

Meet RELEX, making the consumer goods supply chain more efficient

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Johanna Småros, cofounder and CMO of RELEX about being a great corporate citizen, growth and delivering measurable value throughout the supply chain.

What was the catalyst for launching RELEX?

Working as supply chain researchers, we saw that demand forecasting and replenishment ordering in retail supply chains could be done in a more accurate and automated way, especially for the more challenging products and situations, like fresh food products, promotions, and seasons. The existing solutions weren't very sophisticated, so we decided to build a solution ourselves.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work

with, how you reach customers and so on?

As a business, *RELEX Solutions* has two main goals. Firstly, we want to make consumer goods supply chain more efficient by taking out waste and cost by making our clients more efficient and more adaptive to change at the same time by leveraging technology. Secondly, we want to be a great company to work with and work for, treating customers, colleagues and partners fairly and respectfully and being a good corporate citizen.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

RELEX was founded in 2005. Since then, we've grown around 50% annually, and change has been the only constant. The organisation has grown, we have continued to develop and expand our offering, and we have entered into new markets across the globe. The only thing that has stayed the same is our commitment to our values. From a customer perspective, we work hard to ensure that each of them sees "we deliver measurable value" and "the customer is a friend" come to life when working with us.

Tell us about the working culture at RELEX

One of our core values is "a colleague is a friend". This doesn't necessarily mean you are best friends with everyone. Nevertheless, we expect everyone to be treated with respect and expertise and valued over authority. One thing many new starters highlight after joining is that everyone is super helpful and goes out of their way to answer their questions, find information or identify the right person to ask.

How are you funded?

We bootstrapped for the first ten years until 2015, when we entered the North American market. In 2015, Summit invested in us. Then in 2019, TCV came on board. And most recently, we raised €500M at a valuation of €5B with Blackstone as the lead investor. I feel we have a good relationship with our investors and that they are equally excited about our prospects for the future, which is why they are all still along for the ride.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Maintaining growth comes with a plethora of challenges – if it were easy, anyone could do it, but the challenges often change over time. In the beginning, it's about securing those first clients when you don't have references. Later on, it's about maintaining and communicating technology leadership in a competitive global market. Through all this, you need to ensure the organisation grows in the right way and everyone is on the same page despite continuous changes.

There is no silver bullet to address all these challenges, but a few helpful things are: communicating frequently and openly, making yourself available for questions and differing views, and focusing on delivering measurable value to your customers. That last point is essential because if we fail to deliver unrivalled value, there is no reason for us to exist.

How does RELEX answer an unmet need?

We have brought a lot of new technology to market. We adopted a SaaS (software as a service), cloud-based delivery model right at the start and were among the first companies to leverage in-memory computing at scale. This made it easier and faster for clients to buy and implement our solutions and enabled them to benefit from unprecedented computational power, allowing them to do more granular planning for a longer time horizon than ever before, which translated into more accurate demand planning, less waste, and more efficient use of inventory, space, capacity and workforce. Over the years, we've continued to invest heavily in R&D, which has allowed us to further improve planning accuracy but also link more and more planning processes together, such as supply chain, retail space, promotions, capacity, and workforce planning to unlock even more value for our clients.

What's in store for the future?

Growth is in our DNA. We aim to continue on our growth trajectory by expanding geographically and growing our offering, helping to bring more extensive parts of the consumer goods supply chains together. With growth comes growing pains, a lot of excitement, and a wide range of opportunities for talented people.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

I have received a lot of poor advice over the years, which makes me reluctant to advise others. It's super valuable to learn from others, but at the same time, it's important to keep in mind that what worked in one context may not work in another context, meaning that you need to continuously think about why something worked and whether the same prerequisites are there in your present situation. So, even if advice is given with the best intentions, it's still your responsibility to assess whether it makes sense for you and how it would help you attain the things that are important to you in a way that matches your values.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I have a lot of routines because they free up mental capacity – my mornings all look the same, I have a small stack of clothes that I use, and I don't mind eating the same things over and over again. I don't think rules are helpful, though. At least for me, best-effort thinking results in more peace of mind. You do your best in the areas that matter, and when things don't go as planned, you know you did your best and don't beat yourself up before the outcome wasn't perfect.

Johanna Småros is cofounder and CMO of RELEX.