



John Vrionis

Career Path

After spending a few seasons playing professional soccer in the U.S. and England, Mr. Vrionis moved to Chicago to get a master's degree in computer science. At the height of the dot-com bubble, he worked as an associate at ABN AMRO Venture Capital, where he helped the firm manage its deal flow, rather than finding new investments.

That experience taught him that he had a lot to learn about business and that he needed to be in Silicon Valley. He had product development roles at Freedom Financial Network and Determina Inc. before joining Lightspeed Venture Partners in 2006.

Education

B.A. from Harvard University
M.S. in computer science from the University of Chicago
M.B.A. from Stanford University

Current Investments

Data analysis company MapR Technologies Inc., networking start-up Embrane Inc., cloud application monitoring service Boundary Inc. and storage company Nimble Storage Inc., which recently secured a new round of funding at a valuation around \$800 million.

Rising Star

Lightspeed's Vrionis Makes Name by Sticking to Business

By Scott Denne

Though he started his career at a time when other venture capitalists had turned their attention to finding the next Facebook Inc., John Vrionis of **Lightspeed Venture Partners** set his sights on tracking the biggest changes in business technologies.

Now that bet is beginning to pay off, as big-name technology companies and public equity investors are scrambling to get their hands on the start-ups capitalizing on a raft of disruptive technologies emerging in the enterprise.

There's probably no other VC with the sort of success Mr. Vrionis has had in the enterprise before the age of 35, said Andy Rachleff, a Benchmark Capital founder. "He's probably the most successful VC of his vintage," said Mr. Rachleff, who mentored Mr. Vrionis at Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Since joining Lightspeed six years ago as a senior associate, Mr. Vrionis, now a managing director, has led investments in some of the firm's most promising portfolio companies. He led the firm's investments in Nicira Inc., a networking start-up acquired this summer for \$1.26 billion, and IO Turbine Inc., a storage company taken out – also very early in its life – for \$95 million. Mr. Vrionis also worked together with Lightspeed Partner Barry Eggers to back flash-disk company Pliant Technology Inc., which was bought for \$327 million last year.

After graduating business school, he initially balked at becoming a VC. "I found a lot of venture capitalists to be quite arrogant, to be honest," Mr. Vrionis said. He planned on becoming an entrepreneur, but finding himself with no idea and no company he was excited to join, he took Lightspeed's offer because the firm gave him the flexibility to be an investor or join a company if he chose.

Though his contemporaries were out scouting the hottest social media and consumer Internet companies, Mr. Vrionis was drawn to enterprise investing because those companies were tackling tough technology problems, which he found more interesting than solving the marketing challenges that are the biggest hurdle to consumer-focused businesses.

Having no track record and no reputation as a venture capitalist could have made the transition difficult, but, as Mr. Vrionis said, "Being absolutely nobody, I had to be proactive." Mr. Vrionis began by seeking out entrepreneurs with extensive knowledge of the trends coming to the enterprise. He had an early view of many of these trends as a part-time product manager at Determina Inc., a security company that was sold to VMware Inc.

Spending time to do research and making himself a believer in emerging trends, such as how server virtualization will impact storage and networking and the need for more-immediate data analysis, endeared him to many entrepreneurs who often battle for attention before a trend becomes obvious. "Ninety percent of people in the world think they're crazy. It's nice when someone from Sand Hill Road comes to them and says, 'I believe in what you're saying,'" Mr. Vrionis said.

When Mr. Vrionis called Sacha Labourey, the founder of cloud computing start-up **CloudBees Inc.**, hoping to invest in the company before its next formal fundraising, Mr. Labourey was not eager to talk. He'd just been through talks with a wave of VCs looking to do the same and all promising, as Mr. Vrionis did, a very efficient process. None had delivered. But Mr. Vrionis had "really done his homework," Mr. Labourey said. He documented all the players in the cloud market, and didn't bargain over every term of the funding, but was eager to move on to the problems CloudBees was solving, Mr. Labourey said. The process was so efficient that the two didn't even meet face-to-face until they signed the term sheet.