

ITSU Shameer Sachdev

Matthew Todd

Hi. My name is Matthew Todd and welcome to Inside the ScaleUp. This is the podcast for founders executives in tech, looking to make an impact and learn from their peers within the tech business, we lift the lid on tech businesses, interviewing leaders and following their journey from startup to scale up and beyond covering everything from developing product market fit, funding and fundraising models to value proposition structure and growth marketing.

We learn from their journey so that you can understand how they really work, the failures, the successes, the lessons along the way, so that you can take their learnings and apply them within your own startup or scale up and join the ever growing list of high growth UK SaaS businesses. Hey, welcome back to the podcast. Really pleased today to be joined by Shameer Sachdev, founder of agency Growth Gorilla. Great to have you here today.

Shameer Sachdev

Yes, thanks. Thanks for having me.

Matthew Todd

No worries looking forward to the conversation. And as always, I'd like guests to give us their kind of one line intro. Tell us a little bit about what it is that you do and what Growth Gorilla is?

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, well, I think if it's on one line, then the best way to describe the series is that we're growth marketing agency for fintechs.

Matthew Todd

Perfect. Yeah. Love that. And we'll we'll get into some detail about exactly what you do, how you work. But, you know, firstly, you know, I always like to cover, especially with the the SaaS founders that we have on as well, that kind of founding journey, what was the insight that led you to kind of form the company and go down the approach that you have? So it'd be good to understand a little bit about your background prior to the agency. And then what motivated you to move into founding the agency yourself as well?

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, of course. So my background is actually financial services. I started off as a as a junior in a very traditional stock broking environment. And then, as time went by, I've sort of progressed from being a junior to being a junior broker, to then running my own portfolio of clients. And then really, I made the switch from really private, you know, private client broking or advisory broking into execution only broking. Primarily because, you know, the, the, the benefit of having a stockbroker, over the years has declined massively given the amount of information that's now out there and technologies and the

platforms and the news and whatnot. You know, the advantage of being a broker was that you had access to information that your clients did, and then you are a source of information for them interpret that information, you provide advice. And then you execute the trades for him, but it's time kind of went by, you know, that had an impact on our commissions. So the money wasn't as good as it was. And I noticed that that execution only platforms were performing, we're growing. So I ended up becoming head of sales, then eventually Head of Sales and Marketing for a financial trading platform in the UK here. And that, that kind of started off or sparked my, my marketing career. And after growing that business over the course of five years, I decided that it was the marketing piece that I really, really enjoyed, and then decided to set up the agency with a, you know, a specific focus on at that time financial services. But then very, very quickly, financial services and fintech and then now FinTech only.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, that's really interesting, Interesting to see that you're able to kind of notice those trends in terms of information, as well as technology platform, and then, you know, find that interest in marketing pivot across to that. With your agency, why specialize in fintechs only?

Shameer Sachdev

I mean, all of that was is was down my background in financial services. And then, specifically, when I started working for the trading platform, it was really very much you know, that was first generation of FinTech, right? Because every FinTech platform, you know, like SaaS platform is really, you know. They construct of three things really, you know, the front end website, the onboarding journey, and the actual platform itself, the dashboard. Where you access to service that you're looking for. Which is fundamentally what I was optimized to promote you I just called financial services and fintech at that time. And then I got a little bit of advice from someone, knowing that there was a lot of money being poured into startups, the scale ups. And then, it really nicely dovetailed with my experience of financial services, to then focus on the FinTech sector, because I think probably the two biggest areas that have got funding really is probably FinTech and SaaS platforms, really. That was just a really, really natural fit for us. So we just started testing out reaching out to various fintechs different stages. And really, we got traction almost immediately. Arguably, it was actually easier to acquire fintechs as customers than the more sort of the more sort of the traditional companies, especially, especially as a small business ourselves at that time.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, what why do you think that was? Was it just good timing? Was it because of how you're approaching them?

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, I think it's that background of understanding how you onboard users onto an app effectively. Whether or not it's a web based app, or a mobile based app, was really, really important. Because a lot of the traditional financial services guys effectively was forms of lead generation. At that time if you're applying for a mortgage, but even with like HSBC, you are effectively filling out a contact form. But, you know, at that time, Monza was, you know, really up and coming. So it was revolte, and whatnot, all of it was self serve, there was no branches, it was all online, and having that understanding with the trading

platform really set me up, because I had a deep understanding experience of working in that environment. Whereas a lot of my counterparts and other existing agencies really didn't.

Matthew Todd

That specialized industry awareness that helps you communicate and demonstrate to them that you, you understood what it was that they had to offer, how that works, and therefore, how you can help them to market and position that as well.

Shameer Sachdev

That's right. Yeah.

Matthew Todd

For any other kind of startups, listening, I think it'd be good to kind of get into a bit more detail at how your agency works for clients. I know, when we talked before this call, we're kind of talking about your methodology. And I think, if we kind of speak firstly, just to relatively early stage startups before they're starting to scale up, you know, perhaps they have got some funding already, I think it'd be really interesting to think things through from that perspective, and with the context of how your agency works, just give us a bit of detail and advice, I guess, that you could potentially offer a client in that space needing to take their new FinTech or SaaS products to market.

Shameer Sachdev

So I think for the, for the startup space we focus on on some core challenges, and the core challenges that we do focus on, are developing go to market strategy, driving growth strategy. The two others are I suppose, derivatives of the go to market piece, which is market entry, so launch against new countries, and product launches, which is obviously more established brands. So, if you're a startup and you're thinking about launching your product into the marketplace for the first time, you're in a position, that either you're doing one of two things. You're either, you know, coming up with a disruptive product, and you're delivering something in a way that no one else has ever done before, in which case, you've got to think about how you're going to educate your customer. Or, you know, it'd be the opposite of that, which is you're delivering a product that already exists, but more streamlined and more more user friendly. In which case, you could spend less time on education, and more time on just just straight bottom of the funnel acquisition. So our approach really is with clients that work with us, we take them through an onboarding process. And that onboarding process is really sort of taking apart and understanding where the business currently sits. So being really, really clear on what the business's goals and KPIs are, what metrics that they're following. What's important to them and then the one that kind of always comes up is customer acquisition cost or CAC. And then aligning that with what is the number of users that the business wants to acquire? And then really Just seeing if those numbers actually stack up. It's all well and good having a CAC of say, you know, 25 pounds or 50 pounds, but then saying we want, you know, 10,000 customers, and then when you do the maths on that it's actually quite significant sum of money. And actually, you've only got a \$50,000 marketing budget, so you know, that that needs to align and be realistic. And then also understanding that those numbers, you know, how does that look over a time period as well? Is it realistic to acquire that many users in that timeframe? And is the market big enough as well to acquire that many users, you know, a substantial portion of the market, and all of those things need to be thought about. Then once you kind of nail that

down, and you've got some clear numbers that you know, are realistic, you can then start going into things like really nailing down who the target customer is, where we can find them, you know, what message will be going to communicate to them? What does the customer journey look like? You know, and when I talk about customer journey. It's all the way from, you know, the first time your brand appears in front of that prospective users user, all the way down to, you know, how are we going to activate that use and then monetize that user and then retain that user? And what, what does that all look like? So we've kind of established all of that within sort of the first 30 days. And then from that, we can then start to really pull together a strategy that will, you know, that will work for, for, for the brand that's appropriate for where they are, and who they are. So best practices to kind of think about is being really, really clear on the numbers. And is it realistic. So, I mean, just to give you an idea, I've been contacted twice this year by neobanks, or challenger banks, they've just got their seed funding company million bucks. And, you know, they've got our, well, we want 30,000 users in three months? Well, you know, that's just not realistic, it's not gonna happen. By the time you, you know, you're on board the client, you get all the collateral ready, launch really campaigns, that's for five weeks gone already. So, you know, I'll be realistically going to acquire 30,000 users in seven weeks, bearing in mind that no one's heard of your brand, or your proposition, you don't even know whether people want it or not. So just be clear about that. The second thing is, you know, what, what research has, you know, has been conducted, you know, have you put your proposition in front of a set of target customers, and gain their opinion on this, and sort feedback. Then also have you on board a small number of users to make sure that, you know, your, your onboarding journey is as frictionless as it can be, and you know, you're not going to come up against any sort of major issues that you haven't foreseen. Because even in the best developers and product managers and founders, it's not like they get it wrong. But you know, sometimes you just don't see something.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, there can definitely be friction points that you haven't considered because you're too close to the detail to use to how it works every day that you miss things that otherwise could be, you know, obvious that might stop someone from being able to complete that process.

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, exactly, exactly that. And then being really, really clear on on on the messaging. I always think it's worthwhile to spend a little bit of money on a good copywriter to go through your website, you know, and make sure that it's blindingly obvious what your business does, and making sure that all of your communications make sense. And then again, going back to my first point, you know, is disrupting the market? Or are you just doing something better? So, you know, just thinking about, you know, are you going to take a more of an educational stance? Or are you going to start trying to, you know, drive users to the bottom of the funnel into your platform. So all of that will stand you in good stead and then the other little things like just making sure that you've got, you know, the appropriate tracking and analytics setup in place, you've got a feedback loop, you've set up, you know, some sort of survey with your prospective customers coming in. Because at that sort of stage you need to be learning as much as possible as quickly as possible. So you can make decisions, you know, good decisions quickly.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, absolutely. I completely agree what you're saying about the messaging as well as the copywriting piece and being clear on the audience that you're trying to get in front of as well and tailor that message. I've seen so many websites that are either too product focused without making it clear who their customer is, and what the benefits are. Or they're almost hedging their bets. So you scroll down the homepage, and it's, oh, we do this for this particular type of customer, then below it is that oh, we do this for that one. They're kind of going after three different segments all at once. It just leads to confusing messaging, I think a lot of the time.

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, I don't think there's anything wrong with testing out a few audiences to just sort of see where your traction is. But I think as soon as you're seeing a directional result, then, you know, it's worthwhile doubling down on that for a period of time. And going down that rabbit hole, because, you know, it's much easier to acquire, say, 1000 users from one particular market segment, versus trying to acquire 1000 users across like four or five. It's hard to manage the comms are harder to manage. So yeah, you know, that that's kind of our sort of approach for the go to market piece in some best practices.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, thank you for sharing that. I think that's really, really useful. And I hope people listening to this find that useful as well. Going back to the first point, you mentioned on knowing those KPIs, knowing those numbers, I think not enough, people actually model that appropriately, they'll have an idea of number of users, I suspect that they want to bring on board, but they probably haven't done the maths on, you know, what the CAC looks like, what the lifetime value of the customer is, and what the cash flow looks like, on the best of that, You know, are they paying annually quarterly monthly? If so, how does that shape your your budget and the spend that you've got? Because otherwise, like you say, you could put yourself in a situation where you, you just throw a bunch of cash at a wall, and then nothing really works out? And then you've got nowhere to go from that point?

Shameer Sachdev

Absolutely. Having a handle on the numbers of, you know, for for acquisition is is huge. You know, we've got our own podcasts. And, you know, we've interviewed, you know, the founders are some really, really well known FinTech firms. And, it's no coincidence that the most successful brands that are out there are so focused on their analytics and their tracking, and utilizing the data that they're acquiring, and speaking to their customers as well. You know, you hear it once you think, okay, hear it twice, but you know, you hear it consistently, you know, you've got to take heed of that. And I think there's anything that you take away from from this podcast today is track, you can't measure what you can't track.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, especially with early stage founders, or some, you know, first time founders, I think sometimes they can be a bit scared of what that might tell them. They'll do some initial product validation, you know, at that MVP stage, but then they'll almost be afraid of continually talking to their audience and their customer base in case. You know, they hear some signs that actually they haven't got it quite right yet.

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, and there's nothing wrong with that, you know, you're better off finding that out sooner rather than later. And in, adjusting the product accordingly. We've come across that several times. Either where, the team hasn't spoken to their customers or hasn't looked at the data or ignored the data. And then invariably the business has shut down. And in the other direction where it has worked well where they've been, you know, ruthless about acquiring information, data, then making decisions. And then the product is really, really developed and you can kind of see things really working. And it turns into a viable business.

Matthew Todd

Aside from the numbers piece when it comes to actually trying to develop that go to market strategy, when it comes to looking at messaging, or when it comes to looking at different potential channels to explore, are there other mistakes that you see startups making when they approach that? What are some of the things that that you're seeing people do wrong, that they might want to think about slightly differently?

Shameer Sachdev

So I think one of the first things is when you're in, in, you know, really early stages, and you're doing that go to market piece. You know, if you haven't got any customers or customers at all whatsoever, your first job is to go out there, and capture and acquire as many people from your network as possible and get them to start using your product. For two reasons. One, there's no cost attached to it other than your time. And two, you know, they're friendly, they're gonna give you feedback. And you develop a relationship with those users, and you can go back to them, you can create, you know a beta testing panel, or whatever it is. Best example of this was with Stripe, the Collison brothers. When they first started, they would literally sit people down with their own laptops, and get people to open up an account with them in front of them. And they were absolutely ruthless about it. Assuming you've done that, and you've got a core set of users, and now you're looking at spending some money on marketing activity. I think some founders kind of get stuck into just trying to be really, really perfect. I think, if you're at early stages, you can kind of afford to be a little bit rough around the edges. We had a client that had a platform for landlords to communicate with their tenants. And, after six months, they were really struggling to acquire users. And, I said to the CEO at the time, you know, me? Do I have an investment property or two? And he went, yeah, you do? I'll go, Well, why am I not using your product? And he goes, I don't know. Because you never asked me? You and I have been speaking, you know, at least twice a week for the last six months, but not once, as you or any member of your team sat down and gone, why didn't you use our products? You know, and then find out what the reason is. If I'm saying no, you know, is it price is it this is that, you know, whatever beliefs, then you can then just drill down on it. And what I mean by that is that you don't need to go spend two 3000 pounds on a highly polished video for your ads, you know, some basic static banners will work absolutely fine. And your website doesn't need to be built by sentient developers on WordPress, a basic website and Webflow connected to your CRM and back end and whatnot, via Zapier is absolutely fine as well. Because you don't want it to be entrenched in code, because then you can't make changes quickly, and you can't tweak things quickly. Whoever's doing your marketing should be in a position that they're going to wait two weeks to change your headline on landing page, right? And the other mistake is again, going back to that data piece, which is, you know, ignoring the data, and then not reacting to it. And then kind of Last but not least

really is, you know, making sure that you are communicating with your customer base, especially at early stages, when you've got users who are in there using numbers that are basically triple digits. You should have a mechanism in place where you are speaking to those users to find out what's going on. And other things that go wrong is, you know, I mean little things. We had a life insurance company that was only offering, you know, online non insurance for up to 35 year olds, and every successful application that they had with someone that was 36 to 40. Absolutely reluctant to increase the the age to 40. Look at the data. You know, that problem would have been solved easily. I think the other thing as well is, is being really, really clear on what problem your users want solving. So another good example of this versus that, you know, we had an impact investing platform that really, really wanted to focus on the fact that they were female founders, that they were underpinned by the impact investing element, and their target audience were primarily female, who had a deep interest in that area, in making an impact environment, etc. There was a huge disconnect in that because actually, the individuals that have the net worth to invest, tend not to make decisions based upon things like impact investing, that's just a nice, that's a nice to have. So, promoting the fact on, you know, Facebook, for example, that, you know, is female, you know, female founders, and it's all underpinned by that wasn't converting, but as soon as we change the message to then say, you know, we've actually got this range of investments and ETFs, etc. We started seeing conversions, but it went against the grain of what the founder wanted to communicate. Sometimes, you've got to say the things that your market wants to hear as well.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, I see that as well. I see. founders, attaching a lot of the identity of the business and maybe even themselves to a particular message that they want to portray. But then if that isn't necessarily the primary message, that it's going to resonate the best with a particular audience, then as you say, maybe you should just bite the bullet on that and be willing to adapt it, if you want the best results for the company.

Shameer Sachdev

It doesn't mean to say you gotta run undermine your ethics or anything like that, you got to think about where that sits in your communication hierarchy, right. So in this particular instance, it should have been they were actually very cost efficient as a business. So, you know, the fees, pricing, the range of investments should have been priority number one. And then the secondary messages, by the way, we've really, really focused on making the impact change in the world, you know, we're a female founder business, that would work really, really well.

Matthew Todd

Absolutely is, what is the core message that's going to get people's attention and drive towards those conversions? And then what are the other elements and messages that you communicate after that point in time.

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, exactly.

Matthew Todd

So when it comes to moving beyond those early stages, then in terms of scaling, to any startup businesses started to get some traction, you know, they potentially found one marketing channel that's starting to work. What would you recommend they do in terms of scaling that trying to expand their reach? Bring that up a level?

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah. So you know, the kind of like the traffic light system, or the the checklists for, you know, when's the right time to start scaling up is fundamentally, like you said, you found a channel that works and you're, you're acquiring users, you've found an audience that your products really resonating with. And you've got a really, really clear view as to what it costs to acquire a customer, you've established a baseline. Once you've got that baseline, you know, that acts as a barometer for kind of all of the other channels that you can start to expand into. But the first thing is, obviously, you know, if you've got a channel that works, how far can you go with that one particular channel? We've got a client of ours that we've been working with for two and a half years now. And I remember that when we did the pitch for them, we said we would start on Google, then move to Facebook, and then expand out to other channels. Today, even after two and a half years, we haven't gone past Facebook, not because we haven't wanted to, and not because we haven't tested other channels in between. But what we realized is that Google search and Facebook provide the best customer acquisition costs that we can get. And optimizing for those channels is the most efficient thing to do, and acquiring users from there, and then creating landing pages, etc, the customer journey around that has proved to be the most efficient route. So there's no rush to be across 10 channels, it doesn't mean that you shouldn't test. But what you should have to do is just really look to see how you can optimize just channels that you are using. So what I would be doing if it was me if I had a reasonable budget is putting maybe 10, 15, 20% of my overall budget aside for testing out new platforms. And then, you know, the existing sort of 70, 80, 90% of the budget for the current platform that's working, and then just optimize the hell out of it. And then start looking at things that is what I refer to as big levers, the small levers. So thinking about what are the biggest levers that you are able to pull, that's going to have a significant impact on your acquisition costs. So what I mean by that is, is changing the copy on your call to action, from find out more to learn more, it's probably going to be a half a percent to maybe a couple of percent change. But, you know, testing, say, a static ad versus say, a video ad might be a 10 to 15% change. Testing out a landing page that is really closely aligned to the audience that you're targeting and the creative that you've got, say on Facebook is more likely to be a bigger impact than as I said, changing your call to action on the homepage. So what are the big levers that you can pull. Within that, a big level might be, well, we've done really, really well with Facebook and Instagram. Let's test out TikTok. Or, we've done really, really well with LinkedIn, but it's quite expensive. Let's think about creating custom audiences on Facebook, or maybe testing out custom audiences on Twitter. They're going to be big levers that you can pull, especially because you know that you've got creative that is working. So you can pick that creative up, you know, adjusted for the platform that you're going into, see what what impact that has.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, absolutely. And on the LinkedIn, and Facebook, I've certainly seen that before as well, from personal experiences at LinkedIn, although you might think it's a more natural platform to target other businesses, if you're b2b. It can often be more expensive and convert less than something like like Facebook. So I think, yeah, don't make too many assumptions on what the best channel may be. But

do those experiments as well to test, once you've got that baseline? And one thing as well, it'd be good to get your view on is when it comes to doing those experiments, whether it's cost wise, whether it's number of impressions, or whatever it may be, what do you consider to be statistically significant for an experiment to really draw any kind of conclusion from it?

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, that's a really, really good question. So normally, when people sort of ask, you know, how do you go about conducting experiments? You know, the first thing I always say is, you know, we're looking for statistical significance here. So there's nothing I hate more, then we're going to test out a new channel, and you know, we're going to spend 1000 pounds on it, well, that's fine if your budget across say another channel is two or three grand, but if you're spending 50,000 pounds somewhere else, give it a fighting chance. So that's kind of the first thing so you can actually achieve that statistical significance. Plus, on top of that, as well, we don't want to do stretch out the budget too long, because then obviously, that, that there's issues around, you know, sales cycles, and the amount of time it takes to drive users through the funnel the rest of it, it can walp results. But generally speaking, my starting point is, is that I want to see a couple of 100 visits to a landing page that I know is performing. So if we've got a landing page that we know is doing well and we're now going to open up to say, from LinkedIn, to Facebook, you know, I want to see 250 to 500 visits on that landing page to see how it's performing. Now, you've got to use an element of common sense. If you drive 100 users into the page and you haven't got a single conversion, then, you know, it might be worthwhile taking a step back and go well, have I got the message right now? Are we getting click throughs? You know, is the audience right? Is the message that we've got on the ad aligned with the message on landing page, and assuming you've got all of those ducks in a row, you know, then maybe they've maybe a wider issue there. But once you've hit, you know, at least 250 visitors on the landing page, you can make an assumption to say, well, whether or not this channel, this ad, this ad landing page combo for this channel, whether it's working or not. If you have a feeling that it is working, you can start doing some optimizations. The next thing I want to look at, is what are the conversion rates as we make our way down through down through the funnel. So, a very, very typical signup process for FinTech will be a hit the landing page, assuming it's a web based platform, they click a call to action, they go through the first step, which is usually their username and password, then eventually it will be the details and then KYC and then some sort of funding or drawdown if it's lending platform, but some sort of financial transaction at the end of it. And what you want to be doing is optimizing your way down the funnel. So if we're getting lots and lots of people click through fantastic, that's great. Okay, well, you know, why have people not clicked through, you know why have they not converted in starting the signup process? What's up with the signup page there? And then optimize that. Once you nail that down, make your way down the funnel until obviously, you're at a point where you're fully optimized throughout the funnel, there's no point in trying to optimize, you know, a button in your dashboard, if you haven't got your users going through it. And then, you know, going back to the tracking and analytics piece, if you've got good quality tracking and good quality analytics in place, then what you should be able to do is pass back data from the events that have been successfully completed on your website or your app, into the advertising platforms. Platforms like Google and Facebook in particular. And have now reached a point where you're almost better, better off allowing the platform to go out there and find more users that look alike the audiences that have completed those actions. So you want a primary audience that you've developed, through them into the platform, then telling Facebook, hey, go find us more people that look

like this, and these characteristics and these attributes, and then start targeting them, and then getting volume in and then you can start increasing spent. So, there's lots of fun nuances to that. If you're a brand with a smaller budget, you kind of want to start off smaller, then increase your spend and then go wider. If you're brown with a really, really big budget, my suggestion is, is actually just going really, really wide to begin with, and then narrow down. Because if you've got lots of money, the odds are you probably don't have much time to go deliver results. Whereas if you haven't got a huge amount of money, the odds are you've got time on side to get your next round of funding. So you've got to kind of balance those things up.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, absolutely. I think that definitely holds true. Especially when there's not much budget, if you haven't got a lot of budget, but you still got budget to do some of those experiments. What you said earlier about not trying to drag those out for too long, you know, could be something to look at. I've seen, you know, some people take a pretty, very small budget, try and do some experiments, but the timeframe that they're trying to execute that over, they're not giving the platform any chance of optimizing it, because the daily numbers are so low that you know, Facebook doesn't stand the chance of understanding who it should be showing those ads to or not?

Shameer Sachdev

Absolutely, absolutely, yeah, and a lot of platforms have best practices and minimums that you've got to take into consideration. I generally say, 5 to 10,000 platform minimum, is usually what you're looking at. In some instances, you know, this might be on Google, for example, where there's only a handful of keywords that convert, you might spend some 5k. But there's nothing wrong with that, you know, because if you've done the experiments you've done, the hard graphs are working out what does convert and what doesn't convert, then, you know, spending three grand a month consistently to get kind of like a guaranteed number of users at the end of any given month is worthwhile.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, absolutely. It's making sure those numbers work out, isn't it, it's just doing the math on that to make sure that, you know, the payback period on that cost of acquisition. So therefore, you can plan for, you know, best case worst case growth scenarios on the back of that, can't you?

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, and that's really, really good point as well. So those payback periods and lifetime values, you know, the market has changed quite a bit. We've gone, you know, we've gone from a position where it was kind of growth at all costs, and it was just get users in, and, everyone's kind had to put their common sense hats back on. And now it's like, well, we would actually deliver tangible results. And I actually prefer that because, you know, you can make some really good decisions and grow a business once you're looking at the data around, okay, which of these customers are actually higher value to us, and where do they come from? And then how do we replicate that and how do we get more of them? And then that's things where, like, you know, the conversation around LinkedIn comes into play where, yes, you know, LinkedIn can be quite expensive, but it can be a really, really good avenue for attaining high value customers. Maybe not in volume, but you know, those high value customer's might be worth

the 10, 15 pound a click and pull conversion rates? Because actually, once you once you do sign them, and then you do acquire them, they're your big fish.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's about having that joined up perspective. And we're certainly seeing it in startups now, where your sales and marketing a lot more closely aligned with people in a CRO kind of role Chief Revenue Officer kind of role. That should really translate to looking at those products, and seeing that big picture so that you do then get an opportunity to say, you know, we're not just, you know, what, are we converting people at, what's the cost of acquisition. But actually, as you say, where are the high value customers? Where did they come from, and, and look at those and class them differently to the other types of customers who are acquiring? Hopefully, even in terms of product as well, you're looking at the whole onboarding journey, but also beyond that, how the product is actually used. It gives you again, a lot more data a lot more insight into how different people extract value from the platform, which ultimately keeps them as customers.

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah, that's a really, really good point as well, because, again, it goes back to looking at that data, you know, if you can understand what their value is, what they're extracting, you know, you look at that data, you can see that information, go speak to those users, get sound bites from them, because then that can then be translated back into your copy and your messaging. One of my favorite case studies that we for one of our clients that we did was for a company called WayHome, that was disrupting the mortgage market, I won't go into details of the product, but bottom line was, was that their product coincidentally happened to be Shariah-compliant. And, we decided that we wanted to target Muslim homebuyers in the UK. And, there's obviously issues around Facebook on how to target those customers, because you can't target people based on based on religion and ethnicity. So, we pulled together, you know, interests that are likely to be followed by people who are Muslim, you create an audience, and then we create a landing page where we will really explicit around the fact that this was a Shariah-compliant mortgage. So if you weren't Muslim, you weren't going to understand it, and you were just going to bounce. And that exercise is really interesting, because, you know, the way we got to that learning in that experiment in that campaign was, we saw that there was a sharp number of users a sharp increase in the number of Muslim users, when we started advertising on on Facebook. And then we decided to narrow down that audience, create some active, you know, some collateral around it, and then target that audience. And then really, what we then did was, and this is where the tracking and analytics piece comes into play. What we then did was, we said to the, you know, sent to Facebook, anyone who clicks on the call to action, and completes this event, it's very likely that they've understood the product, then it's Shariah-compliant, and therefore, that the Muslim. What we would like you to do is go find more users that look like this. And then serve them the creative, that was very, very much a piece of creative that was aimed at a Muslim family, basically. It had imagery of young Muslim families, in a home buying environment. And then, the campaign just continuously then just kept on optimizing itself. Because we were only targeting users that kind of felt comfortable with that image, click through that, hit that landing page, that then click the button, and then that data to Facebook. And so, we've now got this campaign where it's so so well honed, that it's, it's incredibly efficient. It's now our second best performing audience for that client. Another really good example of that is we tried to target the self employed audience, and we didn't have much success the first time that we did it,

because we, you know, we had a really broad audience for visuals. But what we then did was, we broke down those audiences into very specific categories, plumbers, electricians, etc. And then put a piece of creative in front of them that represented and look like you know, them really. And that went from being a campaign that didn't really perform to probably the best performing campaign. Another learning there is, you know, don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Sometimes it's worthwhile conducting an experiment doing that post mortem again, well, you know, this doesn't make sense. This audience really likes our product, but when we went after them, it didn't quite work. You know, what could we be doing differently here? Giving it another bite of the cherry, you know, and I think like, sometimes you got to be a little bit, you know, a bit of a dog with a bone on this sort of stuff. I'm personally I'm very, very much like that, you know, if I feel a gut feel that this should be working. I try and make sure that objectively tried every avenue to get in front of that audience and try and convert them without obviously blowing, blowing the budget, or putting either traffic and other volume at risk.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's really interesting. I think it's not just does it work? And it's not like a binary yes or no, it's, why isn't this working at the level that we, we wanted it to what are the points for improvement. Again, being specific with a specific audience with a specific campaign, and running multiple was going to be better than trying to shoehorn all of those into one more generic bland campaign, that's not really going to resonate with anyone.

Shameer Sachdev

I mean, you know, in, in principle, any every channel works to acquire users. It's just that some channels are better than others. You can stand outside Liverpool Street Station with flyers for your product. And you'll get a few users. The only problem is, is that the time does cost you in resource, and all of that sort of stuff means that your customer acquisition cost is not efficient enough. So it's a way to acquire users, it's just a very inefficient way. And you didn't take that principle and say, well, actually, we've got a platform here, like, like, TikTok, for example, where the targeting is in still near where Facebook's is, but it's got the audience there. And, you know, it's a growing platform, and the cost per clicks are quite cheap. You've got to say to yourself, well, it may be inefficient to begin with, but how do we make it efficient? And, you know, what are the things that we need to do here. You can then turn an inefficient channel into an efficient channel? I think it's sometimes worthwhile just keeping at it but then without without, without being stubborn as well, at the same time.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, I really like what you just said about any channel can work, because I think a lot of people, especially earlier on in their journey, can blame the channel for what ultimately is a lack of understanding of their audience and the messaging and not having proven that stuff out. And, potentially thinking that is easy, oh, we just give Facebook a few 100 quid or a couple of grand, and we'll have customers flooding to us, I don't understand why no one's coming through, oh, it's Facebook, they're not on there. Let's try LinkedIn, all the, you know, whatever it is, but actually, it's the fact they haven't dialed in that messaging at all.

Shameer Sachdev

When we acquire clients who have got a product that has already attained product market fit, or they've already got competitors in the marketplace doing exactly the same thing. But they've just been around longer or whatever, yeah. And, I quite liked those, because actually, you know, you've know that you've got the capacities got product market fit, that's great, you can actually go straightaway, and look at what sort of activity that they're doing, to give you a bit of a baseline and what sort of channels are working for them. But even with a product like that, you know, take take, for example, like trading platforms, there's nothing new really. Even a platform like that, will will take three, four months, before you achieve a baseline with a paid channel. It takes time to, you know, you know, optimize those audiences, get the right creative in front of them, get the customer journey, right. And then once you've got that, it will, it will suddenly click. We had a chart for this client because they were asking us about, like, when they can start spending more money and, you know, be said to them, well, look, you CACs a bit up and down at the moment, we need to just sort of get that to level out. So we're gonna performance marketing, send them screenshots, you know, with obviously with our client names of client numbers, for the first I think six months and you can literally see for the first two months like the bars were like low and then suddenly sort of midway through sort of what end of month three, beginning month for the bars just doubled in size. And that was just because we nailed the messaging, the algo algorithms were nicely warmed up at that point. The landing pages were on point. The audience had seen the ad a few times as well. And, you know, it just clicked and that's when you can really start scaling.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, absolutely. I think patience has to play a part in anything doesn't I think there's no immediate win. It's not like you you turn an ad set on and suddenly customers are breaking your door down.

Shameer Sachdev

Well, if that was a case, you know, it would be a lot easier really wouldn't.

Matthew Todd

Yeah, it takes time for you to figure that stuff out. But also takes time for the algorithm to figure that stuff out. And to see what works to iterate, improve and test ultimately, isn't it? So thank you for sharing. I think it's really, really useful. And, especially to our audience, whether you're at the earliest stages or starting to think about scaling up, a lot of what you've said is going to be really, really useful to them. But before we we wrap things up, is there any other advice that you'd want to leave them with?

Shameer Sachdev

I think, you know, we've talked about scaling. The other part of scaling, obviously, is, once you've kind of reached a point and said that, you know, you've got a baseline and you've started, you know, really optimizing your channel spending more money? The next decision that you need to make is, yes, do we need to test out other platforms. And while you're doing that, you know, you'll start to understand whether or not you can get acquire those same users on other channels for cheaper or not? And the next question, then is think about the geographical elements, and then also the audiences as well. So, is it more cost efficient to acquire a different audience on the same platform? Or the same audience on a different honor on a different platform? The other thing to think about as well is, you know, if neither of those things are efficient, does it does it make sense to then apply that same audience on the same platform be in a different territory? And you really got to move your ego to the side? Because, there's

always a nice feeling about doing lots. But doing lots doesn't always translate into getting lots. think you're in a better position if you if your marketing is somewhat a little bit linear and boring. Because, it's less to babysit and look after, right? So you got to think about, you know, are we going into that other audience because we just want to, and have you really depleted the audience that you're going after, at the moment? Are we launching into a new country for the sake of launching into a new country? Are we just doing TikTok ads, because we just fancy doing something a bit different? You could ask yourself those questions and see if it really stacks up. Once you've kind of made those decisions, you can then really then start to decide how you want to expand out. And that journey of expansion. The analogy that we always use here is, is what we call, you know, a champagne pyramid. So you know, seeing all of the glasses all stacked on top of each other, you pour the champagne at the top and it flows all the way down. The champagne is your budget in the day. The top part is your most efficient audience channel, country. And then really, then the glasses that sit underneath them will be a combination of different audience, different channel or different country. And it's just thinking about, you know, what's next on that next on that champagne pyramid, and to get all the way down to the bottom. And then naturally, you'll then hit, you know, certain barriers, you know, as you're pouring the champagne, but you can't get in any more efficiency. So then you got to think about things like are there considerations around brand awareness that your business needs to start looking at. You're doing an amazing job on Google search across a couple of different audiences, across a couple of different countries, but, you know, you're you're just hitting you're hitting your head on the ceiling if you try and spend any more money. If we then move on to meta, but it's still seeing the same problem. It may be a case of like, do you need to start elevating the brand, putting money into into your brand awareness piece? So do you need to look at things like influencer or traditional marketing? When you're in that sort of stage, I think your quarterly review of what what is working, what isn't working, you know, trends in data, what is that telling us? And then how does that align with your overall business targets and business objectives? I think the other thing as well is when a business gets a significant amount of funding, and knowing what to do with that. There's a big difference from going from being a seed company who's got a million bucks to a Series A, that's got 8 million, or a Series A, that's got 8 million to Series B, that's now got 50 million. And what to do around there. From talking to founders, one of the key things you got to look at, is making sure you've got the right hire at the appropriate time. So making sure that you haven't got someone to senior with a small budget, because you're not gonna get ROI from a 50 million pound budget when they're looking after some basic spending. And then, you know, vice versa as well, not having someone to Junior, who's not used to working with, you know, big, big budgets. And, thinking about the sort of size of team that you want in place, what do you need to have in house? What can you go to an agency for? There's always that debate on performance marketing. Should we have performance marketing in house? Or should we go to an agency? To be honest with you, I think that's down to where your cmo feels comfortable? It's each their own at the end of the day, and I don't think there's any hard and fast rules around that. I see a lot of what I call, you know, ego based marketing, and if I see campaigns on sides of buses and on tubes, I'm always a little bit like whose idea really was that? There was one that was a money transfer platform, targeting, you know, you know, Indian and African expats. And they were advertising on the tube. And I thought, yeah, they do take the tube. But the largest concentration of Indian expats is actually not right, in the centre of London. You've got pockets in and around London, and then in the north of England, as well. And actually, for the budget that you spent there, you could have hit all of those audiences more efficiently, and then lay overlay that with some digital spend. Just because you've got a lot of money doesn't mean that you need to go buy expensive media for the sake

of it. And just being really, really mindful about how you want to spend that budget. Because especially in the current market, you know, it's really important to be efficient. So, planning that out, you know, again, thinking about what data do we have, what have we learned? How can we leverage what we've learned? What do we know, what are our knowledge gaps, and frankly if you've got 50 million pounds worth of funding, you can afford to put 50 to 100,000 into some market research, to fill in those knowledge gaps, and then making really, really educated decisions on how to spend that budget. And making sure you didn't have the team and partners in place to deliver that efficiently.

Matthew Todd

Absolutely. I think that was great advice. And I think as you go up that kind of go through that growth journey, as well. I think those early hiring decisions can be quite tricky to cool because like you say, a lot of early startups especially will try and think they can hire one person that can kind of do a bit of everything. But if you get someone that's really, really good at top level strategy and scaling to the numbers you want to get to, they used to working with a big budget and they used to working with a team underneath them to do the execution so they're not a standalone hire. You can make without all the other resources to go along with it. And vice versa, if you just try and hire someone who's kind of, you know, very specific in terms of their area of expertise, then they're going to be lacking in other areas and not have the strategy piece. And I think that's where agencies can and should come in.

Shameer Sachdev

Yeah. And it's not fair to kind of stick that on a CMO, you know, in, you know, ask them to post stuff on social media and stuff. And just being honest as well, it's, it's probably been so long since they run an ad campaign of their own, like, physically managed to campaign on their own. But that's not why that's not why paying and paying them that money. The other way around as well, right, which is bringing somebody in who's too Junior, and usually there's two to three issues with that. One, you know, they don't really know how to set strategy. And again, it's not their fault. They haven't had experience in how to procure and manage an agency. And we've had this way, you know, we've had someone quite Junior, who's contacted us and done, you know, reached out to us and stuff, but actually hasn't managed that process. And, in the end, you know, we'd be pretty chilled out, but if it was a less patient agency owner, they may have got a bit pissed off. You can burn bridges that way. And then the third thing is, is then just managing that day to day, you know, we those agencies, and with the activity that's going on, and then being able to feed back the data that a founder needs in order to make decisions because founders notoriously are very busy. So you need someone who's had experience to go well, look, you know, I've been in this situation before, I know what you got, and what information you guys are going to need, I can manage this. And I can provide this to you. And I think paying that slight premium more from perhaps slightly slightly more senior is well worth it at the same time save yourself some money and don't bring in a CMO when you've got a 500,000 pound budget.

Matthew Todd

Absolutely. If you really do have growth ambitions, planned out, you know, when you should hire the right seniority of people should be should be part of that plan as well. I can summarize our conversation in one word, I think it'd be data. And I think it's the importance of knowing your data, knowing your numbers, know what you're trying to achieve, you know, planning acting accordingly. So yeah, thank

you for your time today much appreciated. Obviously, for any fintechs listening, we'll leave links in the show notes so people can check out what you do in a bit more detail as well.

Shameer Sachdev

Amazing. Thank you very much for your time.

Matthew Todd

Thank you for joining me on this episode of Inside the ScaleUp. Remember for the show notes and in depth resources from today's guest you can find these on the website insidethescaleup.com. You can also leave feedback on today's episode, as well as suggest guests and companies you'd like to hear from. Thank you for listening.