

EXECUTIVE SUITE

A BACK END NEWS MAGAZINE

**RALPH VINCENT
REGALADO**

of Senti AI shares his
founder's journey

THE RISE OF AI



EMPOWERING ORGANIZATIONS BY BRINGING AI TO MAINSTREAM

Entrepreneurship lessons from a non-entrepreneur

By Nicole Batac, Contributor

Ralph Vincent Regalado, founder and CEO of technology startup Senti AI, treaded new waters when he founded his company. Armed with a desire to empower others to use technology for good and lessons he accumulated over the years, he made Senti AI the pioneering artificial intelligence company in the Philippines snagging deals with established technology providers in the country.

He became an entrepreneur relying on the knowledge he's built through years as a researcher and professor. His journey is unique for a founder, but the insight is universal. Regalado's story helped us draw some crucial learnings for all aspiring entrepreneurs. And we're here to share these lessons with you.

Prior to Senti AI, Regalado taught at De La Salle University and worked as a consultant. He was an assistant professor and artificial intelligence (AI) researcher focused on mobile and web development spaces. He graduated with a Computer Science degree from DLSU in 2009. He took further studies refining his knowledge and skills in the Natural Language Processing (NLP), which would become the core of the business.

Senti AI started as Senti in 2013. It offered the tool Senti Pulse, a localized text analytics platform that can read and understand Filipino languages and slangs. Its NLP engine can adapt to any local language so that businesses can collect their audience's sentiments. The localized offering set Senti apart, but it also served as a challenge. Senti needed to offer models that can keep up with the evolving languages in our country.

Now, Senti AI offers other AI solutions and services that can work with different industries. It aims to deploy more cost-effective AI solutions tailored to its clients' requirements.

While its main market is the enterprise segment, Senti has worked with the transportation and insurance industries. It is exploring work in the BPO, real estate, and health spaces, too.

The work it has done granted the startup numerous awards and partnerships with recognized institutions such as PLDT Enterprise, Rhipe, CDM Philippines, and Internet and Mobile Marketing Association of the Philippines, and industry giants like Microsoft and Google.

As much as the company has grown over the years, its roots emerged from accumulated knowledge, a bit of luck, the right timing, and some discontent.

LESSON 1: Keep learning and connect the dots

Regalado has always kept his ego in check and maintained a learner's mindset through the years. He would take in and reflect on his experiences and use these to forge his path.

"I try to innovate because students also change the way they learn," he said. "You need to continuously innovate how you teach."

During his time at La Salle, he took the opportunity to teach a course on technopreneurship. He wanted to explore how the subject could be taught in the Philippine setting. He applied accumulated knowledge from research and performed experiments on how to make the class better.





Becoming a community manager Google Developer Group Philippines allowed him to expand his proficiency in the field and widening his as well.

"It gave me a good platform in the community," Regalado said. "I wasn't only limited to teaching a small group at school. It expanded my horizons to understand what else I could teach outside school. I realized there's a lot more knowledge beyond school," he said, "like talking to people, being able to converse your ideas clearly."

In 2013, he joined Startup Weekend Manila using ideas from his research work that focused on applying NLP in the technological advancements of Philippine languages, sentiment analysis, and disaster management. He ended up winning that competition, which became an excellent learning experience.

LESSON 2: Don't be afraid to start again

The Startup Weekend win encouraged him to pursue his business and kicked off Senti with a few colleagues. Some things don't work out at first try. He rebuilt the company again piece by piece all while learning lessons along the way.

In 2014, a mentor from Startup Weekend helped him get his business off the ground. Senti got incorporated in December 2015.

He could have given up after experiencing challenges after challenges. He could just go back to teaching where income is stable and the profession also gave him the satisfaction of helping others. But as the cliché goes, things don't always pan out the way we originally wanted it to be.

He had to make a choice and he chose the difficult path of starting over with Senti AI.

The tide was turning again. Through QBO's initiative, Senti received funding from DOST and when they received the grant in March 2018, it was full steam ahead for product development, which was still focused on Senti Pulse.

LESSON 3: Find your 'North Star'

Even with all the unknowns, Regalado knew what he wanted to achieve with Senti AI. Any person or business needs to know

what Regalado refers to as their "North Star," a guiding principle or goal.

He dreams of making AI mainstream, and he wants the company to serve as a bridge between those who want to use AI but don't understand it. He aspires to help them explore and use AI to improve their work. He also desires to turn the work they do to bridge the gap between business, academe, and the government. That the agendas of these segments can overlap.

He's also setting his sights on bringing Senti AI's work abroad. The company already has an office in Singapore.

Personally, he is looking for opportunities where he can help more people. He started in the classroom, moved on to the communities he's a part of, and now, does his part for nation-building as a startup founder.

LESSON 4: Cultivate relationships, seek help, and pay it forward

Regalado knows Senti AI couldn't last as long as it has without support. He understands that developing relationships is crucial. Many of the help he's received came from friendships and other relationships he's cultivated through the years.

Like through being a Google Cloud partner in the Philippines, Senti AI got to work with the City Hall of Manila and help them with tasks like collating things such as complaints and helping provide transparency with how they work.

Senti AI has also partnered recently with PLDT Enterprise to help local startups and tech companies leverage AI.

The company also conducts workshops and closely collaborates with other organizations to push the knowledge toward data to help them make better decisions.

He believes AI is a breakthrough technology for those who can adapt and compete in the space. It would generate many opportunities for Filipinos, especially if automation affects the contact centers' big business in the country. It can open an avenue for the Philippines to be known as a country that provides AI services. **(To page 4)**



Founder, CEO, and Editor

Marlet Salazar is a former writer and desk editor in the Philippines' leading daily. Her passion for enterprise technology led her to establish the website Back End News in 2018. She developed a unique interest in cybersecurity and instead of becoming a specialist, she chose the next best thing: Write about cybersecurity.

Executive Suite is her passion project. It will still be technology but will mostly feature the business lifestyle of C-Level executives.



Contributor

Nicole Batac spent the last 10 years as a consumer tech and lifestyle journalist and editor for print publications like Speed Magazine and 2nd Opinion Magazine and has had her work appear in other local publications. She now braves the world of freelance writing, contributing to local and international sites like Revu.com.ph and Canadian Reviewer. In her free time, she obsessively listens to music, binge-watches shows on Netflix, eats well, and sleeps in.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Rise of AI



AI offers so much promise to various industries. Many use cases are still being explored both on the front-end and back-end of businesses. There are still the questions of ethics behind the use of the technology and many other issues to tackle. Still, with proper guidelines paired with the right principles, AI becoming mainstream will make business processes easy and effective.

In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when governments imposed mobility restrictions in order to curb the spread of the virus, technology played a crucial role in ensuring business continuity. The temporary—or permanent for some—closure of offices resulted in the escalation of telecommuting.

Some businesses accelerated their digital transformation, while some either amplified their existing services or further improved their infrastructure. For a moment, there was a decline in production and sales of hardware and non-essential goods. When the overcast future of businesses cleared up, technology companies realized there was an opportunity to meet the challenge.

The software market, especially cloud adoption, suddenly experienced a surge because employees working from home fulfill their duties as well as collaborate through the cloud. Cybersecurity solutions companies strengthened their existing solutions to meet the demands of securing devices outside the range of the corporate network.

But among the many technologies that emerged during the pandemic, artificial intelligence (AI) is

perhaps one that may be thriving. Judging by the number of virtual press events discussing AI, the technology is becoming mainstream.

Britannica defines AI as “the ability of a computer or a robot controlled by a computer to do tasks that are usually done by humans because they require human intelligence and discernment.”

AI is often used in automation but it has already been used in different platforms for the past few years. From virtual assistants to automated vehicles, the technology has been around albeit not as pronounced as today.

There are still controversies surrounding AI. YouTube has an Originals series about AI (“The of AI”) wherein it discussed various use cases which include, but not limited to, healthcare, automotive, and even scriptwriting.

In this time when there is a global health crisis, scientists are taking advantage of this technology to accelerate the development of the vaccine for COVID-19.

It was only a few months ago when AI falls under the category of emerging technologies. But today, conversations about AI has become mainstream and business are exploring various use cases that would perfectly fit in the new reality — living with a highly contagious virus.

Marlet Salazar
Editor

(From page 3) One way he is helping develop the awareness is through the AI Pilipinas community he started back in 2017. They hold meetups and host speakers from abroad to enable the community to be well-versed and aware of the developments in AI. They even organized an event last year where they paired off the community with NGOs to potentially create products, research, etc. that could help them work better.

What's something he hopes to see more in business? A “pay it forward” ecosystem. To have more entrepreneurs and businesses to be willing to help out without any agenda. To assist and offer insights to other entrepreneurs to help them grow their businesses. It's something we see in Regalado's work, and perhaps it'll inspire others to do the same, too.