Case Study – Bookassist

"IntegratedThinking strongly informed our strategic discussions for growth going into 2015. The structure of the course and the thinking behind it has very much helped me in my high-level discussions with investors. Highly recommended"

Des O'Mahony, CEO Bookassist

Investors and Venture Capitalists reject more deals than they accept. In order to secure investment for your growing company, it is crucial to understand what investors really care about. Adopting a product management discipline that ensures your company focuses on a compelling market opportunity is key

The Company

Bookassist provides digital strategy and software solutions to hotels so that they can unlock the power of their websites, reach their customers online and build their direct online business. They help hotels understand and derive maximum benefit from digital strategy.

Established in Dublin in 1999, with offices in London, Paris, Madrid, Rome, Vienna and Prague, Bookassist comprises an expert award-winning team with years of experience in the hospitality industry. They have approximately 80 employees.

They have won the World's Leading Booking Engine Technology Provider title for the last 3 years at the World Travel Awards.

Bookassist has a strong established marketing discipline, although before joining the programme they had no formal product management function.

Des O'Mahony, CEO Bookassist

Bookassist were participants in the Scala CEO programme delivered by IntegratedThinking on behalf of the ISA Software Skillnets in 2014

WEB
www.integratedthinking.ie

EMAIL
siobhan@integratedthinking.ie

Company Objectives

According to Des O'Mahony, CEO at Bookassist, he primarily signed up to Scala CEO because he felt that the company needed to "*equip itself to scale*" and that required investment in changes to the organisational structure and the processes they employed. His conversations with investors supported this view and it was clear in these discussions that adopting a product management discipline was crucial to their growth. According to Des,

"When we started talking with investors we weren't conscious of the language and the approach that you need to take to position your company for growth"

Des wanted his team to understand and develop the discipline of product management, as he felt it was crucial to help them to meet their business objectives.

"It was clear that Bookassist had great product offerings but we needed to articulate clearly how we were going to scale our customer base"

What Did They Do?

Before joining Scala, Des described their approach to product development as "monolithic"

"The same team was engineering the entire product range simultaneously and it was a question of prioritizing which bits got done first."

As a direct consequence of the programme the team decided to create definitive product areas and assign "owners" with more autonomy.

Product Management is now an important part of the process. They have established committees to oversee product strategy and are now actively resourcing commercial product managers to manage strategy for each of the product areas.

They also recognized that they did not have the "voice of the customer" represented in product strategy meetings prior to the programme and rectified this by ensuring that marketing was included.

"We ensured we had a clear representation of the customer and market rather than just the views of engineering"

Business Outcome

Overall, Des is happy that they have taken big steps towards market led product strategy rather than relying solely on engineering input.

"The Scala CEO programme has underlined the need for clear ownership of all aspects of the product from research, market assessment, positioning, and engineering. Prior to this, many areas were being looked at but in a more isolated way"

While Bookassist may not have had the immediate resources to deploy product managers across all product lines they did begin the process of re-organising around that concept and detailing the areas of responsibility that would fall under that function.

"This has already given us much more clarity on how we proceed and why we proceed in certain ways. We are validating with the market and we have clearly divided engineering priorities between strategic and tactical requirements"

Des identified that it is so important, when talking to investors, to not just focus on where things are working well - it is equally important to be able to identify areas of weakness and show how strategic investment could be used to rectify these weaknesses and support effective scaling.

"The programme strongly informed our strategic discussions for growth going into 2015"

Through the in-house mentoring support with Scala CEO, Bookassist have taken steps in their external market messaging to clarify their value proposition and to define clearly the benefits that each of their product offerings will bring the customer.

"We are so conscious now of focusing on problems and needs that can benefit the broader customer base"

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