Loic Le Meur
Seesmic and LeWeb

Loic Le Meur is the founder and CEO of Seesmic, a suite of social media management and collaboration tools. With his wife, Le Meur also founded LeWeb, the number-one tech event in Europe. LeWeb brings 3,000 entrepreneurs together every year.

Prior to Seesmic and LeWeb, Le Meur started four other businesses. The first one, founded in 1996, was B2L, one of the first web agencies in France. It was sold to BBDO in 1999. In 1997, he founded RapidSite, a shared hosting company that he sold to France Telecom in 1999. In 2000, he founded Tekora, a packaged website solution. In 2003, he founded Ublog, a weblogs platform that was acquired by Six Apart in 2004.

Pedro Santos: You founded several companies in France prior to moving to the US—all of them doing different things. You also sold a few. Can you talk briefly about each one of them and what lessons that you learned from them?

Loic Le Meur: The first one I created on the campus of the business school I graduated from. That company is B2L. [It] was a digital web agency—one of the very first ones in France. It was founded in 1996 and we were basically creating web sites. We created also one of the first advertising banners in France as well. That company I created without any funding. I didn’t know what a business angel was. It grew from zero to one hundred people. It was breakeven, profitable, one of the top three agencies in France in a few years.
Self-funded, I launched this with the remainder of my student loan. I sold it to an ad company, BBDO, in 1999. That was the first one.

B2L was focusing on large brands—so Chanel, Peugeot or Twentieth Century Fox, all large companies and were pretty expensive.

I had a lot of demand from small businesses, so I thought I should address those in a separate company. In ’97 I launched a company called RapidSite. Then my wife joined in and managed it with from the beginning. That was web hosting for small businesses. We were the first to introduce shared web hosting in France. RapidSite grew from zero to twenty thousand customers in a few months and became very successful, also with no funding. It was breakeven when we sold it to France Telecom at the end of ’99.

Those were my two first experiences. Then I started investing in many start-ups. Frankly, I think around fifteen start-ups. Remember the context: it was the 2000 bubble. It was before the bubble.

Santos: Yes.

Le Meur: So, that wasn’t the best choice, let’s say, but I learned the hard way that being a business angel or being an investor is not as easy as it might seem because I invested in a lot of companies that disappeared. But from let’s say 2000 to 2004, I also invested in LinkedIn. It wasn’t a big deal, because that’s pretty much what investors do.

You lose on most of them and sometimes you have a winner. That was very key that I invested in LinkedIn. That was a big win for me.

Then, in 2003, I launched a company, which I acquired from a developer who launched a service, called Ublog. That was one of the very first, if not the first, European blogging companies. I started to focus on promoting and growing the software as a blogging service phenomenon in Europe.

If you look at how I evolved, B2L was very, very French and actually very Parisian. It was designed for Paris, like other agencies with customers in Paris. RapidSite was very French and nationwide, so I wanted a little more in terms of reach. I really wanted Ublog to be international on day one. That was my goal.

I decided to discuss collaboration with the leader in blogging at the time, Six Apart, who is not the leader anymore, but was way before WordPress even existed. Then WordPress won, but at the time Six Apart was a leader and we merged. We were acquired by Six Apart and I became the head of Six Apart Europe. I kept going for a few years as the head of Europe for them, and you know the rest of the story.