This also gives us a certain degree of responsibility for their success by default.**

We provide them whatever they require to become successful through the in-house synergies we've established. Startups are provided complimentary services from other ASA Ventures startups should they need it.

What are your immediate goals and what is the long-term vision that drives this?

Apart from international expansion, one of our immediate goals is to bring our startup program to the public. **We are in the process of selecting 5 startups to undergo a 3-month program during which we will pour in all our resources into ensuring that they become successful.** This is part of our long-term goal to contribute to the UAE startup ecosystem.





Share with us a few productivity hacks which have helped you in your journey as a CEO. Work smart!

I guess that's the only productivity hack that you need. Determine what should be done urgently and just do it.

What one advice would you give to budding entrepreneurs?

I always say that **setting your eyes on the dream is important**, but it is also important to pay attention and **give all you've got to take the first step**.

You see a staircase and you will want to get to the top of it, but you have to put your foot on the first step in order for you to get there. A lot of ideas get binned because nothing was done to realize it. Just have the courage to start somewhere.