Adam Joseph (AJ): Can you tell us more about your background?

***Stuart Pocock (SP)*:** I am currently a Director at Kompass UK and my background is within the B2B Information Services and Software industry and my absolute passion is around delivering exceptional customer service. As we all know that's easy to say and less easy to do, but it must be about doing good business, understanding the collaboration with customers and that it is not just about orders and sales.

AJ: Have you had that ethos about your career or has that evolved over time?

SP: Yes, I'm wired in that way; it's about good customer service - both delivering it and what I expect when I'm dealing with organisations whether that's from a personal point of view or in business. ***The truth is if you get your customer service right, everything else is so much easier***.

AJ: Can you tell us what you are doing at Kompass to deliver Company Success?

SP: I remember earlier in my career when I worked at a business called "Perfect Information", I had a conversation with a City Law firm and one of the Senior Lawyers said, "*even if your products and services weren't as good as they are I'd still buy them because of the level of customer service and attention we get*". Although I am going back fifteen years, that has always stuck in my mind and it's true for all of us isn't it which ever side of the fence we are on. ***Products, Services and delivery have of course, got to be good enough however with exceptional support and customer service, customers are going to be far more forgiving and prepared to walk-through any minor issues along the way***.

AJ: Where software can often be seen as a commodity, do you think Customer Success can make a massive difference?

SP: Yes, especially in our world where you have a very competitive market and you have a combination of transactional activities and software environments where although an integration should be "sticky" they are becoming easier to transfer one for another. ***It's absolutely paramount that you look after your customers, understand them, have a forensic understanding of what it is they need, why they need it and how it can be served***.

AJ: Can you tell us more about Kompass?

SP: Sure, Kompass has been around for a very long time, starting in the 1940s as a printed hardback B2B directory putting buyers and suppliers together. Today we are in over 60 countries, we're digital B2B data software and marketing services. In the UK, 90% of our customers are organisations that are trading abroad and are looking for either information on potential partners whether that's on an individual basis or large target markets. They may also be promoting their business on our digital directory sites in those countries that they're interested in and also some software services around intelligent lead generation through algorithmic and automated search processes.

AJ: How do you understand the type of value that your customers are seeking from using Kompass solutions?

SP: In the UK, Kompass is a relatively small business in so far as we don't have several hundred people with large teams in different functions so it's vital that we use our resources efficiently and the people are multi-skilled across different channels. Understanding customer requirements starts with an initial conversation with either a Sales person, Marketing or from Customer Services. ***We don't want to shoe-horn something just to make a sale, it's got to be acquiring a new customer because we understand what it is that they are trying to achieve.*** We need to take the time to have the confidence and expertise to ask the right questions, to establish what is it that the customer wants to do/why/who's involved and walk them through that buying process. Once you establish that initial match between what is it that they are trying to do within the scope of their business and what are the likely aspects of the different types of services that we offer; where is the likely match and exploring each of those in more detail. We operate a very simple process of going through those very natural stages and absolutely making sure that together, the customer and Kompass understand and record the success criteria of their expected outcomes. That, for me is one of the key aspects of that early stage and of course that helps develop the checks and balances through the rest of the relationship.

AJ: How can you reconcile a prospect who might not a great fit for your solutions against the significant bookings that you might lose for not taking the deal?

SP: As a sales person do you understand what the customer is looking to do, what they are looking to achieve, and can we honestly support that.

AJ: How do you measure post-sale whether the customer is getting value from using Kompass solutions?

SP: At a helicopter level it was really quite simple; when I joined Kompass around three years ago there wasn't really a formulated sense of the client journey and support. Everyone in the business cared deeply about the customers but there was no formal process that sat behind it. ***We have now implemented a new customer on-boarding process as well as ensuring that we have multiple customer touch-point through the contract year supported by different parts of our business to support that process. By doing this we demonstrated a 10% increase in customer retention based on revenue***. Our new on-boarding processes has led to improvements in the initial customer experience which helps ensure new-user take up of our services which helps drive the renewal further down the road.

AJ: Do you have the same on-boarding / account management processes for all customers or do you differentiate based on their size?

SP: It's more to do with the type of product or service are they buying. If a customer buys transactional data then it is very important that there is a regular monthly contact because if you are a data broker, we need to make sure that we are having constant conversations as these are transactional pieces of work. If on the other hand, it is a subscription-based relationship where the success criteria are absolutely known, the contact will be on a regular basis (monthly or more frequently depending upon the requirements) but it will not be one-dimensional. You need to have multiple teams involved including Customer Services, Training (e.g. webinars or on-site), Sales (reviewing the success criteria) and Marketing. As we work to unify that process across the business, we will get to the point where due to increasing numbers, we will look at the level of service that we provide to higher paying customers by revenue or those that have the biggest potential.

AJ: Although you don't have a "Customer Success" Team as such it sounds as if you have multiple resources across the firm filling this type of function?

SP: Yes, spot on. Having a Customer Success team is the goal but we are not there yet. At the moment, it is a very defined set of processes for particular types of customers across a twelve month subscription-based relationship with touchpoints that are identified and scheduled through the CRM system and carried out by the internal groups that I mentioned earlier. This does work really nicely however it does mean that there is no one person or team that is exclusively focussed on that aspect of the business. That is a real conundrum because we have spoken throughout this podcast of the vital importance of the process and the execution of it but yet we don't have an absolutely dedicated team to do that but we do have very good dedicated people that "own" those different touchpoints.

AJ: How do you respond when you believe a customer is either not getting value from Kompass services or seeing a huge spike in usage?

SP: That's a key area of focus for us. We have a dedicated person looking after this kind of exception reporting. ***The on-boarding process either happens or it doesn't; if it doesn't, we need to understand why and work with the customer to manage***. The piece that needs to be picked up through our systems is usage tracking. We track subscribed users and look for patterns in daily, weekly, monthly spikes in usage, looking for any particular patterns or trends that we map back to a previous year to compare usage. Excessive usage or indeed a complete drop off and failure of usage needs to be acted upon; this is a function of our Customer Services lead and is the focus that they have. This data is fed back to the Account Manager to make the decision about what they do with that information.

AJ: I'm sure that you agree that it is important to overlay your subjective knowledge of a customer alongside reviewing usage statistics and tracking trends.

SP: Yes – absolutely. High spikes in usage need not necessarily be a good thing because it could be that they are at a point where they are trying to use a solution as much as possible before their account expires. Conversely, a drop off in usage doesn't have to be bad news but we have to know why. ***The importance of having regular contact points is huge; things change, people move and those are your biggest risks. We can't have a "no news is good news" mentality and it might, but it probably won't!*** Above all else, so many companies (including ours) have multiple products and services which are not necessarily all sold into the same part of the business. This makes it even more important that you have regular touch-points but also an organised planning process around those organisations.

AJ: Do you have any final words of wisdom or advice that you would like to pass on?

SP: ***The big thing for me is to be inquisitive with your customers, ask the question that leads to the next question. If you are naturally inquisitive and make an honest response and act with integrity the tough conversations are much easier and you have many, many more good conversations.***