

# Meet Unlock, engaging remote employees effortlessly and by design

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Maria Wlosinska, CEO and cofounder of Unlock about creating meaningful connections in remote and hybrid teams, the power of communication and the importance of the founder journey.

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Unlock makes it possible for remote and hybrid teams to build meaningful personal connections. We work with medium and large businesses to improve team experiences and engage remote employees effortlessly and by design.

## What was the catalyst for launching the product? / Why are you doing what you're doing?

Connecting people through experiences has always been a central theme in my life. Whether interactions were enabled by technology, or at events I organised within the tech community, I have always been motivated and energised by the connections people form through shared experiences and memorable moments.

I moved to London in 2019, and met my amazing co-founders, Darshak and Eli

while on the Antler program. We were all really excited about the future of work and what was needed to re-engineer the process of building team connections. We know that successful team connections aren't always created organically, but often require a formal structure and scheduling – something that teams struggle to create.

In our traditional work environments, moments that form connections – from serendipitous coffee chats to regular team events – are not quite as random as they seem. They are a result of invisible social structures that lead to recurring communication, hidden within office designs and social routines.

The rise of distributed work and life behind a computer screen, has liberated us as much as it has abandoned us. It has created an immense disconnect from what it truly means to be a team. We saw the opportunity to enable companies to leverage the power of remote and hybrid work, and introduce employee experiences that were designed with intention, meant for a virtual first environment, and that measurably increased team connection and productivity.

## Tell me about the product – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers, USP and so on?

Unlock helps teams build lasting connections by providing technology and a framework for growing relationships in a remote team. We help team leaders orchestrate the process (before, during and after) of connecting their team effortlessly through unique and curated experiences. These experiences cover any moment of meaning, from pre-boarding, onboarding, team socials, cross-team events, company wide events to – eventually – in-person experiences.

We strive to not only drastically reduce the complexity and hassle of organising team gatherings, but also assist teams to connect in a more insightful and meaningful way. A great example would be our customer Forto, where the teams have seen a 60% improvement in peer relationships score, after just using Unlock for six months!

Although increasing team engagement is something of relevance for all companies across all industries, we have seen particular success with tech scale ups and global enterprises. Initially, we developed our customer base mainly through word of mouth and our personal networks. However, as we are growing, we have now developed a more scalable methodology and kicked off

plans for all marketing channels – watch this space for all the exciting things that lie ahead! Along the way, we have learnt a key lesson – one of the best ways to reach customers is organically. So focus on providing impeccable benefit and service to your pilot customers, and they will turn into your most valuable marketing channel.

## How has the business evolved since its launch?

In fall 2021, we launched purely as an activity marketplace. However, we quickly realised that companies and teams struggled more with the logistics of organising meaningful experiences regularly, than with finding them. With this in mind, we transitioned into a subscription based model in January 2022. Since then we have seen steady growth of 35% MoM growth and are now working with amazing companies like American Express, Google and fast-growth scaleups like Algolia, Forto and Pleo! Our customers start using Unlock for one team, and often expand to multi teams or multiple use cases, leading to a strong net revenue retention and upsell metrics.

## What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

The people you meet throughout this journey! Whether it's incredible talent

that you stumble upon and then end up hiring, or your customers, or other founders building great companies, or the investors you partner with. At the end of the day, it's really all about the people. My biggest goal in life is to always control who I spend quality time with, and being a founder has opened up incredible opportunities to do so. You just have to ensure that you're prepared to make the most out of those you meet, and strive to learn every single day.

## Which founders or businesses do you see as being the most inspirational?

There are so many founders that inspire me, but I would rank Melanie, founder of Canva and Mathilde, founder of Front, top of that list. I am truly inspired by Mathilde's guide to discipline, and how she argues that it is the single most important trait for a startup's success. In terms of businesses, Canva and Notion are not only two of my favourite products, but also motivate me to build a powerful business based on simple products that users love.

## What has been your biggest business fail?

Unlock started off as a different idea. We were initially focused on creating connections with future employees, rather than within existing teams. The value proposition was not well founded, and we struggled to gain any significant traction, or painfully, generate much revenue. It was not the best feeling to have after you've just closed your first round of funding. So we decided to go back to the drawing board – we transformed the idea into what it is today, and rebuilt the entire platform to focus on creating team connections through carefully curated experiences. With that we started to see more promising metrics.

Even though that might be seen as a big business failure, and we continue to fail on smaller things till date, we now realise that every step back opens up massive opportunities. In the end, I see setbacks as a positive thing. As one says, failing is part of learning, so what might appear to be a failure, is instead a redirection to something greater.

## What are the things you're really good

## at as a leader?

Communication is probably one of my strongest skills. Being a people person, it's really natural for me to approach people, inspire them and get them excited. I love reaching out to potential talent to hire, or speaking with customers. Having lived in multiple countries and dabbled in various opportunities, I've developed an agility towards learning and am able to switch contexts quickly where needed. Strategic and critical thinking is probably the third characteristic I'd highlight.

## Which areas do you need to improve on?

I have always been critical about the smallest of details, and quality. I'm slowly learning to delegate, without compromising quality to increase velocity of execution. After all, progress is better than perfection, and speed matters at this stage. Another thing would be patience. I'm understanding that great things take time, and it's sometimes ok not to see results immediately. If you put in the hard work, the results will eventually come.

## What's in store for the future of the business?

There are so many possibilities! But at the moment, we are mainly focused on two key things - investing in additional growth channels to drive customer acquisition, and enhancing our product offering to appeal to more use cases. We will also be fundraising, and to continue the momentum we have with customers, expanding the team in the near future. So many exciting things to come!

## What advice would you give to other founders or future founders?

Invest time with other founders at the same stage as you are. The founder journey can be incredibly time consuming and energy draining at times, so it's really important to surround yourself with people who truly understand it. I'm very thankful to have amazing founder peers that I know I can call or text for any problem, and they will always have a thoughtful perspective to share.

And finally, a more personal question! We like to ask everyone we interview about their daily routine and the rules they live by. Is it up at 4am for yoga, or something a little more traditional?

I'm definitely not a morning person! So no 4am yoga for me. I am most productive in the later hours and love working between 9pm-1am. In general, I don't believe in setting rules, but instead on the belief that if you show up and do work, learn and improve, every single day, then eventually things will happen. So my daily routine is to practise discipline and perseverance. If I need a little energy boost on a daily basis, say before an important customer meeting or investor call, I usually put on a great song and dance. Motion creates emotion, and I believe it helps you radiate positive energy. Having said that, there is one small daily ritual I try to never forget - and that is to give a quick call to my mom or dad. Family is always the number one thing in life.

**Maria Wlosinska is the CEO and cofounder of Unlock.**

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Article by MARIA WLOSINSKA