1:19

Alexey

**This week, we'll talk about transitioning from marketing to being a product owner in search. And we have a very special guest today Valeria. Valeria is a product owner with a focus on e-commerce, site search optimization, analytics, team management, and product development – and I think there are more things that I omitted because your biography is quite long and extensive. Today, Valeria will share her experience with us. Welcome!**

1:48

Lera

Thank you so much. Thank you for joining.

# Lera’s background

1:51

Alexey

**Before we go into our main topic of transitioning from marketing to being a product owner, let's start with your background. Can you tell us about your career journey so far?**

2:01

Lera

What do you mean by career journey?

2:06

Alexey

**Your journey of how you ended up in the place where you are right now. What did you do before?**

2:14

Lera

Oh, okay – fine. Well, as you learned before, I started with marketing. Actually, I was always focused on IT. Working in Product was my vision of my career, but to start being a product manager/product owner, you need to start from somewhere. Basically, there was an opportunity to join Ringostat, which is a SaaS that provides analytics and call-tracking for marketers. They had an open position of marketer – it was like performance marketing, so I was in charge of doing promotions and doing some events. My responsibility was to acquire leads – to generate leads and to make them our customers.

For example, some very interesting stuff that I did – our customers were B2B (other companies) and marketing the work for e-commerce as well. I did some interesting events, for example, there was a rating of PPC agencies. That's how I grabbed the attention of all our customers and provided something of value for them. For this rating stuff, we also acquired leads. My first step in Performance Marketing was acquiring leads and making promotions and all this advertising stuff. So after Ringostat, I went to another company. It was a logistic holding. We have eight companies inside this holding. Basically, it was about transportation, about oil (we have gas stations) and they also have e-commerce that sells car parts. That was a little bit of a journey for my career.

Basically, it was a small marketing department and we also did pretty much everything. I was also in charge of Performance Marketing and we did some promotions for each company. For example, we did a promotion for a logistics company, made events, and so on. Also, it was like internal outsourcing marketing for all these companies in the holding. The other great task was to make branding for gas stations. I also loved this task because I was analyzing and making a “job to be done” framework, creating great messaging in our branding, and we released this branding. The other task was to launch a website that sells car parts. We were limited in our assortment – we just sold tires. This e-commerce was also B2B because we sold to logistic companies. It was stuff for trucks. We sold batteries for huge trucks, tires for them, and oil, and all this stuff. I worked there for one year. It was based in Odesa, Ukraine.

As you know, in 2020, the war in Ukraine started. Because I was in marketing, it's become… I realized I needed to move to Europe, because of the situation there. That's how I left my job at the previous company. I realized it was marketing for the internal market in Ukraine, and so I would need to change my whole career – to change everything I was doing – and to move to another country to focus more on the international position. This was where the challenge began. Basically, I didn’t really have experience being a product owner. I didn't have much experience in e-commerce because my e-commerce experience was for B2B users. It was not about promotions and stuff. I didn't have much of this experience. That's where the journey was about breaking barriers in your head.

So, I was trying to find a new job because I lost mine. I did several interviews, and while I was doing interviews, I actually started learning to code. I was learning, for example, JavaScript, HTML, and CSS, while I was in this transition period – I wanted to learn to code more. I really had time for this, too. It was mind-blowing for me at first. It was hard. I really struggled to learn how to code. But basically, I ended up in a position where I could code a website, for example. When I was looking for a new job I used this time to learn new stuff – it was hard stuff for me because it was completely different from what I did before.

How I joined AUTODOC is a great story. I just tried different channels of how to find a new job and I wrote to my colleague, with whom we used to work at Ringostat. I just wrote to him, “How are you doing? How are you doing with this whole situation in Ukraine? Where are you now?” And he said, “I'm working at AUTODOC right now.” And asked, “Yeah, actually I'm looking for jobs. Maybe you have some open positions, guys?” And he said “Yeah, why not? I should ask people.” The recruiter sent me a job description and it had nothing to actually do with my knowledge – it was so different.

9:26

Alexey

**It was the product owner position, right?**

9:28

Lera

Yeah. Yeah, it was a product owner position. The requirements were something like being a product owner in e-commerce for two years, knowing a lot about car parts, and everything like that. [cross-talk]

9:40

Alexey

**But you knew something about car parts already from your previous logistics experience. [Lera agrees] So it was still a match, to some extent, right?**

9:47

Lera

Yes. I use this experience to sell myself [chuckles] and to be more relevant. We went to some interviews and I think they liked me. So that's how I joined AUTODOC. From the beginning, at AUTODOC, I can share my challenges regarding how to transform a new position from the lack of… [cross-talk]

10:20

Alexey

**Yeah, I definitely have questions about that.**

10:22

Lera

Yeah. Okay.

# Lera’s move from Ukraine to Germany

10:23

Alexey

**I'm just curious. When the war started and you left Ukraine, did he go immediately to Berlin? Or did you go to some other place?**

10:31

Lera

No, no. It was hard to find an apartment, actually. Maybe you know something about this. We started from a small town in Germany, but then I realized it was too small to live there, so we went to Breslau. And from Breslau, then I moved to Berlin. But I moved to Berlin while already having been employed at AUTODOC.

10:58

Alexey

**Aha, so you have offices in both Breslau and Berlin.**

11:02

Lera

We don't have offices in Breslau, it's remote.

11:06

Alexey

**Okay. So you lived in Breslau, you contacted your ex-colleague from the previous company, and he forwarded you a job description. You didn't really fit this job description, but you still tried to interview and got this job, and then eventually moved to Berlin.**

11:22

Lera

Yeah, that's true.

11:24

Alexey

**Okay. I think I interrupted you. You wanted to tell us about the challenges, right? Your prior experience was in performance marketing. [Lera agrees] You were talking about things like PPC campaigns, which is… What does it mean, actually? PPC?**

11:43

Lera

Pay per click.

# The transition from Marketing to Product Ownership

11:44

Alexey

**Pay per click! Exactly. And now you're a product owner, right? Which is… I don't know how related it is to Performance Marketing. Maybe there is some relation, maybe not. But I'm curious, what were the challenges? How did you transition? What did you need to do for this?**

12:06

Lera

Yeah, that's an interesting part. The first challenge was that I needed to learn a lot. I spent… I worked a lot. I worked until late-late evening to become an expert in this field. I learned from very different perspectives. For example, first, I needed to learn what product ownership is. I took a bunch of courses. For example, there was a special course for product ownership in Ukraine – I wanted to take a deep dive into this role and what it actually means and… [cross-talk]

12:55

Alexey

**But you were already employed. [Lera agrees] So you already got hired and you thought, “Okay, what is this product owner thing?” [chuckles] “Let me check.”**

13:04

Lera

[chuckles] Yeah, that's a funny part. But I really did a lot to learn. I read so many books. For example, there is a book called Professional Product Owner. It describes what the role of product owner is. Basically, the product owner is a role in Scrum. But in our company, the product owner is more of a product manager. It's just a title, but we do pretty much everything that the product manager does. Currently, we are in a tech transformation, and our titles would actually be product managers. Really, the first thing I did was take a deep dive into what the product owner role is and what this person does. I went to courses, and I was reading books – I’ve done a lot of this. I have some knowledge on how… For example, in my previous companies [of employment], people were doing the same thing.

At Ringostat, we had pretty much the same positions. It was the Visionary Officer and the Project Manager. I basically grabbed some patterns from those people and put those patterns into doing this role. Then I took a really deeper dive into this role. The second challenge… I also wanted to say that, when you transition from another position, one thing that would be super helpful is to build connections with your colleagues and your coworkers because those people will help you. They will teach you. My tip for this is to learn from everyone. I learned a lot from Quality Assurance Engineers. They taught me about the product. I also learned a lot from engineers – from them, I learned the logic of the product and the search. I also learned from business analysts and I learned a lot from data analysts.

I communicate with a cross-functional team and I spend really, really quality time in one-on-one meetings. So build connections, learn from them, and deeply understand the product. If I were to give a tip to myself back when I started, it would be to communicate more – to do more one-on-ones and communicate with different people, at different levels. They will all generate new insights – they will teach you how to be more insightful and more productive. Learn internal stuff in the company to understand the context. What else do I need to share? Basically, about how I learned data – for example, data analysis.

# The importance of communication and one-on-ones

16:36

Alexey

**I'm curious about a few things. You mentioned you had two problems. The first problem was that you needed to learn a lot. What you did to solve that was take courses, and worked into late evenings – you tried to immerse yourself in the job to learn as much as possible. Then the second thing was building connections. You would speak with pretty much everyone in the company to learn from them – how they work, what they work on, what kind of problems they have, and learn about the company. I think this thing (this communication) these one-on-one meetings are really important for everyone, regardless of the role, be it product manager, product owner, data scientist, software engineer – anyone. So I'm just curious, for these one-on-one meetings – let's say you want to speak with a QA engineer or a business analyst or a data analyst.**

**How do you structure this meeting? First, I guess you need to approach a person saying, “Hey, Martin, (or Hey, Theresa). I want to have a one-on-one meeting with you.” Right? So you agree to a meeting. But then, what happens next? How do you structure this meeting? How do you get the most out of this meeting? Is it just free-form or do you have some structure?**

17:55

Lera

Yeah, I want to share a specific case. When I joined, they already had development going on – they had a specific feature to deliver. Basically, I realized that we kind of had a miscommunication with one developer – we just didn't hear each other. I understood that we could not find common ground – I said one thing, he said another, and we were losing time. We did communications in JIRA and the communication just wasn't aligned. So I decided to set up a one-on-one meeting to fix the situation and find common ground.

18:52

Alexey

**With the developer, right?**

18:53

Lera

With the developer – right. The structure was like this: I will try to remember the questions I asked him. For example, I asked him what his vision of the best product owner was – what did he expect from me, being the product owner? The second question was, “Who do you consider to be the best product owner in the company?” He described what he expected from me and he described a great product owner who was already in our company – whom I needed to learn from.

What I learned from him was that a product owner was supposed to be more confident and pushier – to be a leader – and he said that was lacking for me. This was great feedback. Developers need a person (a product owner) who will be a great leader. Also, we were making some small talk – we talked about things outside of the job. I actually learned that he loved tennis and I also play tennis, so we made some small talk about tennis.

20:23

Alexey

**You connected on this basis.**

20:26

Lera

[chuckles] Sorry?

20:27

Alexey

**You connected because you share the same hobby. So you made a connection.**

20:30

Lera

Yeah. I asked him to give me some tips on how to improve my job and what I do [for him]. He shared his opinion. I also asked how we could improve our work process and what he thought our gaps were. I just wanted to collect his feedback. This feedback was really important to me, naturally, and I really wanted him to just share his concerns and everything. After everything, after this meeting, this person said, “Yeah, okay. I understand you.” He wasn't angry anymore.

He understood that I just came there and I was a newbie. He said, “Okay, you will learn. Okay, Valerie – I'm fine with you. It's okay.” So in one hour, you can build the connection and that's how you take it step-by-step and become a better specialist – more mature, more confident. You learn more. Now, if you compare me with the person I was in the beginning – it’s two different people. [chuckles]

# The role of Product Owner

21:53

Alexey

**So you needed to find common ground with the developer and you couldn't find it. Maybe this is more like a “step back” question because we did not really discuss what product owners do. I was wondering, why was it important to have good communication with this developer? What's the role of a product owner?**

22:17

Lera

Yeah, we didn’t discuss this. [chuckles]

22:19

Alexey

**You said that you took a lot of courses to figure out what your job actually is. So, what is your job?**

22:27

Lera

[chuckles] It's a funny one. The funniest thing is how [different] product owners are from what they’re considered to be in literature and how they are in real life. I think it's kind of different. I will share with you the reality of e-commerce, actually. As I said before, I'm in charge of search, which is when you type something and search in e-commerce. One part of that is monitoring the metrics. Basically, I'm in charge of keeping an eye on the existing products. We are e-commerce, so we already have our search working. The first thing I need to do is monitor our day-to-day metrics – our conversion rate, the search popularity, and all this stuff. This is one part of my job. If there are some critical bugs, I need to fix them somehow – to find a developer and to avoid making the company losing money.

I'm in charge of making sure that the functionality works fine. Sometimes we do have some issues, for example, with updating products. I also need to control. This is simply one part. The other part (the real product owner/product manager part) is we need to have a clear vision of where we are going – where our product is going. You need to have a detailed roadmap with those JIRA Epics and User Stories. The product owner prioritizes… The product owner is a value maximizer – this person needs to prioritize the most valuable features and say, “We’re doing this first, and the next feature would be this one.” Basically, it’s roadmapping, planning, defining the vision of the product and the strategy – that’s basically the product owner’s role.

The other thing I need to do is team management. I think I can say that I sometimes perform the role of a Scrum Master or Project Manager, which is how you just organize the work to deliver some features. Frankly speaking, we don’t have unstoppable development – what I want to say is that we have some initiatives that we deliver. For example, this year, there was some time when we didn't actively work on search because the company had different initiatives, such as migrating from a regular website to an adaptive website. I was taking on the responsibility of transitioning the existing website to an adaptive website. I didn't participate as a Scrum Master in this kind of initiative – I was doing a different role.

Sometimes we have initiatives that are very dedicated to search, for example, delivering filters, or a new auto-complete. For these kinds of parts, I take on the role of Scrum Master to organize our development process. I also do this kind of stuff. I mentioned roadmapping, but I didn't mention that I do research as well. Basically, I monitor competitors, I read a lot about search – I was very surprised that search is such a deep, deep topic. You need to know about machine learning, natural [language] processing, you need to know about algorithms, about Elasticsearch, and how to do the autocomplete, you need to know about product structure and all the attributes of the searches.

Also, you need to know the users, actually – what's the business context of search, what problems are users trying to solve by searching for car parts, for example? You need to know different query types. For example, users can search in different ways – they can search by part numbers (OEM numbers) or they can search by part name, or they just type something like, “I want brake pads Brembo on my Audi a4,” and you need to know how to make your search understand all the semantics.

27:44

Alexey

**That’s a lot. [Lera agrees] You’ve been talking for 10 minutes and I'm taking notes – the entire page is filled with what you do. [chuckles]**

27:52

Lera

Yeah, I'm jumping a lot. I want to structure it a little bit. First, it's to monitor how things are going right now, under the current project. Second, you need to do research and understand users, understand competitors, and understand patterns of users’ searches. The other part is team management – how to organize the work. [cross-talk]

# Utilizing Scrum as a Product Owner

28:30

Alexey

**You follow Scrum, right? All these estimating meetings, daily stand-ups, retrospectives – you organize all that, right?**

28:47

Lera

Yes, depending on the initiatives we have. If we, for example, have to deliver filters – we need two developers and two QA engineers, and that's pretty much it. For this kind of development process, for example, we did stand-ups, planning, and retrospectives. But for the other initiative, we needed to investigate new technologies, so you don't really need all these ceremonies. You just do Kanban, where it's “needs to be done,” “in progress,” “done”. For different initiatives, it’s different types of…

29:47

Alexey

**From what I understood, you work with multiple teams, right?**

29:50

Lera

Yeah, that's the interesting part. Because right now, we don't really have a super-dedicated search team. But I'm looking forward to having one. Before we just took developers for some initiatives. For example, for some kind of initiative, you just grab some people – to deliver this feature, you need those people and you acquire those people – you have this initiative and you deliver it. But we are going to have dedicated teams – for example, dedicated to search – because now, in our roadmap, we have natural language processing, we have machine learning, and I think it requires a lot of context understanding. That's why I’m trying to form a team around search right now.

30:55

Alexey

**So, right now, in addition to all these things you mentioned, you're also building a search team.**

31:00

Lera

Yeah! [chuckles]

# Building teams and cross-functionality

31:02

Alexey

**Okay, I just want to summarize what you said. First, you monitor business health (search health) if I can say that. [Lera agrees] The second thing is, you're doing research, you're talking with users, you're watching what competitors are doing so you know if you need any new features or things like that. Then you do this team operational stuff, which is Scrum/Kanban – all these processes and rituals. Then you mentioned a more strategic part, or defining a clear vision of where you're going, and then from that vision, building a roadmap – that's another thing.**

**Then, I remember you talked about actually learning all these things – learning about NLP, learning about machine learning. And now I think I understand why – because you need to build a team and you want to know what kind of things they need to know. Right? What kind of experience you need in the team, what kind of knowledge you need in the team – you need to know that in order to build the team.**

32:16

Lera

Yeah. For example, I need to know natural language processing is data science stuff. Actually, it's not just me. You might have the impression that I do all this stuff and it's like a T-shaped person. But we still have, for example, the research team – at AUTODOC, there is the research department and they do in-depth analytics and all this stuff. So I don't do it by myself. I don't do user interviews, as you said – we have a special department for that. And also we have… [cross-talk]

32:57

Alexey

**You still need to know that, “There was this interview, and this is the outcome of this interview. These were the questions.” And perhaps you even watch the videos of the interview to see how users actually use the app and then you see, “Okay, something is wrong here. Maybe we should change the flow of the search.” Right?**

33:14

Lera

Yeah, that’s true. My message was that I don't do it by myself, but we have a special department for this. But I still need to read these studies and everything.

33:27

Alexey

**It’s just that you don't code yourself, but you need to translate what the researchers found into what actually needs to happen. You’re this glue that kind of links these departments. Right?**

33:45

Lera

Yeah. I say that being a product manager is like being a mini-CEO of the product. Maybe you've heard this and it's true – you’re kind of responsible for everything and if you have some kind of issues with the product, you need to react. That's a tricky position, I know. But it's still very interesting. Some people like this – more generalists and T-shaped people – I like to learn from different perspectives. So I think this is fine for me, to not be a super-narrow specialist, but more of a wide person.

# Lera’s experience learning about search

34:32

Alexey

**How do you keep up with all that? You mentioned that, in addition to all that, you also need to learn about all this machine learning stuff. Actually, this is how I found you. There was a post that you made about Relevant Search – the book. Duke, the author, liked the post and it appeared in my feed. Duke was already a guest multiple times at DataTalks.Club. I saw his reaction and then I read the post and I thought, “Hmm… Interesting. I should invite Valeria.” So why did you…**

**The book is called Relevant Search and, as far as I remember, the book is about – it's a very technical book. [Lera agrees] It's about using Elasticsearch. It's Elasticsearch, right? It’s a search engine for building searches. So how did you come across this book? Why did you decide to read it?**

35:28

Lera

I think it's good to mention. It’s because I see that I need to understand all this stuff to communicate with developers, for example. I was in some communities of Elastic, and I saw that people were sharing this book. Actually, this book is promoted to be a good one – like the Bible of Search or something. I found that it's pretty useful to read about search. Regarding why I wrote this post – because, in the introduction of this book, they just pointed out some of my pain points. They just described the importance of search and how hard search is. [chuckles]

The main point is relevance, which is very connected to the business context. You need to educate developers to understand the business context because you cannot just build a relevant search from scratch – you need to tune the search to be relevant. You also need to give the developers this context – what is relevant for users, for example. I really like this thought, this expression. We need to work on relevance. You cannot just grab some universal search and it will be super fine. You need to tune it for your business. That's what I wanted to post on LinkedIn – this thought that I really liked. The second part of the post was about cross-functional collaboration. So it's not about requirement-driven development, it's more about a product mindset – everyone should understand, as I said, the business context and why it's important for users to get these kinds of results.

I expect my developers to have a deep understanding of the business context. I actually create those meetings, where I try to explain to developers why we're doing this, what the problems of the users we’re solving, and what search actually means. Even today, I will have this meeting and I want to show them, for example, that the users can search by catalog – they can navigate by catalog, and it’s a different way to search for car parts by text. I want them to understand this, that it's not about just text, it's about users solving their problems.

38:33

Alexey

**I imagine, if we’re talking about this domain of car parts, it's a pretty complex one. Let's say you have a specific car model/make – Volkswagen, for example (I'm not really into cars) – I don't know, some specific model.**

38:47

Lera

It’s okay. That's fine. [chuckles]

38:49

Alexey

**And then you need a specific part that would fit this exact car, right? You not only need to know the name of this car part, but also the model and make of the car for which you need the part. I can imagine that it becomes pretty complex at some point, right?**

39:08

Lera

Well, for this point, we have the user journey. The users need to… For example, we have this cool feature, where you just insert your license plate number and our vehicle selector will identify the vehicle by this license plate. For some countries, we have this feature, and I think it's super user-friendly. You just type 6 points. Now, when your car is identified on our website, you can just search for stuff and you will have only the car parts suitable for your car. It works like this. You first identify your car and then you can search for stuff and the products that our website shows you fit your car.

# The importance of having both technical knowledge and business context

40:11

Alexey

**Well, you need to have this business context – you need to know this business context in order to arrive at this solution, right? Without it, you would come up with just a general search bar and you will be like, “Oh, I don't know. I need a compressor for…” I don't know if there is such a thing. I know that there are compressors in fridges. [chuckles] Whatever part name for whatever model and then, “Okay, why is it not working? Why is it showing me this part for another Volkswagen?” Right?**

40:41

Lera

[chuckles] Yeah. Right now, at AUTODOC, we still have some gaps. But there’s a roadmap to fill those gaps. [chuckles] For example, you can buy a product without identifying the car – you can’t do it right now. And it's our task to solve – to make it more user-friendly, to provide users the ability… We need to make a website to make it clearer and understand users need to pick a car to find the right one. It's quite a common pattern. You can search, for example, “brake disc for Audi” and that's it, without specifying which Audi. We are now making machine learning features with natural language processing that will identify the car part maker or model in a search query and offer the user more information about the car to make the whole journey easier. We have this feature in development.

42:19

Alexey

**This is quite a technical feature. It includes knowing what natural language processing is, what parsing is, and extracting things from there. How technical do you need to be? How much do you, as a product owner, need to know about that? Is it more like a “nice to have” or is it actually a very important skill in your case?**

42:39

Lera

Yeah. I also went to… maybe you know this conference – it is about search, called Haystack.

42:48

Alexey

**Yeah. Is it also in Berlin?**

42:51

Lera

Yeah! It's in Berlin. It's a really technical conference. It’s for developers. and I also go there to understand the technical aspects. You know what helps? ChatGPT helps a lot, actually. What I do is, for example, I'm reading a technical book and I don't really understand what information retrieval is. So I just go to ChatGPT and say, “Hey, ChatGPT! What is information retrieval in the context of car part search?” Ah, inverted index! Not information retrieval – inverted index! “What does inverted index mean in the context of car part search? Explain it to me like I’m 5.” [chuckles] I'm just kidding.

43:40

Alexey

**That’s a very important part, right? “Explain like I’m five.” [chuckles]**

43:43

Lera

Yeah, so it gives a simple explanation – ChatGPT gives me very simple examples I can understand. That's a cool part. I think the more technical of a person you are, the better. I'm trying to dig deep into technical stuff – I really try to understand what natural language processing is from a technical standpoint. I think the more you are in tech, the better – but still, the basics help you to communicate with people and to give them context, for general understanding.

For example, I need to know what a natural language processing task does. I know it's spelling correction, I know it's named entity recognition – the natural processing makes tokenization of the query, whether it's a brand name or a car part name or its number – this task calls to natural language processing. So yeah, I think it’s mandatory to learn the basics but the more you are in tech, the better.

45:09

Alexey

**I guess it also depends on the field of your work. Since you work in e-commerce search, for you, it makes sense to go and learn about search. If somebody works in some other domain, maybe they would need to learn about some other things. But still, for a product owner, it's important to know the technical parts of… I'm trying to think of an example.**

**Let's say that it’s a product owner in the moderation team and the moderation team uses machine learning to identify things that shouldn't be posted on the website. For them, it's probably important to know how machine learning can be used for this and what machine learning actually is. This is similar to your case. [Lera agrees] You mentioned you found this book when you were in a search community. [Lera agrees] So you were already a part of technical search communities, and you came across this book.**

46:07

Lera

Yeah, in Telegram, they have an Elasticsearch group, and I am part of this group. Actually, we are always looking forward to developers and that's why. There are people sharing and this is how I learned. On GitHub, I also saw a bunch of books about Elasticsearch, and this book was the first on the list. So that's how I realized that I really need to read this one because there’s so much social proof on it. [chuckles]

# Open developer positions at AUTODOC

46:42

Alexey

**Yeah. You said you're looking for developers right now?**

46:47

Lera

Yeah, we are. [chuckles]

46:49

Alexey

**So what's the profile that you're looking for? You mentioned that it's a fully remote position, right? I heard in our community, in DataTalks.Club, many people say, “Hey, I really want to have a fully remote job, but it's always US-based (remote but in the US).” So what kind of remote…? Or is it not remote?**

47:12

Lera

We have offices across Europe, across Ukraine, and even in other countries. If you live in the city, you can go to the office – it's fine. We do have an office in Berlin. Our tech hub is actually in Lisbon. This previous week, I was there at a product event. You can work remotely, but you can also go to the office if you live in the city [where there is one].

47:43

Alexey

**You lived in Breslau and you worked and you worked remotely, right? So that’s also possible.**

47:48

Lera

Yeah. What I did was… I actually invest, I think, in traveling around Europe and seeing people offline and connecting with them. Because I think it's also crucial to make these offline connections. I've pretty much been in some offices at AUTODOC already.

48:15

Alexey

**Well, please share the links to the job descriptions. Maybe there is somebody who is an experienced search engineer, who's listening to us right now and would love to join your team.**

48:26

Lera

Yeah, yeah. Why not?

# What experience Lera came to AUTODOC with

48:29

Alexey

**I see that we have some questions. The question is – maybe we already answered that – “Did you have the Scrum Master experience and project management experience before this job? Or did you pick it up on the job and learn as you went?”**

48:46

Lera

Yeah, I learned as I went. But, as I mentioned before, I had a great pattern. Even at the start, we had a great project manager – she was also a Scrum Master. Before coming [to AUTODOC], I already knew all about Scrum ceremonies. I saw how people did stand-ups, how people did retrospectives, how they did planning, and I've seen it and I have great patterns of how it can be done. What I did was just read the Scrum guide and I also went to Scrum training.

I knew just the theoretical part of this and I tried to learn it on the fly. You just need to be a great talker, I think. If you know the basics, you just need to be a great public speaker for this role, because you always need to keep your guys motivated and involved in the project. And you do it by being this energetic person – being this serving leader. So you learn the basics and then you… Basically, to sum it up, I have previous experience of how people did it and I saw how it worked. Then I read books about Scrum – not just the Scrum guide. I went to Scrum training. And I just started doing it.

50:49

Alexey

**For me, the most interesting part is that they decided to hire you even though you had no experience in these areas, which probably means that maybe being an experienced Scrum Master is not important – and you already proved that – you can pick the skills up on the job. But do you know what they actually looked at when deciding to hire you? What kind of skills were they interested in when making this decision?**

51:18

Lera

Historically, at AUTODOC, people that are now in a product ownership position came from marketing. My boss also came from marketing, and her boss came from marketing. So that's why – those people always had a marketing background. It's okay to transition from marketing to product ownership. Probably, if we had product owners come from developers, they would never have actually hired me because they would be biased about me. I think that played a big role. Because historically, product owners at AUTODOC came from marketing.

# How marketing skills helped Lera in her current role

52:09

Alexey

**Which skills, that you already had from your marketing past, helped you in your current role?**

52:16

Lera

The first one is understanding… I think what’s common in marketing and product management is understanding the user. For example, doing “job to be done” frameworks, understanding customer journeys, understanding customer likes, pains, cases, and customer needs – all this customer development stuff is present in both marketing and in product. Basically, I already had this kind of knowledge and it's cool. The second one I want to share is very interesting – when you work in a super huge company like AUTODOC (we have 3000 people) it's not the same as working at a small startup.

What the difference is – people don't know you, and people don't know about your product either. I think the crucial role of a product manager in a big company is to be a PR manager of your product – to be a marketer of your product, an internal marketer. Make people learn about your product, and about the benefits of your product. There is a certain department in a company that’s responsible for the search. In a small company, everybody knows and it's obvious, but in a super-huge company, it's not obvious. You just need to shine. That's why I post on LinkedIn, that's why I traveled to communicate with other people.

Because when it comes to working in a huge company, you need to scale your brand awareness and the awareness of your project. That's where marketing helped me, because I used my social media to talk about search, and used these techniques to educate people about my product. We are all working remotely, so information… We are a little bit isolated. For me, LinkedIn posts are like a virtual version of communication in our office.

55:01

Alexey

**That's why you post selfies, right?**

55:04

Lera

Yeah, it's kind of my trick. I understand the importance. Across a big company, you need to talk more about your product publicly. That generates… For example, people from assortment come to me to solve certain problems. It generates new connections and new ideas. That's why I think it's crucial. To grow in a big company, you need to be a little bit of a PR manager of yourself, your product, and your team as well.

55:53

Alexey

**That's how your marketing skills helped, right? [Lera agrees] Because you already knew how to market something, “Okay! Let's think about what I can do to be more noticeable within the company.” Right? [Lera agrees] “Let’s run a PPC campaign.” [laughs]**

56:09

Lera

[laughs] Just kidding. The other thing I wanted to add is that you also need to sell your ideas. Because when the company is huge and there are so many initiatives, the top management needs to pick some initiatives that will generate more revenue. That’s how prioritization works. Sometimes you don't really know how this feature will deliver money in the future – you’re selling the future. For project management, you need to be a great salesperson. You need to encourage and to believe in this perfect future – to generate revenue and stuff.

Because you’re selling the future, sometimes it’s obvious what the outcome of this feature will be. Making presentations helps. I took this from marketing. Understanding what information should be shown, how you can encourage people to listen to you – to listen to your new idea. Basically, make a pitch. It's all about marketing – how you make a pitch. For me, it's the same as when I was working in B2B marketing – it's how we pitched our product to the B2B users. We just have this presentation describing what the benefits of this product are. That’s the same thing I do in this company. I explain what the benefits from my product are.

# Lera’s resource recommendations

58:06

Alexey

**Yeah, thanks. That's a very comprehensive answer. I see that we are almost running out of time. I still wanted to ask you one thing. You told us that you needed to learn a lot – you took a lot of courses and you read a lot of books. We already talked about one book – Relevant Search. Are there any other resources that you would recommend to listeners who want to learn more about product ownership and this topic?**

58:36

Lera

Actually, it won’t be a typical answer. But I think the crucial take away from everything I talked about in this interview – the most crucial skill for the product owner is communication. How you build connections and how you talk, how good of a manager you are, and how you can encourage people. Basically, I would recommend you read books about communication, if you haven't before. Books like Dale Carnegie, or about negotiation – some books about… I don't really know what it is in English, I read it in another language. It's like, “You Can Negotiate Everything,” or something like that. Robert Cialdini – about how to influence. All these books are about communication. I also read a book about communication called Aikido. A funny one.

So, I think you really need to master your communication skills. That’s the first one. There are books related to product ownership – there is a book called Professional Product Owner. It's recommended by Scrum. You can go to Scrum.org and you will see this book. I read it and it's pretty valuable. It gives you a picture of what the product owner is. Also, there's a special book for Scrum – to understand the basics of Scrum – Philosophy of Scrum, I think. I think it's also good to read this one. What else?

Some books related to your specific topic. For example, I read about search. I also remember one book about strategy called Strategize. It’s also very connected to product ownership. User Story Mapping also goes to the product ownership basket. Also some books related to, for example, e-commerce. It is like a book about experimentation and A/B testing. It’s also a very interesting one. I haven't read a book about car parts, actually. [laughs]

61:34

Alexey

**Not yet, maybe. [chuckles]**

61:35

Lera

Not yet. [chuckles] We actually have specialists that are more knowledgeable in cars – you can grab them into a meeting and they will explain stuff to you. I think you can divide some skills you will develop and grab some books for the skills, like communication, product management by itself, some books about your features (like search) and about e-commerce, and about your business domain. When you’re working, it's also fine to have some knowledge.

62:14

Alexey

**One other tip that you shared with us was learning from everyone – scheduling meetings with engineers, QA engineers, business analysts – and just asking them… What did you ask? “What do you expect from the product owner? What’s the best product owner in the company?” Then, also make some small talk to build a connection and, I guess, learn about what they do. I really liked that part. I took a note on it.**

62:42

Lera

[chuckles] Really cool.

62:44

Alexey

**Yeah. I mean, I take a lot of notes. Four sheets here. Anyway, We should be wrapping up. Is there anything you want to mention before we finish?**

# Everything is possible

62:55

Lera

Yeah. I just want to give some general advice. For me, this is a story about how the barriers in your head can be broken. Yeah, I didn't have the same experience that I did before but it's possible to learn. It's possible. If you want to change your career, if you want to be in a different position, it's possible. You just need to break down the barriers in your head. It will be difficult for the first half a year. Yes. But if you have this dream, you can do it. It's possible.

63:38

Alexey

**So the main barrier is in your head. Right? [Lera agrees] Yeah. Okay! Thanks a lot! I really enjoyed this interview. It was great. Thanks for coming. Thanks for joining us. Thanks for sharing your experience with us. And thanks, everyone, for joining and asking questions. It was amazing. Thank you. Have a great week, everyone. Bye.**