instinctools

Full-scale MVP Development For a Fintech Startup

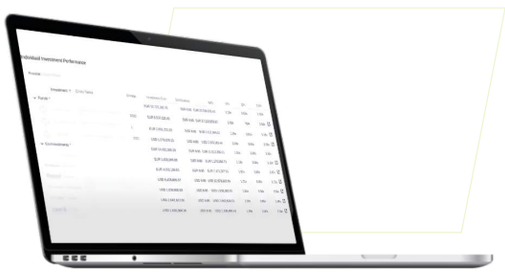
How running a discovery workshop saved a fintech startup tens of thousands of dollars on needless software development and enabled the company to craft a trailblazing MVP for venture funds and investors.

Industry:
Fintech

Business challenge

Securing a top-notch development team when building a software product is only one part of the equation. The key lies in defining what kind of product you want to create, who for, and what problems of the target audience it will address. For those operating in highly demanding niches, like our client, this precision represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

Instinctools was approached by a **European venture capital company** with €800m+ in assets under management. They planned to **launch a fintech startup and develop a web platform to consolidate information for VC investors and funds.**



The envisioned solution was supposed to:

Present investors with concise, visually appealing information about potential investment opportunities and their terms, rather than extensive 50-page reports

Provide a secure space for communication between funds and investors moving away from traditional emailing

Offer a comprehensive experience for investors, eliminating the need to switch between several systems

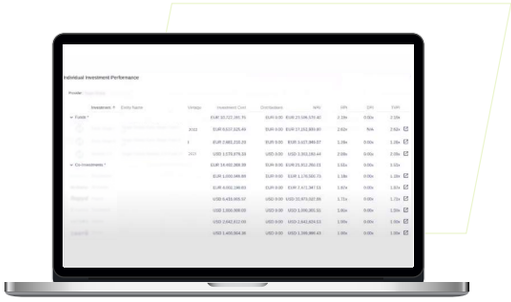
Empower funds with automated back-office functions, significantly reducing staff hours.

This **innovative and far-reaching B2B2C solution** had the potential to take the market by storm even as an MVP. However, the **haphazard approach to its implementation put the whole project at stake.**

Initially, the client worked with another tech partner who had offered to set up a developers-only team for the project. Specifying the requirements and prioritizing features fell under the client's purview.

Here is how it played out. The client outlined the platform's core idea to their contractor and continued to pile up features throughout the development process. Not surprisingly, those efforts didn't hit the mark the client was aiming for.

It turned out **the client had been draining their budget crafting a solution that veered far from their original vision.** Letting multiple stakeholders from different departments define the project requirements on a whim and the lack of a unified product vision between the product owners and dedicated team resulted in a deep chasm between expectations and reality. The developed **solution looked like a nice visualized Excel spreadsheet instead of being a top-of-the-line digital fundraising platform.**



Despite developing some of the intended features, the team couldn't pull the whole solution together, and the situation was being exacerbated with each new feature implementation. The **web platform benefited no one: not funds and investors, not the client.**

The **problem required input from a skilled Product development consultant**, and since the previous contractor couldn't provide one, the client started to look for a new tech ally. And that's how *instinctools entered the scene.

In the project, the **main puzzles were lurking at the pre-development stage.** Our team had to:

Process the information

received from the client and create the project's Vision&Scope documentation

Gather and clear up

business requirements along with technical and non-technical constraints

Prioritize

the solution's features

Shape the project's

iterations in line with the features it should have

Evaluate

the current product against the updated requirements

Solution

At *instinctools, we know how to address the problems of clients who turn to us after dismal cooperation with other tech partners. Sometimes, the situation can be completely muddled. There may be no basic documentation on the project, and it can be challenging for the stakeholders to define how they see the final product. In such cases, we suggest conducting a **discovery workshop before diving into the development to frame the product vision into a set of specific actions that would ensure the project's success.**

What was the value of a discovery workshop for the client?

- **Clearly defined business requirements and product vision**

  The client obtained a Vision&Scope document, where all functional and non-functional requirements for the project were captured. That information ensured all

- **Balanced development scope and business value**

  Following the here-and-now principle in developing product features, trying to implement every single idea you come up with is a sure way to oversaturate your the participants involved in the development process were on the same line and had similar expectations regarding the final product.

Additionally, with Vision&Scope in hand, the client could seamlessly transition to another tech partner — if they felt the need to do so — without going back to square one.

product with flashy components at the expense of vital ones. It's a slippery slope, especially for an MVP. By chasing excessive functionality, it's easy to lose the crux of the MVP, resulting in missed deadlines, and wasted budget.

A proper evaluation and prioritization of features with the solution architect empowered the client to balance business value, development cost, and time.

Potential for product enhancement

All artifacts created at the discovery workshop were documented. And anything that didn't make it into the MVP could be put into the subsequent product releases. That way, the client got a backlog primed for future development after the minimum viable product rollout.

Aligned product vision between the client and the dedicated team

Cooperating closely with our stakeholders empowered us to sculpt the product seamlessly within the projected time and budget.

Decreased time to market

Although a discovery workshop took some time, working out requirements, prioritizing features, and developing a common vision of the project paid off. It allowed the team to move at a rapid pace through the development phase as they had a well-defined action plan and could fully focus on product development and testing.

01 Behind the scenes: how did the discovery workshop go?

The number and duration of workshop sessions depends on the project's complexity and the scope of issues that need to be clarified before starting development. In our client's case, we proposed **two three-hour sessions.**

What did they cover?

Examining the existing solution with the product owners and gathering up-to-date business requirements and constraints of the product

Within the first workshop, our dedicated team collected and analyzed the information about:

- Problem, task, and business opportunity
- As-is state of the product
- Success criteria
- Stakeholders
- Our product
- Risks
- Functional and non-functional requirements
- Target audience
- Competitors
- Unique value proposition
- Constraints

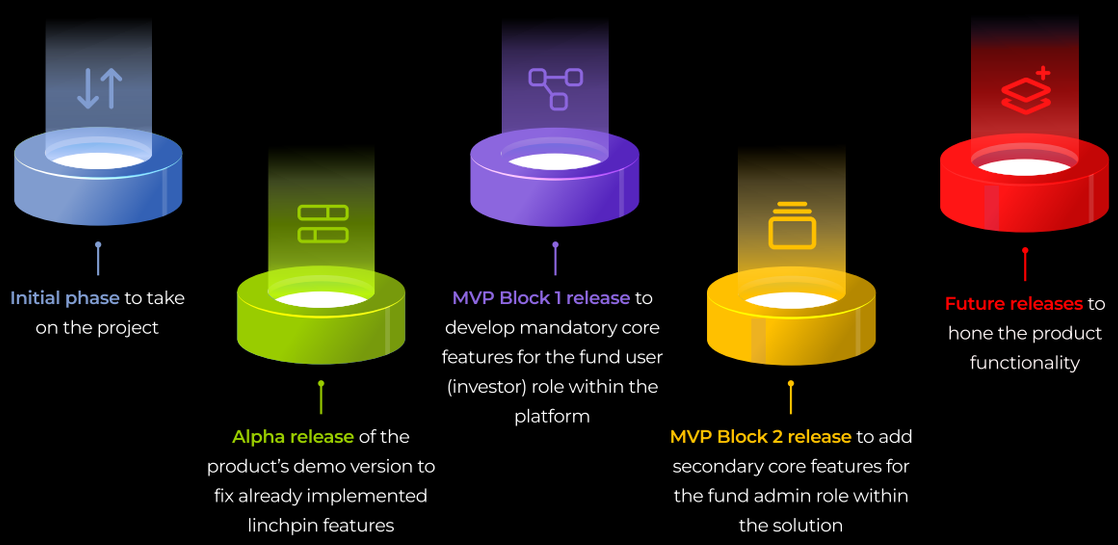
For example, **one of the client's concerns was that the solution wouldn't be secure enough** to manage documents with sensitive financial data from venture funds and investors.

To guarantee that Fort-Knox security level, we offered to tighten requirements for authorization on the platform and offered to conduct training on using and managing the solution for the client's employees.

After an in-depth discussion, **our team spent a week processing the collected data, brainstorming possible strategies to put the project back on the right track, and preparing a Vision&Scope document** for the second workshop.

Vision&Scope presentation to highlight our idea of revamping the existing solution according to the updated requirements

Instead of scrapping the existing software we decided to breathe new life into it, moving gradually:



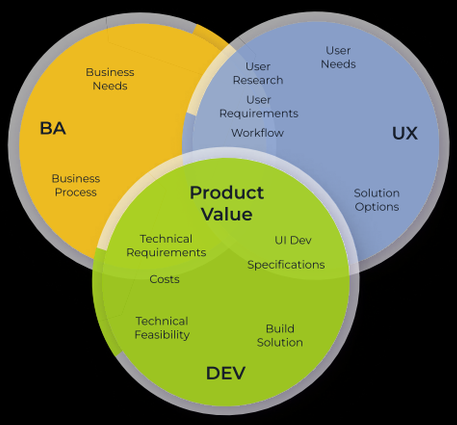
After their previous tech partner delivered a final solution that deviated significantly from the initial idea, the client appreciated our iterative and incremental approach.

Furthermore, that strategy allowed the client to **use the product's beta version to reel in future platform users** – investors and funds. Engaging customers is way easier if you have a demo version they can click through to get an idea of the platform's functionality.

During the second workshop, we also introduced to the client how we see the product's:

- Business goals
- Scope decomposition
- Milestones
- Timeline

The scope decomposition discussion allowed us to **prioritize the order of the features' implementation.** Some of them, such as two-factor authentication (2FA), were moved to the Alpha release, while others were postponed for later stages. For example, the client wanted to include integrated analytics for the Opportunities page in the Alpha release, but they needed integration with Tableau to do so. Therefore, this functionality was shifted to future releases.



We also suggested reconsidering the team composition and strengthening it with our **classic triad of a business analyst, solution architect, and UX/UI designer,** typical for an *instinctools' product approach. That way, our experts ensured creating the product centered around customer experience.

The client appreciated the businesslike approach of the *instinctools team. They approved our ideas, and so we jumped right into work on the next stage.

02 Initial phase

At this stage, we focused on:

- **Auditing the current platform.** We reviewed the client's functionality as the Fund admin and end-user's functions for the Fund user (Investor) role implemented on the platform before cooperation with *instinctools. That way, we determined which of the already developed features to include in the Alpha release.
- **Troubleshooting and bug fixing.** We evaluated bug fixing priorities. For example, authentication, notification system, and chat had to be fixed first.

The initial phase **resulted in creating a joint value-based development model** with described stages, milestones, and releases. As we've elaborated the scope for the Alpha release, we moved on to it.

03 Alpha release

Our primary goal was to establish a base for future development. The Alpha release included a limited set of core features to speed up the product's time to market and provide maximum business value with minimum effort and cost.

Instinctools' team covered:

- **Conducting code refactoring.** We eliminated the spaghetti code inherited from the client's former tech partner to simplify the process of uncovering bugs and vulnerabilities and hone the product's efficiency and maintainability.
- **Implementing necessary fixes to current features.** Only manual logout had been available earlier, so we added auto logout for the Fund User (Investor) role.
- **Reviewing UX/UI.** The current platform looked more like a visually appealing Excel spreadsheet, while the client wanted to put a premium on innovation and make the product up-to-the-minute in look and feel.

The Alpha release **led to crafting the product's version with updated core features and design ready to be tested by early adopters.**

04 MVP release

The client showcased the demo from the Alpha release to one of the funds. It was a sort of validation milestone for our client, which they passed. Therefore, we moved to fine-tuning the product, considering **feedback from the early adopter,** and added new features to the platform to provide more tangible value to customers.

First, we **extended the functionality for the Fund user role.** The following features were included in **MVP Block 1:**

- **2FA.** In line with best practices and the client's desire to raise the bar on the platform's security, we implemented two-factor authentication for fund users.
- **Manage documentation.** Fund users can open, read, and download docs in various formats unlike in the platform's version, provided by the previous contractor, where users could only see the list of documents.
- **See the full picture of investment activity.** Fund users can check the invested money and the remaining amount they can invest.

At the **MVP Block 2** stage, we **enhanced the functionality for the Fund admin role:**

- **Oversee investor organizations users.** Fund admin can delete the investor organization users, activate, and deactivate user accounts. In the past version, the admin could only create and edit users.
- **Manage Opportunities.** Fund admin is allowed to add new Opportunities, set their visibility, edit, or deactivate them. Previously, admins could only view the Opportunities the platform owner published.
- **Handle documentation.** Fund admin can search and filter docs, while they could only view a list of documents earlier.

The main deliverable of the MVP stage was launching the **product to the public.**

05 Future releases

Based on the feedback from end users, we've planned updates that are sure to captivate both funds and investors:

- ### Benefit from third-party integrations

  IIntegration with Tableau is at the top of the list to provide end users with embedded analytics within the platform.

- ### Prepare the data for internal and external purposes

  Summarize investments and generate reports to make back-office tasks a breeze.

Manage Opportunities

Automated notifications for investors about changes in Opportunities to help them keep an eye on the offers they are interested in.

Communicate with investors

Secure in-app messaging instead of emailing.

Before

- Confusion about where the project is going and when it will be finished
- Doubts about whether the goal is worth pursuing any further
- Lack of understanding between the development team and product stakeholders
- Random order of the features' implementation
- Budget drained on the creation of an undercooked product
- Half-finished product with no value for the client or end users

After

- Clear project roadmap with a blow-by-blow description of each stage
- Shared vision of the future product
- Step-by-step feature rollout, prioritizing what matters most
- A robust MVP that not only fits the bill but also turn heads of users

Client's testimonial

The product owner says how expectations align with reality when partnering with the *instinctools team:

There is still much more to come, but we can already confirm that it's outstanding and is totally different from what we have seen in other cases. We want to have a safe, consistent, dynamic, scalable, and intuitive system and it really goes in the right direction.

Key features

Consistency

Laser-focused strategy adherence.

Cohesion

Continuous collaboration between the stakeholders and the dedicated team.

Efficiency

Delivering the solution that is profitable even as an MVP.

Business value

- Balanced development scope to provide **maximum value with minimum investment**
- **Decreased** time to market
- **Fail-safe MVP**, ready to conquer the venture capital market

Do you have a **similar project idea**?

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contact@instinctools.com