

# Virginie Simon

Founder and CEO / MyScienceWork

When Virginie Simon was studying for her PhD in nanotechnology, she realized it was more difficult than it should be to find and access research from other fields and other countries. Her work covered several disciplines at once, and there wasn't a good platform to make those kinds of connections, so in 2010 she created MyScienceWork to connect researchers with each other and with work from other areas and fields.

**Can you explain what MyScienceWork does?**

MyScienceWork is a global community of a half-million researchers. Our goal is to democratize science and make research more open and discoverable. We're working with publishers and institutions in several countries to provide better access to research and better communication between researchers, and to connect people in different disciplines. Our company works with seventy million scientific publications.

The company also develops a variety of services and works with publishers and institutions to map, structure, manage, measure impact and promote research content. We have an offering called Sirius, which is an analytics dashboard for researchers; and Polaris, our main product, is an open-source repository solution that allows institutions to archive, evaluate and promote their research input.

**What gave you the idea for your company?**

I was twenty-eight and doing research on the use of nanotechnology for cancer therapy. During my PhD, I realized that science should be more open, and that scientists needed tools to access research results, accelerate research and better collaborate. One of the things I like about nanotechnology is that it mixes work from so many other disciplines. I work as a biologist, but I have to work with physicists, chemists, computer scientists and others to create a new way to treat cancer or develop a new treatment for a disease. I don't like working in only one discipline, but it was difficult to get an overview of research in other areas. I first created the company in Paris in 2010, but we decided to relocate to Luxembourg in 2012.



**What made you move to Luxembourg?**

It's more international. As you might know, French institutions and French people really love to speak French, and that's not very helpful for a company that wants to connect researchers around the world. In Luxembourg, people speak at least three or four languages, and they're from all kinds of countries. It's a more multicultural and more international environment.

So what inspired you to go from discovering this need to building a company around it?

I was working with lots of people for my PhD – computer science people, chemists, all kinds of researchers – but it was difficult. We didn't have the same type of education or vocabulary or background in science, so collaborating was not easy. I spent more time during my PhD finding good content and good people than analyzing papers. So during my PhD, I had the idea to create a global, multidisciplinary platform that could connect people working in all kinds of different fields, from the hard sciences to things like law, economics and humanities, so we would have a global thought engine. It would be like LinkedIn, but for science. You'd put in some keywords – “stem cells,” for example – and see what research was being done in that area in biology, chemistry, mathematics. So you can find something, and then have access to the numbers, the research, the researchers and the institutions. You'd have all the information you needed in a single click, meaning you could then spend more time reading, analyzing and working. The idea was to save researchers time.

**How was the process of starting the company?**

The hard part was not the innovative part; it was creating and growing the communication platform. We used a lot of social media and worked with scientific journalists directly at first.

The company was supported at this time by Luxembourgian shareholders and a Luxembourg investment fund. Since then, we've grown internationally. We're still based in our headquarters in Luxembourg, but we have our office in Paris too, and in 2014 we decided to create a subsidiary in San Francisco, so we're now a company of fifteen in three different countries.

**Is it difficult for a young company to manage offices in three different countries?**

Of course, it means that we have to be very organized, but we use all the technical tools we can: Skype, Google Hangouts. So it's just a matter of organization. But once you have that in place, it's very powerful. It's really cool to have people working from France, Luxembourg and San Francisco. It's dynamic. We have people focusing on all kinds of fields, researchers working on semantics, machine learning, natural language processing, etc.

*“When I realized the company was created seven years ago, I thought it was impossible – it feels like only one or two years ago.”*



Each office also has its own specialty. The technical and R&D teams are based at the Luxembourg headquarters, as is all of the intellectual property of the group. The office in Paris focuses on the commercial and marketing people, and San Francisco is where the cofounders and key partnership people are.

#### **What's been the hardest part of building the company?**

You're obviously going to have some bad times over five years and some more difficult periods. Sometimes recruitment was quite difficult. When you're a team of fifteen people, if one person is not committed enough or competent enough or aligned with the vision of the company, it's very visible. It affects everyone a lot when the team is that small. So if one person doesn't match or you recruited the wrong person, it really takes up a lot of your time.

#### **How do you prevent that?**

It's so difficult. Of course, we have so many tests, but when you're hiring, you're never sure whether it's enough, whether someone is really good and efficient. Once we've taken someone on, we're very clear with them that it's a small team, it's a startup, we have to work a lot. We don't count our hours; we're very invested in the company, and the project. After that, it's a question of confidence. After four or five months, we can see if someone will still be here after five years. But sometimes we've made some recruiting mistakes, and that was very painful.

#### **When did you first think the company was really going to work?**

In 2012, we raised a lot of money. Since the beginning, we've raised €5 million, but in 2012 we raised €1.2 million, and that was definitely a big step. The first launch of the platform was at the end of 2012 – that was the first version of MyScienceWork. It was a very exciting moment.

But I would say 2014. That year, we were based in Luxembourg, and we got the news that we'd been selected to spend four months in Silicon Valley in an accelerator program for startups called Plug and Play. The team was so excited to go to Silicon Valley and join the program. It was the first time for us. There were five of us, and it was so great. We had a chance to check whether our business model was compatible with the US market, and it was, so at the end of 2014, we decided to open a subsidiary in San Francisco. This was definitely a great moment. Everyone was so excited – it was a new life, a new way to work, a new environment.

**What do you like or dislike personally about the founder's lifestyle?**

What I like is to be in a dynamic environment. The people are very positive and dynamic. The lifestyle can be difficult, but people know why they made this choice, so it's really positive. I meet positive people all the time, and I really like that. I need to be in contact with positive people.

MyScienceWork is really an innovative company. We use a lot of machine learning and natural language processing, a lot of technology. It's exciting to be in Silicon Valley because there are so many geeks. It's really cool. We can imagine what life will be like in a couple of years.

I think that it's difficult to be an entrepreneur, but at the same time, it's fun. It changes all the time, so we're never bored. The time just flies. When I realized the company was created seven years ago, I thought it was impossible – it feels like only one or two years ago.

As one negative thing, I would say that as a woman, especially a CEO in tech, I feel lonely. I always meet men, especially in Silicon Valley, forty- or fifty-year old men who travel all the time, and I'm just thirty-five and a woman in tech. Most of the time I'm the only one. I would like to see more women in tech, more women CEOs.

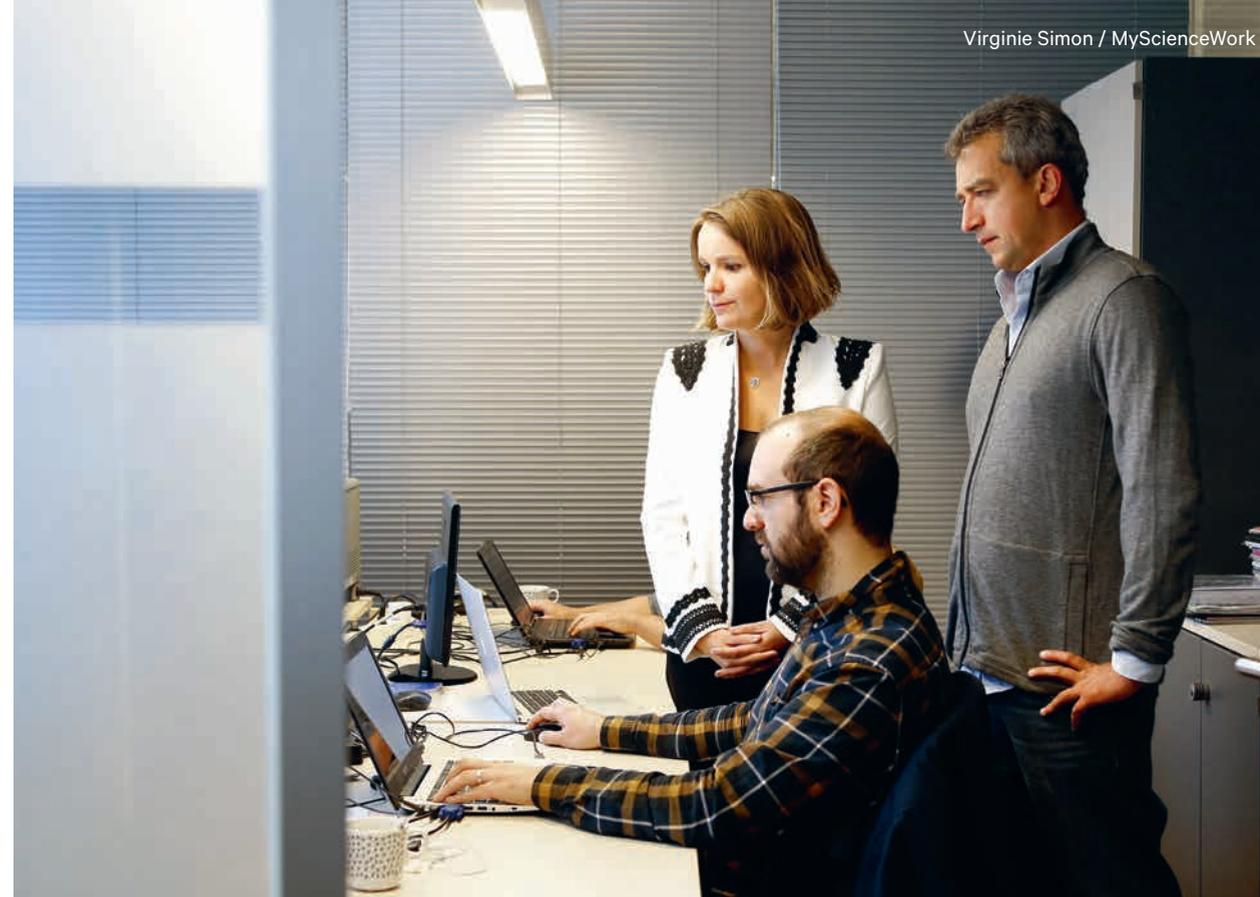
**You've done some work to promote women's leadership, right?**

Yes, I'm very engaged in promoting women in science, women in tech and female CEOs in Silicon Valley. I work with many groups, such as Women in Leadership and For Women In Science, that promote leaders around the world. We make ourselves available to media and journalists to create positive role models for young people.

This year in San Francisco, I won the first Gold Award for Women Role Models, one of the French American Business Awards, which was really awesome. I'm being invited to a lot of conferences to talk about my work and the way I created my company, and about why it's so important for young women in tech, and for women who want to create their companies, to join this network to help young women become entrepreneurs.

**[About]** MyScienceWork was founded in 2010 by two young graduates with complementary profiles: Virginie Simon, a biotech engineer and PhD in nanotechnology; and Tristan Davaille, a financial engineer with a degree in economics. MyScienceWork serves the international scientific community with a digital promotion platform for research called Polaris, and with premium access to scientific publications and experts. The whole team promotes easy access to scientific publications, unrestricted diffusion of knowledge and open science.

**[Links]** Web: [mysciencework.com](http://mysciencework.com) Facebook: MyScienceWork Twitter: @MyScienceWork

**What are your top work essentials?**

A good internet connection and coffee

**At what age did you found your company?**

Twenty-eight.

**What's your most used app?**

Uber. I'm always going to meetings, meetups, conferences – and San Francisco is really hilly.

**What's the most valuable piece of advice you've been given?**

Never be discouraged. This field is really hard, but you learn a lot every day.

**What's your greatest skill?**

Energy and dynamism.

