

COVID-19: Interview with Alex Olley, Co-founder of Reachdesk

Reachdesk helps sales, marketing, customer success and HR teams deliver moments that matter using integrated direct mail and gifting. Maddyness spoke with Alex Olley, Co-founder and Head of Marketing to understand how the company coped during the pandemic and what the future holds.

Temps de lecture : minute

25 September 2020

I'd love to say it all started in a bedroom or cafe. But I'd be lying. It started in an office, where we identified the problem. We were struggling to break through to prospects using traditional digital channels (email, LinkedIn, ads, etc.) and needed another way to win. We tried direct mail and gifting, and it really worked. Response rates more than doubled, and our ability to create connections with prospects and customers went through the roof.

The only problem was that we couldn't scale it, and it was impossible to measure the ROI of our efforts. So we fixed the problem to solve our own challenges. A year later, there are nearly 50 of us, and we've tripled in size during the lockdown. We have teams in New York and London and have recently raised our Series A of \$6M (~€5M). Now it's time to grow up and scale.

[Maddyness] What have been the biggest professional challenges during lockdown?

[Alex] Working life seems like one all-day Zoom meeting. It's not quite the

same communicating with people via a screen. The biggest challenge has been onboarding new starters in a way that makes them feel like they are part of the team and culture. Of course, there are rays of sunshine in the form of efficiency and getting stuff done. We've had to be more process-driven and fixed a lot that was broken to ensure individuals are enabled.

What have been the biggest personal challenges during lockdown?

The obvious personal challenge is that I don't have an office at home. But then again, few of us do. It's hard to tear myself away from work, as it's too tempting to keep chipping away at things. Luckily, I've found a routine that involves getting up earlier and doing exercise. The best part is getting to see my 10-month old son a lot more, which is the most rewarding part and a real silver lining.

Was remote working a new thing for you and if so will you be adapting your work to allow more of it?

We are a very young company and worked a lot of evenings and weekends to get Reachdesk going, which wasn't too long ago. This meant we were already set up to do the remote working dance. A lot of our sales and customer success meetings were held over Zoom too, so it wasn't a massive change. We will definitely have a remote working element to our working life moving forward to allow for a more flexible approach to work.

How have you been keeping your teams happy?

Competitions have worked well, particularly for sales. We still do virtual

drinks, celebrate birthdays, team quizzes, etc. Something that has worked really well is sending surprise gifts and swag to colleagues' homes. It makes the relationship more tangible.

As a leader, have you successfully managed your (and your teams) mental resilience through lockdown?

I was a lawyer previously. I thought I was used to the hard grind of flying solo. However, the lockdown was totally different as our personal lives were affected too. We've gotten used to over-communicating with one another and really operating as a team.

The internal support network has been essential and helped us build trust with one another. This, in turn, has led to a positive approach to working. I believe this lockdown has made us more resilient mentally, as well. We know what needs to be done and don't live in fear of failure.

Have you made any changes to your business and business model?

The business model is the same. We had to change the entire business and product. Luckily, it has served us well. Before lockdown, our company was mainly used to surprise and delight prospects, customers, and employees in their offices. Now offices are closed, so we had to build products that allowed our offering to be used in a remote environment alongside a digital-only offering.

What have you implemented to stay

competitive?

We have released products that help our customers win in a remote world of work. We have also invested heavily in our Customer Success and Project Management offering. Our customers need more support and help, as teams have shrunk in most companies. Outsourcing this to our teams internally is not only a cost-saving exercise but also helps our customers become more efficient.

How is your relationship with your investors?

Very strong and built on trust. I've never had a disgruntled email or phone call. We have the right investors who are on board with what we are doing.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID?

Yes. We've weathered what I believe is the worst part of the storm. Now we need to crack on and really start to scale.

Are there any changes in society/economy that you think will help you?

Society longs for more human connections right now. Most of us don't see our colleagues every day. We can't attend networking events or trade shows. Building rapport in a digital world is getting harder as we grow tired of online fatigue. Reachdesk helps businesses overcome this challenge. If this continues, then this in itself will support our growth as we help customers address these real-life challenges.

Tell us about your future post-COVID?

We are building a company where we want our colleagues to feel energized every morning. It's important we maintain this goal. I believe if you look after your people first, it will help your product innovate and, in return, help grow the business.

The next chapter is about us becoming an essential part of the sales and marketing tech stack. Nobody knows what the world will look like post-COVID. We just want to ensure we are there for companies during the pandemic and can help them weather the storm. Once it is over, we will make the right changes to help companies continue to break through the noise.



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Article by Alex Olley