

# One Knight in Product - E175 - Forget the Funnel

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

customers, marketing, funnel, product, company, book, customer experience, work, claire, understand, wrote, team, process, milestones, georgiana, feel, kpis, website, leads, people

## SPEAKERS

Claire Suellentrop, Georgiana Laudi, Jason Knight

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Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight. And on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. Now, speaking of conversations these days, you don't have to go too far before you bump into the latest AI powered career support solution. But where's the humanity? Now, don't get me wrong. I'm in love with AI as the next person, but I think it's an AND not an OR, and there's still plenty of room for empathy and personal connection. So if you want to put the human touch into your career development plans, why not head over to My Mentor Path at <https://www.mymentorpath.com> and sign up for free to be a mentor, mentee or both. Make sure to check the show notes for more details. So, tonight we're going to be speaking about the venerable sales funnel you know that upside down triangle with all the leads going in at the top and the lovely sales dripping out the bottom one by one but as the funnel had its day delights guests think maybe it has and that we need to concentrate on our customers jobs to be done and consider the whole customer experience to be successful. If you're struggling with your product marketing or just want to hear what this is all about, stick with us on One Knight in Product.



Jason Knight 01:16

So, tonight my two guests are Georgiana Laudi and Claire Suellentrop. Georgiana is a product marketing and growth advisor and currently the fractional VP of Marketing at Bitly. As a former florist and current budding waterfront real estate developer, Georgiana's Apparently one on the way to put in our waterfront property empire but on site reinventing SaaS marketing. But, she's not got a monopoly on invention because we've also got Claire, a former heavy metal DJ (we'll compare music notes later) and previously Director of Marketing at Calendly and co-founder of Userlist, who started out as a secondhand book buyer, before joining forces with Georgiana to write their own book that has got product marketing social media of a flame with plays. They're both here tonight to talk about why we all need to forget the funnel, to which all I've got to say is what funnel? Who said anything about funnels? And we're gonna go deep into why product marketing is broken, and how we're gonna fix it with their new book on customer led growth, also called Forget the Funnel. There's that funnel word again! Georgiana, Claire, welcome, and how are you?



Claire Suellentrop 02:11

That was a top notch introduction. Truly unmatched!



Jason Knight 02:16

To be honest, it's all downhill from here. So why don't you both quickly, say your names for the microphone so that people know who to attribute what to and and who's saying what things



Georgiana Laudi 02:27

I will introduce myself first. This is Gia.



Claire Suellentrop 02:29

And this is Claire over here.



Jason Knight 02:31

Excellent. Now I've one will know your voices and hopefully not use them for surreptitious AI voice generation to start putting other podcasts out in your name. But anyway, first things first, we've got a book called forget the funnel, we've also got a company called forget the funnel. So we'll talk about the book in a few minutes. But what are you two doing day to day what your clients are? Forget the funnel? And how are you helping them.



Claire Suellentrop 02:51

So as you stated in that incredible introduction, Gia and I both have a background in SaaS marketing, especially, or particularly product marketing, which maybe at some point in this podcast, we'll get to the difference between the two. But point being in our day to day, we're working with SaaS companies and recurring revenue businesses, primarily B2B, but on always, to help them understand really who their best customer is right? Rather than trying to cater to everyone, and then helping them figure out how to more effectively attract and activate and retain that best fit customer. Gee, I think I'd like to leave it to you as to how this moves away from the more traditional idea of a funnel. Since forget, the funnel was really as a name was was your idea to begin with?



Georgiana Laudi 03:41

Yeah, I mean, it really was born from the just basically, the fact that we were we're both focused on recurring revenue businesses and the funnel leaves out the most critical part of your relationship with a customer, being post acquisition and high lifetime value and really

building long term relationships with your customers. And thinking about your customers is something you like push through or worse, pour through a funnel is just really a not a very thoughtful way to think about your customer relationships, and is very sort of generic and doesn't really feel good either. So I mean, the the the biggest culprit really being about post acquisition and retention relationships not being part of the process, but also it being generic and pretty meaningless. From a sort of customer standpoint, product standpoint, company and brand standpoint. So yeah, that's, that's why down with the funnel and lots of better alternatives.



Jason Knight 04:42

Well, we'll talk a lot more about destroying that funnel in a minute. But I did also see things on your website, or maybe it was in the book acknowledgments that Claire knows how to get the insight and Gia, you know how to apply it. Do you think that's a fair kind of division of responsibilities?



Claire Suellentrop 04:57

Absolutely. So When we initially met back in 2017, we should have, we should have a party at some point, bringing some milestone anniversary, I, what I brought to our dynamic was this extensive background in customer research, the ability to gather deep insight through customer interviews. And then Gia is area of expertise was taking that insight and operationalizing it. So helping teams figure out how to act on it day to day as a company scales. Yes, in the book more succinctly put, I know how to get the insight and Gia knows what to do with them.



Jason Knight 05:37

But I guess, as far as again, as far as understand, Forget the Funnel didn't start out as a company at all, like, obviously, you both had jobs, you were doing advising, consulting, whatever it is you were doing on the side at the time. But it's almost started out as more of a content play where you started to take some of the insights and the learnings that you've taken from some of your day jobs, and started to kind of propagate that out to the world of marketing so that they could get better at what they do. But at some point, you then sat there and decided, well, let's make this into actual company where we go out and do that effectively as part of our day to day jobs instead. So what was it that made you decide that having done all this content stuff, you know, I mean, obviously, we all love doing content stuff, but to actually turn that into a business. And that's sort of the precursor to going out and getting paying clients?



Georgiana Laudi 06:22

Yeah, it's like you said it started... Forget the Funnel just started as a as a workshop series really targeted at a folks in house at tech companies, folks in marketing roles at tech companies who were struggling. And that was really our sort of M.O. for getting started with this was like, you know, helping those marketers get out of the weeds of execution, stop

thinking about their relationship with customers through the lens of this funnel, and start thinking a little bit more strategically and having a more significant seat at the table, so to speak, and being seen as revenue drivers inside of these tech companies instead of just, you know, order takers, or the person who executes on everybody else's marketing ideas.



Jason Knight 07:05

Oh, you don't have to tell a product management guy about that, to be honest. But, you know, maybe that's a shared pain that we can take with us together. But is that clear? Was that something that echoes with you as well? Or did you have other motivations to kind of get into that game as well?



Claire Suellentrop 07:19

I think Gia summed it up very nicely. I also want to acknowledge that yes, this challenge of being seen as an order taker does cross both the marketing and product sides of the house. Somebody else that I think is helpful too, or additional context that might be interesting is when we first met, we were both, you know, doing our own individual consulting work. And forget the funnel. And the plan to start a content series together, really stemmed from the fact that we both needed to do our own marketing lead generation. And it seemed more fun to do something together. Plus, Gia had expressed frustration that she's a very slow writer. And so she, she wasn't interested at the time, and like, you know, putting her thoughts into articles or newsletters, you had the makings of a book already in your head, like way back then. So this book version of forget, the funnel has been a very long time coming.



Georgiana Laudi 08:13

Yeah, there was, um, there was sort of this process of working with companies that I kind of couldn't unsee from my sort of origin story in 2013, visiting Airbnb and seeing their customer journey map, which, by the way, is on a revival tour right now, which I can't believe the timing of that. But it really inspired something in me for sure. And that process of basically deconstructing the customer experience identifying those milestones, developing KPIs around those milestones, I, once I saw it, I couldn't unsee it, and I, you know, went back in house and leverage it in house. And then when I left my in house role, it was something that I continued to do with the companies that I was working with, in addition to you know, stuff like helping them hire or like mentor, their head of marketing or whatever, you know, the company sort of needed in terms of, you know, marketing expertise, depending on the stage of the company. But when Claire and I started running these workshops together, we ended up in this really cool opportunity where we got to learn about each other's sort of philosophies and ways of working with these product companies. And the more and more workshops that we ran, the more and more we were like there's something here, there's a way to connect these things. And so yeah, definitely the the process of deconstructing the customer experience and operationalizing for teams. That idea was definitely something that I was thinking about, even it's sort of the at the beginnings of us running this content series together. But eventually what ended up happening was, we'd been running the content series together, having a grand old time, basically like running this side project, both doing our independent consultancies, and then we ended up with the opportunity to work with a couple of companies who genuinely needed both Have our skill

sets. And we were like, Okay, this is this is the opportunity we we've got a try this on and see how this works. And we basically worked on a project together and it went amazingly. And then we kind of Claire refers to it as we got business married, we sort of merged our consultancies and decided to keep the name and we just sort of made it official and then started to work with company after company and turned this sort of way of running customer research and operationalizing it into a framework, thus, the customer led growth framework that we wrote the book about,



Jason Knight 10:35

Oh, well, congratulations. And long May the marriage last but let's talk about that book, also called forget the funnel, seems to be a very natural step from some of the work you're doing, as Claire just said, like maybe it was something that you kind of already had in your head, and you just needed to find a way to get it out. But it took, as far as I can understand, about two years to get it out of your head, or your combined heads onto the page or the Kindle. So a big investment of time for people that are also probably quite busy with all this consulting and advising and all the work that you're doing. So what was it that made you specifically say, this book has got to come out? And we've got to work on it. And we've got to spend two years on it. I guess, maybe the two year thing came later. But like, what was it that inspired that?



Claire Suellentrop 11:18

So many thoughts. And Gia, I would like you to chime in with yours as well, ever since the early days of working together and knowing that Gia had this concept for a book in her head, and she had notes everywhere. And she had attempted multiple times to work with accountability partners, or get it written in some way around. Yeah, two years ago, we were in a conversation with Bob, Bob Moesta, I'm sorry, I should be more specific.



Jason Knight 11:46

We all love Bob,



Claire Suellentrop 11:48

Who doesn't? Such a wonderful person!



Jason Knight 11:51

100%.



Claire Suellentrop 11:51

But we, we were really asking him about his experience, having written multiple books at that point. And we were telling him, we've gotten our framework to a point at which it should be we

want to put it down on paper, but we're kind of afraid, too afraid to invest the time given that we are very busy. And he stopped us and he said, this book needs to exist, you need to put this book out into the world, which was a pretty big endorsement for spending the time on the project. His view of it was, you know, he had he had just written demand side sales. Yeah, fantastic book. And what he said to us was, I do some I do some teaching on the side, if I've taught in sales and marketing environments, there needs to be a new, modern approach to marketing that people can learn. And so it's very flattering for him to say this needs to exist. I don't know if we would have gotten out of our way otherwise, and actually committed to doing it. Because it has been such a long process. But your credits to Bob, on that one. Gia, do you... Do you have anything to add?

G

Georgiana Laudi 12:56

I mean, just maybe why it took so long. Luckily, the reason why it took as long as it did was because we were really busy. And we were you know, it's not like we were in a position to take a retreat, and you know, write it in a weekend or these, I don't know, just doesn't even sound realistic to me, but we'll do it. But we basically continued to run our business. Throughout the process, obviously, we, we were working with the companies that we were writing about, you know, as we were writing about them, and so that was positive, but we were dedicating just a few hours every week to writing the book. So that's why it took as long as it did. But I'm not really sure we would have been able to pull it off realistically, had we not gone about it that way. Because you know we, again, luckily, we were very busy. And we had a lot of companies coming to us and wanting to work with us. And we're not in a position to turn those down. So we tried to do both.



Jason Knight 13:51

Yeah, no, I can imagine it's pretty tricky. I mean, even just writing bits and odds and sods of content. Sometimes when you're also doing some consulting and coaching and all that good stuff starts to get a bit much. So the very thought of even starting to write a book is something I'm always thinking, how could it be? And then you're like, oh, that sounds like an awful amount of work. But I'm glad that Bob got you along that path.

G

Georgiana Laudi 14:11

Yeah, actually, to that point, we had to make a very deliberate decision to sort of stop marketing, because we were looking for, there's only so many hours in a week that we can dedicate to marketing. And so we made this very deliberate decision. We actually paused our workshops, we paused basically all marketing. And that was our marketing time. It was behind the scenes. Nobody was seeing it, unfortunately. But it was a major investment of time. But we admittedly had to basically pause marketing because we've made the decision to do this.



Jason Knight 14:45

Fair enough. Well, the books here now and before we talk about what's in it, I do want to call out that there's been some super positive feedback from the good and the great of Product Marketing Twitter. Everyone's taking their pictures of themselves holding a book and smiling In

saying all these great things about it, it's starting to rack up the five star reviews on Amazon. I've read it myself, obviously you, I've posted myself about it and said how much I enjoyed it and how much I recommend it. So I'm guessing all of this feels pretty good, especially given the time that you spent on it. But is there any particular feedback that you've had that between you that has made this feel that it was just really worthwhile putting this down and putting this out?

 Claire Suellentrop 15:23

There's one note that came in to our inboxes, a couple of months back from someone who purchased like an early access version, just like a, you know, a shitty PDF that we had made available? Because we had been getting questions like, when is this thing coming out? You've been working on this for so long. So we did put out a low-fi PDF. And in response to that, at one point, there was a woman who reached out she's the head of marketing or director of marketing within the company she works for. And she had read the book, gone through the process with her team. And the CEO of the company had said to her, the customer experience map that was built from that came out of this work is probably the most valuable thing our company has ever created. Wow, that felt really meaningful to me.




Jason Knight 16:12

Well, that could be damning with faint praise, by the way, like they could have put out a lot of rubbish before that. But let's take this... take the win!

 Claire Suellentrop 16:17

Potentially!

 Georgiana Laudi 16:20

yeah, I had forgotten about that email, Claire. Thank you for reminding me of that. That's great. I think the other thing, too, that has been really great to hear from many folks actually, was that they sat down to read the book and like, didn't stop, like God went through the entire length of the book. And I say entire length, it's a short book, mind you deliberately short book. But to know that so many people sat down with it, and went from front to back in one sitting is incredible. Because I mean, that says, I mean, it says it's a short book, which is, which is good to reinforce that. But it also that it resonated, and that it was interesting enough to keep going with it. And our sort of M.O. with it was this is not meant to be a theoretical book, it is meant to be very practical and useful. And the idea is that you should read it from front to back to begin, and then go back and reference it. So it's very reassuring to know that that at least that part is working. And then, to Claire's point, that people are actually able to like execute on it and feel really good and give very positive feedback, make, you know, really strategic decisions, not only from a marketing standpoint, but also higher level than that, and even on the product side is definitely super, super valuable and great to know,



Jason Knight 17:39

Yeah, got to stop taking those orders. But you're both marketers. So it's time to market me what's the value proposition for this book and who are its best fit customers?



Jason Knight 17:49

Both pointing at each other!



Georgiana Laudi 17:53

So yeah, ideally, the person who picks up this book is a founder or a executive, or, you know, on the senior leadership team have a recurring revenue business. And the the difference between those two are significant sometimes, for a bunch of reasons. But we we kind of envision that one of the first readers of this book at a company shouldn't be the founder or the CEO, who seeing the writing on the wall, knows and sort of understands that something is off here. And you know, it feels like maybe the team has lost sight of the market or lost sight of the larger picture sort of strategy, or maybe the founder, herself has sort of has less clarity over the vision for the product and the and who that target market is, or what often happens is seeing that like the marketing strategy itself, doesn't feel scalable, or they don't feel a tonne of confidence in it. So a founder who's in that situation, is a great first reader of this book. And I say first reader very deliberately, because like I was just describing, having that person go from front to back, and make that sort of mindset shift in their belief around what's possible what their team can do, and that customer research doesn't need to be this big, scary, time consuming analysis paralysis thing, and that it is actually very accessible and can actually be very actionable. That mindset shift has to happen there. So they're an ideal first reader of this book. And then the idea is that they pass it on to either a team lead or the practitioners basically at that company to then read it front to back but also start applying some of these things. And so it was really important to us that those practitioners, not only were on board with the ideas behind the book and the framework, but also had access to tools and checklists and templates. We actually also have a workbook which is almost as long as the book itself, full of templates and tools and resources to help those practitioners actually take action all the way from email templates, to checklists, to survey templates and interview questions and stuff like that customer journey maps. So it really, hopefully the beginning it's about that mindset shift and it actually trickles all the way down to actually taking action. That's kind of the idea there.



Claire Suellentrop 20:21


One thing I would add in is, Jason, you recently wrote, I want to say in your newsletter, yeah, I came across it on Twitter, and I clicked through and you wrote about this concept of revenue debt, where



Jason Knight 20:33

Patent Pending!




 Claire Suellentrop 20:35

Yeah. Still, I liked the egg puns as well. The company has acquired this broad mass of customers, and it's a bit muddled as to who are we really going after who's really the right fit for us? That is a very common problem companies are facing when they come to work with us, or when ideally, you know, they they come across this book. So shout out to that concept and the way that you described it, and use it in a conversation recently to explain what we do.



Jason Knight 21:03

Thank you very much. That's, it's good to see them trying to give some back to the global community after taken away so much. But, I mean, let's talk about that, then. Because, yeah, something that I think, you know, kind of a conversation that I've had a few times with different people that are trying to work out either from the product side, the product management side, what to do about the products, also, obviously, working with product marketing teams, trying to work out what to do as well, this whole idea that, you know, we just kind of mentioned it, this idea of revenue debt, the idea that people have got so many different types of revenue that they've kind of organically come up with over the organic growth of their company. And now they're stuck trying to support 15 different segments of customers all at the same time, they don't really have an ICP, to speak of their ICP is just like whoever they could get a call with. And then they're trying to, as they scale, try and work out how to effectively draw a circle around something that they should concentrate on. But that does beg the question, and if we're talking about, you know, getting rid of the funnel, and trying this new customer lead growth approach, which again, we I promise we'll talk about in a second, are there kind of prerequisites that they need to do before they even start with your book, for example, getting rid of some of that revenue debt or trying to get some kind of ICP going first? Or does your book kind of take them from kind of from step one onwards,

 Claire Suellentrop 22:22

I would say the latter, the book begins at that something is wrong state. So I would say it meets people where they are when they are experiencing this revenue debt issue. And they're not exactly sure how to make progress and find a way out of it, the research aspect of the entire customer lead growth framework is an exercise in kind of forcing the team to to agree on who they believe their best customer to be. So some criteria that we typically recommend. And this of course, varies you know, individual business, individual business, but we typically help them start by creating a you know, a list or a segment, whatever, have customers who are actively engaged like in a in a healthy way, right, they didn't purchase the product, and then forget about it. So they're engaged in getting value on a day to day or, you know, whatever, whatever cadence is appropriate for that product they are paying. So we're not worried about understanding why churn users left at this point, we're not worried about speaking to free folks and trying to convert them to paid, we want to talk to the folks who are using it voting with their dollars, saying that it's valuable. And ideally, we also want to be filtering by folks who begin paying recently enough that they remember life prior to this product. And that they're also paying for and getting value from the most up to date version, right? Products are ever evolving. So those three criteria, oftentimes mixed with whatever other criteria are relevant to a particular company. Those are kind of the the first way of defining like, Okay, this is who we

want to learn from, these are the people we want to clone more of, now let's go figure them out and try to understand really what they all have in common with the job that that they hired our product to do for them.



Jason Knight 24:19

100% Well, let's go back to that funnel then that we're desperately trying to forget now. funnels have been with us for a while apparently, they were invented by Elias St Elmo Lewis back in 1898. So they've definitely put a shift in. So you kind of touched on it a little bit this idea that maybe they're not quite so relevant in this new recurring revenue, ubiquitous SaaS world that we're in at the moment, is that the only reason that they kind of aren't fit for purpose anymore? Like why do we have to forget them now specifically?



Georgiana Laudi 24:50

The research process that Claire was just describing and getting that level of sort of understanding and and depth of understanding of our best customers puts us in a position to be able to understand those customers in a in a much more holistic way that the funnel just does not account for and I say the funnel, but equally problematic are like pirate metrics. And don't get me wrong like I often have to pay tribute to pirate metrics. Pirate Metrics are why I even got into SaaS marketing to begin with, because... oh, post acquisition marketing, everybody understands marketing has a role to play post acquisition that was like, I don't even know how many years ago now 2012 Or something like 11 years ago. And still we're talking about this. But the idea there being that understanding our customers in that way, and to that depth gives us an opportunity to identify what the sort of major milestones in our relationship with our customers are from being out in the world experiencing the problem, a lot of I mean, a lot of customer journey maps don't even take that into account. They start with like somebody lands on our website. So problem space being taken into account, very, very important understanding, you know, what led them to sign up for our product, what were they using before, what happened on that day and sort of understanding the job to be done from that aspect, but all the way through the search for a new solution, who they talked to where they went, what influenced them through to discovering that we exist, and you know, how they evaluated our solution from some of our like marketing collateral, or our website through to getting into our product for the first time. And what really led them to hit a sort of moment of first value where they were like, Okay, this thing may actually solve my problem through to actual product activation and engagement, continued value value expansion. So what I'm describing is very far removed from the idea of a funnel, right, and you're like, we can use top of funnel, middle of funnel bottom of funnel all day long as a communication tool. But at the end of the day, if we're actually trying to operationalize how our teams are making strategic decisions about how to optimise our customer experience, we need to be thinking a lot more nuanced than that. The other problem with those more generic sort of models like Pirate Metrics, or like MQLs, and you know, SQL is, is that they don't take into account the nuances of your individual customers, or your product, or even what kind of business you want to run as well. So, you know, identifying the most appropriate experience that we can provide these ideal customers that Claire was describing those customers we want to clone, and really understanding what are those major milestones, then we can identify actually meaningful KPIs, you know, the leading indicators of success, not just those transactional moments, like they entered a credit card, or they became a paying customer. But really, what does Product

Activation for our product actually look like? What kind of product usage shows us that our new customers received or experienced some sort of value equally on the value realisation? Side? What does meaningful product engagement look like? It's not just about weekly actives, or monthly actives. Right? It might be but it might not be. And so those generic models, that's tends to be the problem is they don't take into account your customers, your product. So that's why we believe heavily in the sort of customer experience maps and identifying those leaps of faith and identifying KPIs. And I mean, all of that just gives us that sort of documentary understanding of what our best customers want and need. And then we can look at what we're currently doing today. So we were we were referred to this a couple of years ago, as like the idea it's so interesting that you refer to it as revenue debt. We often talked about it as like customer experience, debt. Yep. Because over time marketers, Customer Success teams, product teams, product, marketers create all kinds of assets and programmes for our customers, whether or not it's nurture campaigns, or onboarding emails, or in app prompts, say, you know, and product tours, and all of a sudden, we end up with all of these programmes running for a customer, we may not actually understand. So if we can do that customer experience mapping process, identify those milestones, identify those KPIs, then we can then go through our customer experience and and, and really evaluate whether or not we are doing our best customers, you know, service and where we're dropping the ball and where those success gaps might be.



Jason Knight 29:31

That's obviously, really interesting. And we could probably spend weeks talking about that it's such a fascinating subject. But let's talk a little bit about those maps. Because I am a big advocate of, for example, user story mapping. It's something that I spoke about recently and got loads of engagement on LinkedIn, because everyone loves the book about that. And then all of the concepts within it, this whole idea that you kind of shift everything around, like you said earlier, the kind of jobs to be done approach what our customers or our users try And to achieve and then mapping out, certainly in user story mapping terms anyway, this idea of like, left to right sequential spine of activities, and then all the things that I might want to do and which are the most important and which are maybe just nice to haves and stuff like that, is that very much a similar approach for what you're talking about sort of mapping out that customer journey, although additional kind of nuances to doing it from a marketing perspective, that maybe wouldn't be covered in a more of a product development perspective.



Georgiana Laudi 30:26

So it is different slightly in that the journey mapping process that we're describing here, with customer led growth is a little bit higher level, it's not quite as granular as you would do in that user journey mapping. The absolutely play, though, and they should both exists. But this customer journey map, or the customer experience map, as we like to call it is a little bit higher level. And it's really more about those top level leaps of faith in our relationship with our customer. Part of the reason why identifying those top line milestones is important is because we want to be able to make strategic sort of decisions inside of each of those experiences, and then drill in in the way that you're describing. Some customer experience maps have more complex evaluation phases, for example. So if you're in a product lead company, then your evaluation phase might just be two milestones, like we need to help our customers get to first value and then we need to help our customers get to value realisation, help them solve that job

to be done. And then they move on into a sort of growth phase. If on the other hand, you're in a scenario where you're selling into enterprise, that evaluation phase is gonna look quite different. It could be three, or even four milestones potentially. So the idea being, we don't want to over complicate, because while the process that you're describing is wildly valuable, this process happening before that is very advantageous, because it helps create the structure for those user journey maps, if that makes sense. So if you think of an evaluation phase, that's two milestones, then each of those milestones needs its own user journey map in there. There's a lot of levels. Exactly. It's all like, you know, it's very inception II potentially. But I believe heavily in zooming out before you zoom in and making sure that at the big picture, we understand that customer in the big picture, we know that we're focused on that ideal customer for us. And we understand the major leaps of faith in our relationship with our customers. And then we can drill into the optimising process.



Jason Knight 32:41

Okay, so that then if we think about the customer led growth framework, which you talked about in the book, and there's a three step master plan, getting inside your customers heads, mapping and measuring their experience, and then unlocking your biggest growth opportunities. So we've kind of talked a little bit about getting into customers heads already, like doing some of that research and understanding them and their pain points and all the different things that you can understand about them. We've talked about mapping it, we've not really talked about measuring it, which is more about the KPIs which maybe we'll touch on in a minute. But I really wanted to focus on that unlocking your biggest growth opportunities. So like, you've you've mapped stuff, you've defined some KPIs that support that, before you've done any of that you've done all the research to get inside their heads and understand their jobs to be done their biggest struggling moments, all that good stuff. Is there a systematic process, then to effectively kind of, you've done all the research, you've mapped it all out, now. It's just like bang, bang, bang, and you've unlocked it? Or is there some other thinking that needs to be done at that point, to actually make sense of all this stuff?



Claire Suellentrop 33:39

I'll try to jump in on that one. So I'll speak to the experience of going through this process with the companies we work with. The way that we help companies implement this framework culminates in like a half day workshop with major decision makers on their team. So that's usually the founder or CEO, and, you know, key stakeholders from various departments. Often it's marketing, product, customer success, sales, if there's a sales team. And because we have with everyone, with all of these people on board, we've gotten aligned on what those high level milestones in their ideal customers journey are. We can then also, our team compiles this ahead of time, create a visual of that end to end experience, as it currently looks out in the world. So our team will actually go to their website and grab screen grabs of key pages, we'll go through the product signup and onboarding process, will read and do screen grabs of all the onboarding, email, nurtures that fire all the way through to reaching a moment of value within the product. So we've started kind of high level with the team but then we can get very tactical in showing them... Okay, your customers are hiring your product for this job to be done. The messaging on your homepage doesn't speak to that and And clearly, like there's a missed opportunity there. In the onboarding experience, this key feature is what stood out to your ideal customers. It's super hard to find that, like, how can we make that easy? How can we bring that

to light more quickly? So, we do end up with this laundry list of opportunities that they could take advantage of, and the process of prioritising it is the next big piece, the prioritisation process, you know, prioritisation frameworks, like there's so many ways you could...



Jason Knight 35:28

Yeah, I have my own thoughts and feelings about them. But maybe you can tell us a new one.



Claire Suellentrop 35:32

I'm very interested in yours. Because that piece I still find the stickiest



Jason Knight 35:38

Stickiest in the sense that it's the hardest to get agreement on or...?



Claire Suellentrop 35:42

It's the hardest to maybe get it... Well, it depends on the company size this, the smaller the team, the easier it is for everyone to kind of be mobilised and be like, cool. You're doing this. I'm doing this. We'll see you next week. For larger organisations, it's, you know, there's a lot more competing priorities that have to be bargained with. And that's where I'm still like, Okay, this we kind of still need to lock in.



Jason Knight 36:08

Yes, the eternal struggle,



Georgiana Laudi 36:10

There tends to be a very typical outcome of this type of work, because it can be kind of existential in terms of customer understanding, there are some mainstay sort of priorities that tend to come out of this work that aren't as difficult to prioritise because it's really obvious. So the one that Claire mentioned, like, Hey, your customer said that this was really important to them. And your website talks about this completely different thing or isn't, you know, your messaging strategy isn't through the lens of this customer's job to be done, it doesn't communicate the sort of the understanding of the struggle or, or it doesn't take into account what previous solution they may be firing or what they might have to move away from in order to, you know, adopt your product. So almost every why shouldn't even say almost every time we work with a company, we identify opportunities to improve messaging, and so that the most obvious asset to update when messaging is being revisited as a website, and product pages, so those tend to be really obvious. However, very shortly thereafter, you can imagine that your website can't making promises that your product can't keep. So your actual early product experience has to match the expectations that your website set. So those two areas of the

customer experience are very typical, especially to tackle after we've run through this process with companies or they do it on their own. Those are very, two very specific, I'll call them even milestones in that customer's relationship with you that needs to be optimised. That changes when companies are a little bit more mature. So some companies that we work with, it's actually we're more focused on value realisation or even value expansion. So maybe the product or the team is introducing a new feature set or a completely new product that they want to introduce to their existing customer base, then we will be focused elsewhere. But in general, those are the two milestones that teams are almost always in alignment note, we've got an update that where it tends to get sticky to Claire's point is that product onboarding is a great example of like, who owns that? Sometimes it's marketing, sometimes it's product, sometimes it's product marketing, sometimes it's CS. So you know, there's that can be a little sticky. The website is typically, you know, marketing, even there, sometimes it's, you know, not as straightforward as that. But that's where it tends to get sticky is like, who owns these experiences? And what team should we be working with to actually get them updated? But generally, there's pretty good alignment across like, Yep, we're not putting our best foot forward here. Yeah, our messaging is off. Oh, shit, we're not actually floating the the right parts of our product soon enough. So that hierarchy of messaging on the website, and that hierarchy of how we introduce the product, generally those get tackled very, very quickly. But again, that's an example of a company who I don't want to say earlier stage, but a little bit earlier stage versus the more mature companies that are doing fun things down the line.



Jason Knight 39:11

That's really interesting, though, because as you were talking about maybe some of those hate the phrase because it has connotations, but like low hanging fruit that you could maybe look at the things that people think are just obvious to do and somehow only become obvious once you tell them...



Georgiana Laudi 39:24

Leaky bucket is the other tired analogy, but that's what it is. Why are you going to add marketing? Why spend money on traffic, if your website's not converting, and your customer onboarding isn't converting? There's absolutely no point in spending a dime on marketing until you have those two things fixes and that becomes very, very obvious through this process.



Jason Knight 39:44

But it's interesting, though, because, and obviously, you've been both consulting with companies from the marketing side. I'm talking to a lot of product management teams and it does feel like there's quite often like every company thinks they've got their own unique problems, but it does seem to be that quite a lot of the times ever basically got the same problems, more or less, I mean, obviously, the realisation of those problems and how they specifically need to, or how they manifest within their organisation may be slightly different, it might look different, but they're all fundamentally the same problems at the heart of it, which obviously, on the one hand makes it feel like, well, you know, maybe this stuff should be easier

to fix than it sounds, because, you know, there should be playbooks for this kind of thing. But do you feel from a marketing perspective that? I mean, you've kind of touched it yourself already. But there are generally quite a lot of common problems, whatever the company,

**C** Claire Suellentrop 40:32  
Yes!

**G** Georgiana Laudi 40:33

I mean, our company is called forget the funnel, and still, nine times out of 10 intake requests on our website are so like, oh, we need leads. And we're like, have we not, you know, talked about this enough that actually, more leads might not be the answers to your growth challenges. Yep. Truthfully, it's product folks are among our favourite to work with because genuinely he, they they think very holistically, and they think post acquisition product managers think about the post acquisition experience, if that's their, you know, domain. And so, tying those two things together, and helping sort of marketing see the customer experience in this very sort of holistic way post acquisition, that's something that product managers do very, very naturally. So a lot of the product managers that come to us, they're like, Yeah, I got it. Like I understand why we shouldn't feel this leaky bucket, we understand why more leads isn't the answer to our growth challenges, they understand that our messaging and positioning may be off, you know, our product onboarding probably isn't doing as much as it could be we, we know that there are better ways to introduce our product, and even probably measure engagement with our product and get a better understanding even company wide of who our best customer is. So I would dare to say that product folks are our favourite to work with. Just because they get it, they understand that holistic sort of view and but founders and marketing leads do still tend to come to us with this, like, we need more leads growth, you know, is inconsistent. And, you know, we need to do a better job, our marketing needs to be doing a better job. And almost inevitably, we end up in a situation where like, actually, it's your messaging and positioning on your website that's off. And actually, there's no point in sending more people to your website until you've got your customer onboarding dialled in as well. So they may come through the front door, so to speak, or come to the book, thinking that they've got a marketing issue or a leads issue. But almost always, again, depending on on the stage of the company, it ends up ultimately, they learn something about their customers that they didn't know before. And they, they can actually make their assets, like their website and their customer onboarding. And the early product experience works so much harder for them. So that when they do layer marketing on like acquisition and awareness, focus marketing on it's worth so much more to them.

**C** Claire Suellentrop 43:03

One more thing I would add, to bring it all back to the funnel is what Gia is describing is another reason that we find using the funnel as a concept as a business concept problematic because it reinforces that silo between marketing, and then everyone else who's responsible for the rest of the customer relationship is marketing, you know, is thinking about filling the funnel, and handing the leads over or, you know, okay, great, we got people to sign up for the product, our

job is done, like onto next month's quota. And it reinforces that gap between what that team sees as the priority versus the rest of the customer experience, whichever one else is not responsible for, just to bring that back.



Jason Knight 43:48

So it's good to bring it back full circle, otherwise, you might be accused of making funnels of her own. But the book could be considered pretty disruptive to traditional thinking, right? I mean, we're talking about smashing something that's been around for over 100 years, and every single marketing person in the universe is gonna have some kind of opinion and probably be fairly comfortable working with these concepts, because that's the way they've always done it, especially if they've never really worked, for example, for a SaaS company. Or maybe they're now working for SAS company by mistake. But either way, some of these people may be considered a little bit sort of status quo thinkers or just not necessarily believe that they have to change any of these things. And that actually, all they need to do is do what they were already doing better. And I was wondering, maybe just to wrap this up, whether any of those people have either before the book came out, or after the book came out, and they maybe have a read or maybe they've sent some feedback about it, and then they kind of come back to you and rather than giving you positive feedback, they're like, no, no, no, that won't work.



Georgiana Laudi 44:49

Not that I've seen, not that they've, you know, come to us to say anyway, who knows, maybe it'll happen one day, but it has yet to happen.



Jason Knight 44:59

Yes, fine. I remember speaking to Matt Dixon, who wrote the Challenger sale on the podcast, and he wrote this really disruptive, foundational book for b2b selling. And, again, he had lots of good feedback on it. But you do get the occasional he, he mentioned the occasional person who was just like, Well, I've been selling for 30 years, of course, I know how to do it. So it just struck me that you might get these old hackneyed marketers that maybe they just don't read the book. I don't know.



Georgiana Laudi 45:25

I mean, one thing that I have heard, and this doesn't really match what you're saying, but, you know, in the E commerce or non recurring revenue business models, where some people might be like, well, we don't have a recurring revenue business. So this doesn't apply to us. But even those folks, when they read this or familiarise themselves with the framework, they're like, oh, it still makes total sense. Like, every business is in the customer business, every, you know, company that wants to be successful, stands to benefit from better understanding, they're their customers. And I one thing that I would say, we've got a lot to say about, you know, customer research and why customer research is valuable. But it's 2023. We have lots of tools at our disposal now to provide really great experiences. And our customers like not only do we have tools available to us, but our customers also expect a much better experience and much better



understanding from the companies that they, you know, interact with and buy from, so you can't get away with the the playbooks of, you know, even five years ago in some markets. So to stick with your, you know, with the old way of, you know, I know what's best, and I've always done it this way. I mean, I don't know that nobody here needs to be convinced that that's, you know, problematic.



Jason Knight 46:43

Well, hopefully not. But it's funny, actually, this is one of the things that really grabs me with the product, lead growth initiatives that are going on now as well, which is obviously slightly different to the topic at hand. But this whole idea that you kind of touched on the idea that customers deserve better. And I frankly, think that product lead growth is a massive shot in the arm for product thinking, right? Because ultimately, you're sitting there saying, I mean, I would say that basically, a large proportion of b2b SaaS apps should probably be ashamed of themselves, like the quality of the experience going in and the, the how long it takes you to do anything in them and how the light you are on sales teams to kind of guide you and pussyfoot around the bits that don't work. So I think that if there's anything that we can take out of some of these more disruptive approaches, it's the ability to go out there and say, Hey, we've got to make our products better. End of the day, we've got to make our products better, it doesn't matter that they're some B2B, back office, SaaS app or whatever, like they've got to be actually good, right? We can't hide anymore.



Claire Suellentrop 47:46

100%.



Jason Knight 47:49

Well, that's obviously given us plenty to think about with regards to what we might do to optimise our marketing. Hopefully, people come and pick up the book, but where can people come and find you to after this if they want to talk about forgetting or perhaps even smashing up their funnels, the concepts of customer like growth, heavy metal playlists, or try and rent out a waterfront cabin?



Georgiana Laudi 48:07

Oh, that's so nice. <https://www.forgetthefunnel.com> is definitely the best place that's home base, you can find the book there, you can find more information about how to work with us, we have a community as well, that we supportive practitioners and DIY founders as well. I highly, highly recommend picking up the book I again, you know, we mentioned this earlier, but it is it is a short and very practical book. Very, very accessible. So that's probably the best first place to go. And then following that. Any questions, comments, challenges? Do you want to tell us that the Long live the funnel, then hitting us up maybe on LinkedIn or or even better... Probably Twitter, that would be the other place that we that we hang out.



Jason Knight 48:49

Excellent. Well, I made sure to link everything into the show notes. And hopefully, you'll have a few people wandering in your direction, hopefully not defending the funnel, because we've all talked about how that's a bad idea. And I don't think they're going to get much of a fair hearing if they try and pull that kind of nonsense with you. Well, that's been a fantastic chat. So obviously, really appreciate you both spending your time to talk about some disruptive and thought provoking topics. Hopefully, we can all stay in touch. But as for now, thanks for taking the time.



Georgiana Laudi 49:14

Thank you so much for having us. That was super fun.



Claire Suellentrop 49:16

Yeah, that was super fun. Thanks so much for having us, Jason.



Jason Knight 49:21

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to hop over to <https://www.oneknightinproduct.com>, check out some of my other fantastic guests sign up to the misters subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but as for now, thanks and good night.