1:11

Alexey

**This week we'll talk about being a data generalist. We'll discuss going from bioinformatics to freelancing. We have a special guest today, Katya. As a freelancer Katya is helping companies bridge the gap between business and data by building actionable analytics and coaching the teams. She has a lot of broad experience in startups, entrepreneurship and scale-ups. Katya was head of analytics at Gitti, a beauty brand. She tried to start her own fintech business with Entrepreneur First and she worked as a data scientist at Zalando. Welcome to the show. It's a pleasure to have you here.**

1:52

Jekaterina

Yes, thank you so much for the invitation. It was really nice to catch up, actually. I think we've known each other for some time. I'm really happy to be here.

# Jekaterina’s background

2:02

Alexey

**I tried to invite you multiple times. Finally, we managed to do this. [chuckles] Before we start with our main topic of being a data generalist, let's start with your background. Can you tell us about your career journey so far?**

2:15

Jekaterina

Yes. Let me start a bit from the very beginning and jump to what is happening right now. I started, as Alex mentioned, as a bioinformatician – a Bachelor’s and Master's degrees in bioinformatics. I worked in different research institutes across Europe, Manchester University, Charité here in Berlin, and also at the Center for Genomic Regulation in Barcelona. After getting my Master's degree, I realized that I was not motivated that much by research.

That's where I switched directly to a startup and was a first data hire there. I was hired as a data analyst, and I ended up doing a lot of the data engineering part, which I loved, but I didn't enjoy it that much, maybe. Then I switched to Zalando. I also was there at Zalando Payments, where I was building real-time machine learning systems for fraud prediction and payment scoring. Basically, when you shop on Zalando and you get an invoice and the payment method, that's exactly my team who built the algorithm behind that, to enable you to buy with this payment method. It was a super-heavy engineering team, lots of PhD people and lots of young people – so really ambitious, really nice. That's where all my engineering background comes from.

Then, after two years there, I was a bit stuck regarding learning. That's when a very good friend of mine said, “Hey, why don't you start something?” and that's when I went to Entrepreneur First. You can imagine that there's a startup accelerator, founded in London, they have programs across the globe. Basically, it's pre-team, pre-idea. You go there as an individual, you need to identify yourself as a CEO or a CTO, and then it's kind of like speed dating – speed co-founding. [chuckles] I'm more on the CTO side (a technical person) so I was trying to find a CEO match.

Basically, you work with one person, you match, and you work together for three days. Normally, after three days, you realize that either it’s going well or it’s not, because at the end of the day, startups fail because of the mismatch on founders. Within that program, I tried to found a fintech company, but I went really in a very different, weird segment – I went into compliance. It's like the most unsexy and the most regulated thing ever. So I realized [cross-talk]

5:00

Alexey

**What is compliance?**

5:02

Jekaterina

Basically, it's KYC – Know Your Customer – know your business. You need to do legal checks on the person –who you are as a person. Have you ever had bankruptcy? Are you associated with money laundering? Do you have a company that maybe was associated with money laundering? All those kinds of checks that, for instance, you also need to do when you open a bank account – then you do this postident thing. We went into the B2B “know your business” compliance part. After that, I realized that it was interesting, but… and we wanted to try to copycat an American startup, but it didn't work here in Europe. Then Corona happened and I was really exhausted after almost six months of Entrepreneur First.

Really, seriously, I was not ready to found a company. It was like everybody around me were founding companies and I was like, “Okay, let me jump on that wave.” But internally and mentally and emotionally, I was not prepared. I would wake up two weeks in a row with that headache. That was already a sign that something was not going well. Then I joined Delivery Hero’s fintech department. And again, I was the first data scientist there. I also tried to build basically what we did at Zalando – the whole machine learning for fraud production. I love the people, but I didn't feel that it was for me, so I left.

That's when I joined Gitti, a direct-to-consumer brand, selling nail polishers. Within my junior period there, we went into the cosmetics segment. Also, they launched (I think several months ago) skincare. So it's a beauty brand. There, I basically built the whole BI and team from scratch, and helped on the fundraising. Then on the first of September, I left Gitti to start freelancing.

# How Jekaterina started freelancing

7:13

Alexey

**That's quite a journey. What do you do as a freelancer? Maybe before you start telling us what you do now, it's also interesting to know – how did you decide what you want to do as a freelancer?**

7:29

Jekaterina

Okay. I never tried to... I think I just asked myself the question, “What is the next step for me?” And then what happened? I had a Bumble date. I went on this Bumble date, and we didn’t match personally, but then the guy was like, “Hey, I will invite you to a founders dinner.” I went to the founders’ dinner. There were only founders there – I think 10 people. One guy arrived super late and we didn’t not chat with him. But what I did after was just add all the people who were there on LinkedIn. And this one guy that arrived super late wrote to me “Hey, Katya. We want to hire you.” And I'm like, “No, I don't want to be hired. I want to do freelancing. What about it?”

Then in three days, he sends me a freelancing contract, and I’m still at Gitti five days a week, and he sends me a freelance contract for one day a week. So I'm like, “What do I do now?” So I go to Gitti. I don't know how, but I managed to convince them to give me a four days a week contract. I started freelancing for the company. Now, it's also interesting because today, this company (Kittl) announced a Series A fundraiser of 11 million. That’s what I was hired for back then – to help them with the fundraising, building the data deck. So that's how it started. They are a SaaS company. It's a completely different business model than what I'm used to at Gitti, because Gitti is typical ecommerce.

After a month of freelancing I was like, “That looks really good. I really enjoy that.” Then some friends reached out and I was like, “Okay, let me help you.” And then I decided just to leave Gitti and see what kind of clients I could attract. I didn't even know what kind of clients I should attract. I was like, “Okay, let's just leave and figure this out.”

9:40

Alexey

**That's quite optimistic. So you left. How did you actually figure out what kind of services companies need? Was it just ad hoc meetings in Bumble? [chuckles]**

9:53

Jekaterina

[laughs] No, then I switched to Tinder. [chuckles] I mean, it was still calculated risk because I had this one client at the end of the day – one long term client and one more kind of short-term client. So it was not like I decided, “Today I leave.” and then I left. No, it was more of a calculated risk in that I still have income (at least something) that would allow me to start.

I left and then in September/October I was sitting on my couch. I was like, “I don't have clients. I don't have income.” I was tapping into my savings and I started panicking. Of course, I didn't announce to anybody that I was freelancing. So how should anybody know about that?

# Jekaterina’s initial ways of getting freelancing clients

10:44

Alexey

**So you quit but nobody knew that you were a freelancer?**

10:47

Jekaterina

Exactly! I didn't announce it on LinkedIn. I didn't tell anybody. I mean, some people knew. I had connections. But it was not enough to pay the bills at the end of the day. That was a hard realization, because I was like, “Whoa, if I can't make money, now I need to go back to work for someone.” That really hit me. So what I decided to do was announce that I'm freelancing right now, but not like, “Hey, I'm a data freelancer. I'm here. Pay me!” But rather to do a series of LinkedIn posts – I think there were eight LinkedIn posts directed at... [cross-talk]

11:30

Alexey

**I saw one of them and I thought, “Okay. Actually, I wanted to invite you for a long time. So let me do this.” [chuckles] Sorry for interrupting. That helps to get noticed, right?**

11:41

Jekaterina

Exactly, especially with selfies. If you post a selfie, it's crazy how many people immediately recognize you. If they associate your face with a topic, it's even much easier at the end of the day. So I created those eight posts addressing direct-to-consumer brands on how to structure their KPIs, what to look at, when to look at this, how to come up with easy KPIs and not with super-complicated ones. And of course, with a selfie. [chuckles] I was posting for two weeks, I think, and I got two clients out of that.

12:26

Alexey

**How did you feel about posting selfies?**

12:29

Jekaterina

It was so hard. It was so weird. Also doing selfies… I mean, I do have Instagram, but I have a closed Instagram. It's a different thing. But on LinkedIn it’s a professional thing. I was like, “It's so uncomfortable.” But that's the thing, you need to do what you need to do and then you just do it. The funny part is, the first and second post, I was like, “Oh my god, this is so awful.” But then I didn't care anymore because I just got so many likes and so many shares as well. People were also writing to me, “Hey, you're doing a great job.” I was like, “Pff. Okay, then let's do more selfies.” [laughs]

13:12

Alexey

**I still don't know if I'll ever post a selfie on LinkedIn. [chuckles] Because it’s so awkward, at least to me.**

13:20

Jekaterina

I know, it’s really awkward. But I was like, “Eh, whatever. Let's just see how it works out.” And then exactly – I got two clients there.

13:32

Alexey

**And you got clients in the segment that you wanted, right? These are direct-to-consumer brands who need help structuring their KPIs?**

13:41

Jekaterina

That's funny enough. One is not. One is kind of a marketplace. It's kind of similar to a direct-to-consumer brand, but a marketplace. And another one was a very German company Mittelstand somewhere not far from Munich. What they wanted – and that's so crazy because my profile is so broad, I can do so much stuff that it's also hard for me to understand what pain point I'm solving exactly. So that company wanted – they had lots of data, different kinds of data and they wanted to make a project with me on how to monetize this data. I would go and figure out if we can sell this data to the government or to the job centers or to whatever. So it's not working with the data, but rather trying to find revenue streams for the data that they have.

It's completely different. It's not direct-to-consumer. It's completely different things. And that's so funny. I have three kinds of different clients. One client wants to have this full experience of having a head of analytics, who would negotiate with the vendors, who will sign the contract… well, not sign the contracts, but make sure that the contracts are written properly and owning everything end to end. It's like an internal data team basically.

Another client really wants help only with the fundraising. Third client wants me to coach their data team and the business team, because sometimes it happens that they don't chat with each other. Another (fourth) type of client hired me to automate some stuff that is just hard for them to do in Google Sheets. I just have those small technical projects. It’s four different kinds of ways, or packages, that I can offer – and that's why it's hard to communicate what exactly I’m offering.

15:53

Alexey

**But you still managed to get clients, then I guess it works.**

15:57

Jekaterina

Yeah, exactly. It's more for all those LinkedIn posts – when you do something like that, you really need to understand who you're targeting and then adjust the messaging for them. Because if it's too broad, people don't feel that they are being addressed.

16:15

Alexey

**You're still targeting the same audience – the same people, right? Direct-to-consumer brands?**

16:21

Jekaterina

I try to, because that's where most of my knowledge comes from, basically. Yeah.

# How being a generalist helped Jekaterina’s career

16:30

Alexey

**But from what you said about your knowledge and your background, you did pretty much everything when it comes to data. Maybe you didn’t do MLOps, or at least you didn't tell us about that, but every single data role that is out there, you did this. You did data analysis, and as a data analyst, you needed to do data engineering. Then you did data science at Zalando.**

**Then you worked at Gitti as a head of BI, or somebody that set up the BI team. I don’t know, you didn't work maybe as an ML engineer, but apart from that… or maybe you actually did do some stuff there, too. So it's like everything. Also, in addition to that, you tried a startup. That's a lot. Maybe the question I have is – it seems like you enjoy doing different things.**

**But does it help you in your career to know so many things and to be interested in so many areas?**

17:35

Jekaterina

Yes. That's this whole generalist part, right? I never wanted to be a specialist in anything. I never wanted to optimize, to figure out how many layers I want to have in my deep learning model. I'm not excited about that. You immediately see on my face, I'm like “Ugh”. But what I really get excited about is connecting the dots between all those specialized people in the business. Because I did data engineering, I did a bit of MLOps as well by the way, I did a bit of marketing analytics, I did BI, I did tracking (I hate tracking [chuckles]) – this whole Google Analytics thing, but I also did that. Then I can challenge all of those parts and know the best practices there. Can I do it myself? Some of the stuff, yes and some of the stuff, no.

Then it also starts to be – I'm not a profile for corporate companies, for instance. For Zalando right now, what I enjoy doing and what I collected over the time – I'm not the best fit. For Delivery Hero either, I'm not the best fit. Because they are searching for very specialized people and I don't want to do that. My profile, this whole generalistic approach, works better for startups, where I can chat with the business, and I can easily explain the numbers to them and then they can go to the marketing team and figure out their marketing analytics or go to the tech team and speak their language.

That's so funny, because bioinformatics, it's a bridge between informaticians and biologists because those two don't know how to communicate with each other. Throughout my entire career, I was always just this person who links someone but doesn't know anything in depth. [chuckles]

19:36

Alexey

**Do you think it somehow makes your chances of having a successful career smaller? Or do you think it's fine?**

19:49

Jekaterina

If you're a generalist sitting in Zalando, and you need to optimize for deep learning models, you will be internally unhappy by default. And if you're internally unhappy in your job, you will not succeed in this job. In order to succeed, you need to be happy. [laughs] [Alexey agrees] I think it boils down to this – the more excited you are, the more you overdeliver. Maybe let me brag. It was so crazy right now.

For one of my clients, they were using Fivetran. Fivetran is a data extraction tool. Basically, it gets the data, let's say, from Shopify and packs the raw data into the data warehouse. What I figured out is that they had a bug in their codebase for how they calculate spends on Google ads. What I did is just push the fix to their codebase and it got merged. This thing just made me so happy. The client was like, “What?! You just improved our vendor codebase!” I'm like, “Yes.” I'm just super happy about this. Once you're happy, you're going this extra mile, and you're enjoying it. You are enjoying working until super late.

# Connecting business and data

21:22

Alexey

**But it still looks like you somewhat have focus right now. Right now, at least your posts focus on KPIs. I guess, this is related to what you said you enjoyed doing most, which is connecting the dots between different people and engineers. That's correct, right? Right now, this is your focus?**

21:49

Jekaterina

Yes, right now I'm focusing on connecting the dots between business and data. Basically, helping business people understand how to steer their business and according to what numbers – easy numbers or even more complicated numbers, and how to transfer those KPIs or this logic for KPIs into the infrastructure. What do I need there? Do I need help from the tech team? I cannot do it myself. How can I do it? And do I do this whole implementation or outsource this implementation? But I know exactly what the steps there are.

So the focus right now is on working together with the founders or business people and to translate this everything into the data parts. Again, for instance, data science, for me, is out of the question right now, because I'm working with the founders, who just really need to know, “What was our revenue yesterday? What did we pay for the customers yesterday? What was the percentage of returning customers?” That’s easier stuff, but that's what they need to know in order to understand how to steer the business and how the business is going. Even at Gitti, we never started with data science, although I wanted to, but just the business was not there.

# How Jekaterina’s LinkedIn posts helped her get clients

23:09

Alexey

**I see that we have a few questions and some of them are related to the discussion. A question from Adonis is related to your posts. The question is, “Looking back, what was the most important thing about the posts that helped you get the clients?”**

23:26

Jekaterina

What was the most important thing in the LinkedIn posts? Really, it was three things: figuring out who I am addressing so that I would structure the posts in a way that the people who read it will understand immediately that I'm addressing them. You don't start with “What will my post be?” You start with “What is my audience? What's the type of voice I'm using?” Am I professional, flirty, and humorous or am I super professional? What is the style? This is one thing.

Then the second thing is, I shared those posts with two of my friends, and they had brutal feedback on that. I took it, I improved it – done. So getting feedback was the second thing. And the third one, I think it was one of the hardest – to put myself out there with those selfies. That's where internally I had to struggle with myself. That's where you also realize that might be the point when you're getting out of your comfort zone, which also might be good. [chuckles]

24:48

Alexey

**We already discussed who you are addressing – direct-to-consumer brands who are interested in improving or defining their KPIs. What about the type of voice and style? Is it flirty, as you said, or is it professional? How do you decide? Do you test this? Or do you just assume that this one will work better? Maybe walk us through one of the posts and how you did it.**

25:15

Jekaterina

What I realized is that I love chatting with people. I'm loud. I love laughing. I love stupid jokes. I love clever jokes. But I can also be serious, professional and clever and figure out stuff and help people. That's what I thought – I wanted to bring my personality over through those posts. Basically, professional, clever, but filled with a bit of my weird humor. [chuckles]

I also wanted to kind of reflect this whole journey a bit. I realized that I don't want to fake anything. At the end of the day, clients are not only paying for the infrastructure, they are paying for the whole package. The whole package is this energetic person who comes into the room and is always saying hi to everyone and even entertains the team sometimes. This energy is what people pay for as well, at the end of the day.

26:24

Alexey

**Do you have any go-to stupid jokes that you use to energize the team? [chuckles]**

26:29

Jekaterina

Oh, no. It's super ad hoc-ey, right? It's not even stupid joking. It's rather those internal jokes that you get with the teams, while you sit with them. You just start to be friends with those people, right? It's so funny, with all my clients, with the older teams, I'm in a really good relationship, and they are super happy to see me and I'm also super happy to see them. So you start to have those internal jokes at the end of the day.

27:03

Alexey

**I'm trying to make a connection between the posts that target a specific audience and the four different types of work that you do. To me, they don't seem super related. The posts are KPI-related but, as you said, your work falls into four different buckets – full experience as a head of analytics, fundraising, coaching data and business teams, and then automating stuff. These are the kinds of different packages. So how did the posts help you get things that don't seem very related?**

27:45

Jekaterina

Yeah, it’s because of the reach. They figured out, “Hey, this person knows something. What she writes makes sense. Let’s just chat with her.” People kind of relate it. Of course, fundraising is another thing. But people relate that, “Okay, she's technical enough that she can automate some stuff and she understands me immediately.” That's what I meant. It's hard for me and that's what I need to figure out – how to transmit the message of what I really do.

At the end of the day, what do I really want to do? Fundraising is super tiresome. I had calls at 11 PM and had to work till 3 AM because in the morning we had to submit everything to the investor. It's not this dream job. It's super intense. The day after, I was just lying in my bed sleeping. So do I want to do this job for the next three years? Or what is it exactly that I'm enjoying the most where I don't burn myself out either? First, I need to actually figure out this part and then I need to figure out how to transmit it through a LinkedIn post so that I attract the right audience as well.

# Jekaterina’s work in fundraising

29:10

Alexey

**But for you as a generalist, what you enjoy now might not be the same as what you enjoy tomorrow, right? How do you live with this? [chuckles]**

29:21

Jekaterina

Yeah. Yes, exactly. That's a good question. Right now, I know that fundraising is fun and that's where you get lots of understanding about things like what investors want, how they steer the business, or want to steer the business, but it's super intense. Let's put it differently. At the end of the day, what matters are also people – who you work with.

All my clients are super fun, nice people. Sometimes, of course, there are some parts that I don't enjoy doing like data warehouse optimization. I'm like, “Whaaaat?” But that still helps – the people help, this whole atmosphere helps. That's where I’m still not sure which direction to go in, regarding what I love. Plus, is there a market for that as well? Fundraising doesn't happen every day.

30:26

Alexey

**What kind of work exactly do you do for fundraising? I guess it's somehow still related to KPIs? You need to show the company in a good light, “Okay, these are the KPIs and this is how the KPIs look so far and this is how they will look in the future.” So you're still kind of connecting business and data for fundraising. Right?**

30:45

Jekaterina

Exactly, exactly. Basically, there are just questions of cohorts, “How active are our cohorts?” And I sit together with the founder and we define what a cohort actually is, what retention actually is, and how we calculate this. Then, there are 10 different ways of how we can calculate it and you decide, “Okay, which one so I submit and how do I visualize it?” And if there is some kind of weird stuff happening, “How do I explain this so that investors don't find it weird.” Basically, we sit together with the business and try to figure out how to show, what to show, and then I just go collect the data through different databases, different systems, wrangle something in Python, create the charts in Google Sheets. I started loving Google Sheets. [chuckles] And then it’s iterate, iterate, iterate. And then maybe investors sometimes have other questions.

# Cohorts and KPIs

31:46

Alexey

**Do you have any examples of these cohorts and KPIs? Maybe it doesn't have to come from a specific client, but just to understand what exactly you do.**

31:55

Jekaterina

Yes. For instance, for SaaS, the business to consumer segment (not B2B, but B2C). There, you sign up. Let’s take Facebook for example – you sign up and then you can post, you can like, you can just be active on the platform. Now the question is – those who signed up in April, how active are they? That's where you define activity. What is activity? Is it liking? Is it scrolling? Is it whatever? Those who signed up in April, how active are they compared to those who signed up in September, for instance? And if you see that September cohort is really bad, you're like, “Okay, what happened? Did our product start to be really bad? Yes, no? Is it the traffic that marketing's attracting? Is it bad or good? Yes, no?” Then you start to dig deeper like, “What is it about those people that they are just not active on the platform from specific cohorts?”

33:11

Alexey

**Okay, first it's about defining KPIs, then defining cohorts, doing some analysis, showing charts, and then if something is off, going there and understanding what's happening. You do this for fundraising, too? Does it help to attract more money?**

33:32

Jekaterina

Yes. That's so funny, half of the stuff that is normally done for fundraising can also be reused in the business – to look at this on a monthly level. Some of the stuff we never implemented – it's only for fundraising. But yeah, it's kind of how business wants to steer and then we just figure out how to see how the business performs. What are the users doing? Why are they doing it?

# Improving communication between the data and business teams

34:03

Alexey

**We spoke about fundraising to some extent, but I'm also curious about the other three parts, especially this coaching data and the business team aspect. How is it similar? How is it related? What do you do there?**

34:16

Jekaterina

This project will be… I'm not doing it right now, it's one of the future projects. The problem there is that the company is pretty... It's like six, seven years old. They do have the data team, they do have the business team. However, it's hard for businesses to be data-driven because nobody coached them to be data-driven. What is data driven nowadays? Everybody uses this word, but nobody can explain what it actually means at the end of the day or how to actually start being this. So the business team is super frustrated. They need to be data-driven, but they have no clue how and what this means. Then the data team is there, and they need to manage all these ad hoc requests. The infrastructure might already be outdated. And then they don't understand just what the business team needs because they don't have time to understand the business.

Those people are not business savvy. That's the thing, you have engineers or data people who are not business savvy and you have business people who are not data savvy, so it will not work by default. And that's where I try to help. Well, I try to help the business people to be more data-driven, or data savvy, and the data people to be more business savvy. Then once all those two parties go towards each other a bit, like one step, then it's already a success at the end of the day. It's also hard for me to measure the success because what I do is just coach them on how to communicate with each other. [chuckles] How do you measure communication – the success of my work? It takes time, right? It takes even several months, actually, when business will know the impact of this coaching.

36:10

Alexey

**So you kind of act as a translator – you translate from one language to another. But then, I guess, the ultimate goal is to let people be able to talk between each other without you, right? [Jekaterina agrees] You do this, then you leave, and you help somebody else achieve the same.**

36:29

Jekaterina

Exactly. That's exactly what I was doing with bioinformatics as well – helping those informaticians and biologists actually to make sure that this whole thing works together.

# Motivating every link in the company’s chain

36:43

Alexey

**I think you mentioned that. The question I have right now is “How does being a generalist help you now?” And I think one thing you mentioned is – you've done a lot of stuff already, so sometimes you can just go ahead and do this. Even if you don't do this yourself, you kind of have an idea in your mind of how you would approach this. So that's one thing, I think, that can help you in your current role. Are there other things that you think are also helpful for you right now?**

37:14

Jekaterina

Yes. I also mentioned that I know best practices. That's so funny, people know that I know best practices. but I don't know… I know what doesn't work for sure. Those mistakes are normally done by young teams over and over. You see the patterns, and you're like, “Hey, I already know now that in three months we'll struggle with that. So let's not do that.” So that’s knowing what doesn't work because I was in those different roles, it helps me now to prevent, let's call them “disasters,” in the future.

Also, it's all about the people's communication. You just adjust to how people communicate, and then you try to communicate in their language. That's why, with the generalist part – I chatted with so many different people. I had to chat with the data engineers, PMS, CEOs, CTOs, CPOs. And you need to find a way of how to make them what you want them to make. [chuckles] That entails different approaches to different people. You need to know how to motivate every segment of it – every person, basically.

# The cons of freelancing

38:45

Alexey

**Are there any cons of freelancing? Are there any cons of being a generalist when freelancing right now?**

38:56

Jekaterina

Yes, it’s hard to sell myself, because people just ask, “Hey, Katya – what is the difference between you and a data agency?” This is also a hard explanation for me to actually define the real difference there, because again, people also pay for this energy. How do I tell them, “Hey, you will pay for the nice mood that you will have in the office?” [chuckles] It doesn't work that way.

39:26

Alexey

**That’s too bad. [chuckles]**

39:27

Jekaterina

Yes. [chuckle] So I think it's hard for me to sell this generalistic thing because there are lots of other agencies or freelancers who have a very specialized focus and then people ask me, “What is the difference between you and them?

39:50

Alexey

**What is a data agency?**

39:53

Jekaterina

There are several data agencies in Berlin that help direct-to-consumer brands build data warehouses, reporting tools on top of it, and dashboards. They may also might help a bit with the tracking. I'm kind of competing with them, but on the other hand, I'm not. Because I'm not going against the typical data engineer – I'm more this holistic who will really fit with the business-first, figure things out and then implement.

40:29

Alexey

**From what you described in terms of what data agencies do, it looks like they already have some packages. If I know that I need a data warehouse, I go to them, and I tell them, “Hey, come over and build me a data warehouse.” But what if I don't know that I need a data warehouse? Who do I go to?**

40:47

Jekaterina

Yes, that's the thing. Everything is about how you sell yourself. Data agencies don't sell themselves by saying, “We’ll build your data warehouse.” They sell dashboards. And that's what the CEO and CPO and the business founders need, right? What is in the back? They're like, “I don't care. I just want this fancy dashboard that shows me my sales for the last several days.” Of course, the agencies figured out that this is a selling point – their selling audience is actually C-level (CMO, CEO, CPOs). If there’s a CTO, that already means that they might be a tech team who can kind of handle that. Those people are the selling points. So how do I adjust my messaging to those people? That's the thing, again, adjusting the messaging so that the customers feel addressed at the end of the day.

41:44

Alexey

**So how do you compete with them? By making selfies? [Jekaterina laughs] Posting selfies on LinkedIn? Because I don't think they do this, right? [chuckles]**

41:52

Jekaterina

No. [laughs] Exactly. What I feel is that I'm more on the business side. I try to be more on the business side and because I was operationally involved at Gitti at steering business with data, and also in the fundraising events, which is experience that those agencies don't have – operationally being involved in businesses, helping the marketing team. They just come, build, they leave (normally). Of course, sometimes they maintain the infrastructure and maintain the dashboards, but they are not actively involved in the business team. And that's where I get involved immediately.

# Balancing projects and networking

42:40

Alexey

**Okay. We have a few more questions. A question from Claire, “What are the pros and cons of freelancing, according to your experience?”**

42:51

Jekaterina

Yeah, we discussed this with Alex before – don't be confused by this “free” prefix in “freelancing”. You're free in terms of choosing who you work with and when you work, but that doesn't mean that you will now surf for a week and then can maybe do three hours of work. This doesn't work, because you need to work on the project that you have right now, but you also need to grow your own freelancing business. This basically entails reaching out to new customers, or helping them somehow, so that you get the audience of people who know you. You need to make this audience bigger. Those are two things that you need to do in parallel.

That's why there's not so much “free” time in freelancing at the end of the day. The process that I use, for instance, I like to work with ambitious people – startups. Those are very motivated people, fast people, fast thinkers – they want to solve the problem. I'm really intrigued by those kinds of people. The disadvantage of freelancing is that sometimes – one month you will be without money. How do you deal with this? That means that if I earn like 10K today, that doesn't mean that I need to spend those 10K today. That means that I need to distribute those 10K and do this whole financial planning of my life, so that I can buy food. This is exactly what hit me in September/October. I was just without clients, so without the proper income. And this is a bit scary.

44:45

Alexey

**How do you deal with this stress? By planning things?**

44:49

Jekaterina

I mean, yes, planning. Also, knowing exactly how much you spend and not overspend. You must see that you’re not only working on your project, but you’re also growing this audience that will become the leads afterward. Basically, projects are short-term optimization, but this growth of the audience is long-term optimization, where you don't know what will come out of this at the end. That’s the instability or the risk that you just take. Of course, you should not go freelancing if you don't have any savings. That's hard. Mentally, this will be very hard.

45:38

Alexey

**Or at least if you have a client lined up for the next half a year. Right?**

45:43

Jekaterina

Yes. Exactly. Then it's fine. The hardest part… if you don't have clients, you will figure it out. Maybe you can go to the coffee shop and work there. You will figure it out. But mental health and this mental instability – that hits hard.

46:05

Alexey

**What do you do for that? How do you deal with this?**

46:09

Jekaterina

In September/October, when I was sitting without clients, I was like, “Whoa.” I was immediately thinking, “Okay, can I sell something on those platforms where freelancers do some kind of small stuff for you? Do I need to sign up for the freelancers networks? What should I do?”

46:27

Alexey

**Like Fiverr, right? These kinds of places?**

46:28

Jekaterina

Yes, exactly. Then I was like “This is not what I want to do at the end of the day.” And then I came up with those posts. So you need to be creative, and you will be creative once you realize… [chuckles]

46:45

Alexey

**That if you don't, then you won’t have anything to eat, right?**

46:48

Jekaterina

Exactly. But that's the funny part. There should be calculated risks. I didn't go freelancing all of a sudden. I had a customer already, where I was like, “Okay, we discussed things. It’s been going well for several months. I feel good. They feel good about me.” So that's when I felt like, “Okay, I can leave my stable job.” And then, I learned about this myself, that I can stretch myself – I started to learn about my boundaries, about my limitations, and also about myself more, once I got out of my comfort zone. That's the thing. Oh! One more thing that's crazy with freelancing – every new client will challenge you. I feel like I’m constantly in the job application process and in a constant salary negotiation process. You come in and what I'm used to at Gitti, but had been working there for two years – I had lots of freedom, but only because I earned this freedom. With every new client, I don't have this freedom. I don't have this trust. So I need to build this trust, and building this trust with every client is hard. It takes time. That's where I was like “Woah, constant salary negotiations, constant job application, constant building trust… this is hard.”

48:15

Alexey

**Yeah, it does sound very hard. Do you work more now than compared to previously?**

48:23

Jekaterina

Yes. Yes, I do work more. That's the thing, chatting with people – do you consider that work or not work? Growing this audience.

48:35

Alexey

**Networking. Yeah. Okay.**

# The importance of enjoying what you do

48:36

Jekaterina

That's the question – you, as a person, are you happy doing that? If you're happy doing that, if you enjoy having three coffee meetings during the day in different parts of the city and you're running around like crazy – and you need to come to those meetings as if you're fresh, energized. [chuckles]

48:58

Alexey

**And you still need to do work for other clients. Right?**

49:01

Jekaterina

Exactly. Again, if it makes you happy, if you have the energy for that – and you need to create this energy, energy doesn't come from out of the blue – then yes, you will enjoy that. And it doesn't matter how long you will work at the end of the day. But it's also the question of “Is it working hours or not?” That's the thing, chatting with people – I don't see that as working hours. But for those hours, currently, I'm not paid either.

49:31

Alexey

**How do you create this energy? Where do you get it from?**

49:34

Jekaterina

I don't know. [laughs]

49:41

Alexey

**Do you just naturally come refreshed to every meeting?**

49:44

Jekaterina

No, the thing is that I think before joining Gitti, I was calmer and maybe scattered and maybe also more irritated by some stuff. That's what I love about Gitti, as I also said to the founder – I was able to see within Gitti, that I managed to do lots of things and that I was able to get out of my comfort zone and achieve lots of stuff. I always felt like, “There is a problem. Yes, it's a problem but I will figure out how to do this.” This belief that you will figure it out somehow turned back to me as, “I don't need to be sad. I don't need to be depressed about this. I will figure this out.” This was a mind change for me. That's where I am now. I'm super happy with what I'm doing again. This happiness creates the energy at the end of the day.

50:57

Alexey

**In some ways, the secret is positive self-talk. Right?**

51:02

Jekaterina

[chuckles] Exactly. But that's the thing, if you start doubting yourself, that's the most negative energy that you can have. It will not help further.

# Growing the client base

51:16

Alexey

**Sarah wrote a comment “Passion and desire to help and the impact in many trials is so fulfilling.” [Jekaterina agrees] This is a good summary. So you said that in addition to “work,” meaning helping clients, you also need to grow your client base, you need to grow your network, you need to have leads for the next gigs. After you finish the current job, you need to have another one. The question from Wilhelm is, “How do you reach out for new clients? How do you grow your client base?”**

51:53

Jekaterina

I don't do cold outreach. This is hard. This is annoying. This makes me sad – when somebody doesn't answer my message. [chuckles] So I decided not to go with that. Before I started posting on LinkedIn, what I did – I was invited to a Slack channel of direct-to-consumer brands, where founders and operators talk about where to get the best price for packaging, for instance. There were like 200 people, and I stalked all of them on LinkedIn. I was blocked by LinkedIn twice for several days because of this. Because I was just doing it really quickly. What I needed was for them to see that I checked them out. I didn't care about their profiles. Then two people reached out to me as well from there. Basically, this stalking helped a bit. [chuckles]

52:57

Alexey

**It's like cold outreach, but a little bit different, right? You stalk them, you make sure that they have this view – in LinkedIn, there is a setting that lets people see that you visited their profile. This is enabled for you, so you visit their profile, they see it, and then they check your profile, right? And then they decide to talk to you themselves?**

53:21

Jekaterina

Yes. I mean, the conversion rate from 250 people to 2 people is super small, I agree. But it's fine. It worked out. And it took me maybe one hour for two possible leads. Fine. So there’s that. Also, if somebody posts on LinkedIn, “Hey, I have this reporting. What is the best reporting tool?” Then I jump immediately on that question. I'm also in several private Slack channels where people ask questions and I also jumped on that. I'm like, “Okay, let me help you.”

There’s one potential client – well, not even potential, but we just chatted with her – her freelancer for Google Analytics is not answering her and she has a project where she wants to move from GA3 to GA4 and adjust some stuff. So I was like, “Hey, let's have a chat. I want to understand your problem. I might not be able to do that, but I know people who might be able to do that.” We just chatted for 20 minutes and she was super thankful that I just reached out and helped her. It might not be that she converts to a customer, but she has seen my face, she has seen what I can do, so she can also maybe suggest me to someone.

54:49

Alexey

**Okay, so networking – helping and stalking people on LinkedIn. [chuckles] That's your secret?**

54:55

Jekaterina

[laughs] And selfies. Don’t forget selfies.

# In the office work vs working remotely

54:59

Alexey

**Selfies, yeah. That's the most important thing. Do you work remotely or is it always within Berlin in an office?**

55:08

Jekaterina

I love being in the office. That's where this whole energy is great – this whole communication with the team. I am not the typical digital nomad who will go to Bali, surf, and then work. I'm trying to always do 100%. So either 100% work or 100% vacation. I don’t do this whole workcation thing. No. I am still considering if I should stay in Germany and Berlin or if I should move somewhere else. I still don't know.

But I feel now that there is a freedom for me. That's where the “free” comes in. If I'm able to structure my clients in a way that I can work remotely for them, and I don't need to be in the office, then I can move to wherever I want. This is also amazing. That's where, all sudden, the advantage of this “free” in “freelance” comes in.

# Jekaterina’s advice who people who feel stuck

56:11

Alexey

**Interesting. I noticed that there is one question in the list of questions that we prepared. I don't know if we have enough time – we only have three minutes – but maybe we can try to cover it quickly. What would be your advice for people who feel stuck at what they're doing?**

56:30

Jekaterina

Don't sit, act. Act immediately. Again, don't quit today. [chuckles] Don't do that. Let's say you're a machine learning engineer, and you're like, “I'm a bit stuck at work. What should I do?” Reach out to consultancies and talk to them. Maybe you could join them as a freelancer one day a week. Just start chatting with people and try to figure out what others can offer. Or do what I did as well. I reached out to data consultants – people who have a similar background to me, but much more experienced. He is targeting other customer groups. I just told him “Hey, I want to do this. What would be your advice?” Just start chatting with people and try to figure things out. Take calculated risks, but don't sit on the call on the couch. Really just start doing something. Even small things are also fine.

57:34

Alexey

**If you feel stuck and you want to be a freelancer, this is what you should do? In general – talk to people, right?**

57:42

Jekaterina

But that's the thing, even if you don't want to do freelancing. Just start chatting with people who you think are exciting, who you think can help you with advice or something else. People love to help. People will write back.

# Jekaterina’s resource recommendations

58:03

Alexey

**Is there any book or other resource that you can recommend to the listeners?**

58:08

Jekaterina

Yes. I think there are two. One is more general, as in “generalist”. It’s called The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact. Basically, they talk a lot about lots of things, like how to do storytelling with very nice examples from all over the world. They explain how to create moments for other people that they will remember and how to create this energy, and what it actually means to create this energy. I love this book. I just read it recently.

So that's the general book and another one is more about marketing analytics, which is what I was doing the last few years. There's this guy in Google, who’s like the Senior Director of Strategic Analytics or something – Avinash Kaushik. So his blog and newsletters. That's just a bomb of knowledge. So for anyone who is interested in marketing analytics, that's the newsletter to read.

59:24

Alexey

**I also usually ask what the best way to reach out to you is, but I think it's LinkedIn. Right? [Jekaterina confirms] We’ll include the link to your profile. I think that's all we have time for today. That was amazing – talking to you. You're very energetic. I feel the energy now. I can go and work and something. Great! Yeah, thanks for joining us today. Thanks for sharing all that. Thanks for telling your story. It was amazing. Thanks, everyone else, for joining us today. Have a great rest of your day!**

59:56

Jekaterina

Thank you so much. Thank you for having me and have a nice day as well.