

AJ (Adam Joseph): I'm sure many people will be familiar with the Financial Times but less aware of the B2B (Business to Business) side of the business; can you tell us more about it?

SH (Shannon Hyson): A lot of people would be really familiar with the paper and also possibly have a personal online subscription, but it's only been in the last 10 years that we have been offering it to whole organisations. I'm really pleased to say that in those 10 years, B2B has now taken over B2C in terms of revenue and readership.

When you are purchasing your own personal subscription to a newspaper you don't have to put a proposal together. You don't have to get sign off from your partner about why you want to invest in whatever subscription you want, but when it comes to a business subscription - that is absolutely vital.

AJ: When did Customer Success begin at the FT, was it at the very beginning of B2B or more recently?

SH: I was brought in at the beginning of 2016 to form the Customer Success team at the FT. Previously we had some Product Consultants that were part of Customer Services performing training and some ad-hoc product consultation sessions but there wasn't really any process or strategy around it. So you could say that the birth of Customer Success at the FT was in January 2016 and we've been through a huge period of change and growth over the last two years and it's been really exciting.

AJ: How is your team structured and how do you segment your customers?

SH: We have a global Customer Success team and segment our customers in different ways. Let me start by discussing "KAM" (Key Accounts Model) and non-KAM accounts where we take the 80/20 rule. In other words, 80% are non-KAM (one to many approach) where we have a team in Manila who look after those accounts. The rest of our KAM accounts are spread all over the world and looked after by a global team. For CEMEA (Central Europe Middle East Africa) and UKI (United Kingdom and Ireland), we have a team based within our London office and also in New York. For APAC (Asia Pacific) we have teams based in Singapore, Hong Kong and Tokyo. In total we have 27 people in the Customer Success team.

AJ: Given the huge growth of Customer Success at the FT, how have you gone about showing your progress to key internal stakeholders?

SH: I will start by saying that the FT was really clear about why they needed Customer Success; there was certainly a buy-in from our Managing Director through to the Senior Leadership Group about needing to prove value back to our customers and not doing it as part of the sales conversation. **I'm a strong believer that if you get Customer Success right, the Sales sorts itself out – if our customers are getting value then they should continue to renew.** However, that doesn't work with our traditional way of selling within the FT. There was a very strong buy-in from the beginning about Customer Success but I really wanted to understand what “Good” looked like from a Customer Success perspective and trying to understand it even if we didn't have metrics how we could define that.

The first thing I did when I started was to get to know the team really well, understand their processes and what data they were collecting (and what the gaps were). Once I had an idea about what we were measuring, I could start to put some targets in place. One of the biggest things that the FT uses for growth is engagement and we charge per engaged user. For example, you could have 500 people within your organisation and you could give every single person access to the FT. However, if you've only got 100 that are logging on regularly, you only pay for those 100.

That in itself was a really quick win; the business had already identified that was a way of securing growth/renewal and been working on that for years but it made absolute sense that Customer Success would be focusing on how do we grow engagement and the different tactics within that. Each year we start with a really high-level objective of how many new engaged users do we need to achieve our up-sell and renewal targets. I then worked with our Data Teams to model that across the year and because we track engagement, we can actually prove how Customer Success influences the bottom line because it directly impacts our revenue and we can assign a value to each of those individual users.

AJ: That really helps show the value that your Customer Success team brings internally, but how do you show that same value externally to your customers?

SH: Unlike with many other SaaS products, we can't actually see everything that our customers are doing with our product. I can see how many times a user has logged on, and to a certain extent I can see what they've been reading – for example, which articles/topics have been reviewed and how long they have been on a page. **There is a lot of information that we have and we share with our customers but that doesn't really show me the value. What I'm more interested in is after you've been reading the FT, once you've closed your browser page, what do you do then with that information? That for me is where the real value is and the kind of sexy stuff so to speak.**

We have to be really close to our users; we spend a lot of time identifying the key contacts and stakeholders. I spend a lot of time with my team trying to understand exactly what the different use cases are for different people at multiple levels within our customer's organisation.

For individual users, we really try to tap into both the expected professional outcomes and the personal ones as well. The integrity of the information provided by the FT is critical to an individual user who is providing it to their customers, the impact of which could be reputational. It could also be that you're able to have a better work/life balance because you can finish up your work more quickly and actually get home and spend time with your family.

At an organisational level, we use that intelligence to then draw connections between the FT content that's being consumed and what the customer at a senior Stakeholder level has told us that they want their users to do (plus the actual user stories that we have). It's a sort of a tapestry of intelligence, knowing what our users are doing online is super important but without actually having that understanding of what they are actually delivering for their business, we are not really proving value, we were just proving usage.

AJ: Great Customer Success is not simply acquiescing to every customer request but sometimes saying "no", or using negotiation skills so that you can achieve what is in the best interest of both the customer and your business. Is this something that you have seen within your team as well?

SH: Sure, it's really important. There is a great book called "*The Customer Experience*", and its message is not to delight the customer, which almost goes against everything anybody ever hears, however I really buy into that. We can't give the customers what they want all the time because sometimes we set ourselves and the company up for failure. **There has to be a real balance between what benefit we are delivering to our customers, to our business and to our department.**

You can't always bend over backwards and it's a difficult lesson to learn. Everybody within the FT is able to take part in negotiation training and it's something I've done with the Customer Success team as well. A lot of the times we do a lot without thinking, "*what's in it for us?*", that might seem a bit selfish but the reality is that if we are providing a customer with intelligence or data that they wouldn't usually be entitled to, we should be thinking about how can they introduce us to the next person that we can get to know.

In the simplest form, the benefit of negotiation training is building that confidence levels to have those conversations and I think that's a big barrier as people just feel "*oh my goodness, I'd be so rude; I just want to give them what they need*". I think there are a lot of people pleasers in Customer Success which isn't a bad thing however we need to make sure that we're getting something in return. You then need to figure out actually how far do you push the value and what is the walk away point.

AJ: It's important to also make the distinction between making our customers happy and ensuring that they are getting value – hopefully you can do both but providing value is more important.

SH: You're absolutely right; **I think about my own experiences with some of my suppliers in my personal life. Whether it's my mobile provider or something more domestic, all I want is efficiency - I want you to get the job done that I'm paying you to do. I try to put our customers in that position; all they want is what they are paying for and they want to know that they've made a good investment from it.**

AJ: If you are providing real value to your customer I also believe it puts your solution in the “essential” category, rather than “nice to have”. Once your solution becomes essential to the customer it becomes less likely that budget becomes an issue because they won't be able to do their day jobs without it.

SH: We do weekly “Customer Outcomes” sessions between myself, my Director and the CSM where we talk through a customer that have had a recent on-boarding session or a QBR (Quarterly Business Review). Not only are these great learning exercises for us but we can also see if we can help remove any blockers. We also have the CSM post the outcomes using our Salesforce Chatter page so that other teams can get really comfortable with the language that we're using when we're talking about customer outcomes and what questions Customer Success ask.

In fact one of the questions that comes out in almost every single conversation I have with the CSMs is “*who are they using alongside us?*” as there's absolutely nothing wrong with asking. We also ask “*what if you didn't have access to the FT?*” and how would this impact their productivity. It's a way of turning it on its head, rather than saying “*what value do we bring?*”, it helps you to get a different perspective on the need fulfilled by our product and it helps identify what our USP (Unique Selling Point) is to that specific customer.

When assessing future risk and opportunity, if you know what your USP is, you can use it to your advantage. If we have some development work being done to enhance (or even lose) a particular part of our product functionality, we can understand the relative positive or negative impact to each customer.