

Smart Matching Platform for Outsource On-Demand Graphic Design And Copywriting enabling SMBs and Fortune 500 Companies To Connect with Skilled Creative Professionals

Phil Alexander
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Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor CEOCFO Magazine



CEOCFO: *Mr. Alexander, your site shows ConceptDrop is the easiest way to create marketing material. How do you do that?*

Mr. Alexander: ConceptDrop is set up to make it really easy to outsource graphic design or copywriting. What we actually do is employ something we call smart matching. That means that we pair every single project that comes to our platform with a creative professional who is the best fit for that particular project. That means that if it is 1:00 pm and you submit a proposal that needs to get designed, our technology can connect you with someone who is a specialist at making proposals and maybe they work in a time zone that gives them a head start on the design because you need it in the morning. We have built and curated this network of elite, creative professionals and we are able to deploy them to businesses in a very turnkey fashion. In contrast to what you find with most online solutions, we are not doing any kind of contest, freelance, applications or review. It is very simple. Our clients fill out a quick, two minute form and we are introducing them to their designer or copywriter right over email. It is essentially set up as an on demand creative service for different pieces of marketing material.

“ConceptDrop is the easiest way to create high quality marketing material. If you are playing the role of designer or copywriter or this is a bottleneck in your organization, we can help you focus on the area where you actually have thought leadership, healthy focus on your core competencies and quickly outsource some of these other things to us so that in the end, we could help you sell more and look better in front of your colleagues.”- Phil Alexander

CEOCFO: *What goes into the vetting of creative people on your end?*

Mr. Alexander: Every creative professional must apply to work with us. We look at many different data points. We look at their hourly rate, location, availabilities, language skills, copywriting skills, their portfolio and corporate experience. We will do an interview with them and then as they start working in our platform, we are able to collect more data based on what type of outcome they have on different projects. It is one of those things where we have a little bit of a network effect where as we have more data, we are able to make even better matches.

CEOCFO: *You mentioned time differences or time sensitive projects, but where else are you able to distinguish? How do you match a general inquiry and maybe something more specific?*

Mr. Alexander: We look at many different product types when we have designers or writers. For instance, if someone has experience with press releases, we will dig into that and see if they can send over sample work to prove they have done

press releases in the past. The matching and quality is one part of it. We only accept about 1% of applicants into our network, so it is a very elite group. The other part besides the quality and speed is just trying to make things easy. Usually when you are hiring online, what ends up happening is you will get a list of applicants or independent contractors that you can review and you will have to spend a lot of time trying to assess their quality standard, maybe get a vendor approval, do the on boarding, and what we are saying is we are going to manage this entire network for professionals. All you need to do is tell us what you need and we are going to introduce you to someone who will get started right away. It is much easier than what you would find from existing freelancers' solutions and a lot more cost effective than going through a traditional channel like an agency and faster than piling on the marketing queue, which is already focused on many of these high value, long term projects.

CEOCFO: Are many prospective clients comfortable with what seems like a commodity process? Are people realizing that with more and more technology today, you do not need the traditional ways of doing some of the requests for a presentation or ad?

Mr. Alexander: What is happening is people are asking why they need to go through this traditional agency process where they have a kickoff call at this high rate, and it takes a while. This is a simple project that I can explain digitally. We are seeing that whole, archaic model that takes a long time with these high prices that are just not needed. People are moving to wanting what they want and needing it now. Our platform is able to streamline that entire process and if you look at our designers or copywriters, many of them are working for those top agencies during the day but they are looking for opportunities to make additional income through our platform and on their own terms.

CEOCFO: What types of companies turn to you?

Mr. Alexander: The majority of our clients are in the US but as far as industry, it is not that we are agnostic with the industries but we pretty much service to every single industry at this point. Startups will sometimes come to us. They need investor presentations, which is a common request for them. Maybe you are a small business and cannot afford a designer or you have one designer who is overburdened with requests. We will essentially operate as a remote creative team for a small business but we scale all the way up to Fortune 500 brands who use us to help with the specific niche marketing collateral that tends to be quick turnaround that is hard to service within their organization or even operating as a safety valve for an overflow. We can scale up and down easily at any level.

CEOCFO: How do you reach out to potential customers and how do people find you? Do they know to look and how would they know to look for a service such as yours?

Mr. Alexander: We acquire customers. It is kind of a two pronged approach. We do paid search and content marketing as one piece of it that tends to help us the most with SMBs and we also have an enterprise sales process in place that we are actively reaching out with targeted prospects in certain industries and also they tend to come from the marketing function, usually a director level or higher. It is inside sales and enterprise sales on one side and then the other is pulling their leverage with marketing with paid search and content marketing.

CEOCFO: What is involved in your technology, managing the two sides of the equation?

Mr. Alexander: We have a lot of data. We have the data points on our freelancers but we also have the projects that are coming through. We had to build out communication tools. We had to create this entire matching process. Our technology manages the entire workflow. When someone submits a project to us, they can get connected with a designer, the money can go into escrow and can be sent to the designer and then we will take our fee as well. That entire process has been entirely managed through technology, but we are constantly looking at changes in our data points so that we could tweak the algorithm. If we see that one designer is more likely to accept a project or at certain hours of the day, that is baked into our algorithm. We try to optimize it so that we can match really quickly. We have to look at acceptance rates but we also need to make sure we are making these matches with quality in mind. We want people to not just end up with something they are happy with but we want them to also have a positive experience working with that designer. We are actually in the process of looking at including behavioral components in it as well.

CEOCFO: Were you sure it would work or was it iffy when you decided to get this off the ground?

Mr. Alexander: We have gone through a few evolutions. It has not always worked but over time, the more customers we have talked to, we have been able to refine things and we are fortunate to be in a model now that allows us to scale up quite a bit without adding too much cost. Of course we have done things that have not worked, we have just had to change really quickly and that ability to evolve and adapt has made it so that we could grow pretty fast.

CEOCFO: Are there services or categories you offer that do not get the traction you would expect?

Mr. Alexander: Upon the inception, we expected that this service would be most helpful for people in a banking or consulting capacity. Because of the proprietary nature of a lot of that material, especially some of the largest banks and

consulting firms, presentations and design are already such a big issue for them and a lot of them have found internal tools to deal with it. We have done a lot of traction in industries where maybe we have not expected it as much like consumer products. In design and marketing material, it is pretty much universally seeing all these companies and there are a few industries where I have not seen any traction like legal services and I do not expect that to change too much.

CEO CFO: How do you deal with projects that may require revisions in your platform?

Mr. Alexander: Most of our projects are set on fixed prices but what we do is tell every customer that we build in a free revision period, so every project includes at least two hours of free revision work. That revision period allows you to make the small tweaks but if you go beyond those few hours, we do tell the client that they will be billed at a base hourly rate. That usually helps and if someone wants to change the entire scope of the project, that is something we treat differently and we have to charge that as a new project as well. One of the bigger challenges is figuring out when to push with the clients as well because we do not just have a responsibility to them, we also need to make sure that our independent contractors are having a positive experience on our platform.

CEO CFO: Do you have a fair amount of repeat business?

Mr. Alexander: Yes. That has been our big focus. We were doing well at the top of the funnel, acquiring new leads and for us, the big push has been on retention and recurring work. That could happen ad-hoc, but we also offer business accounts where you can essentially have a retainer prepaid credit with us that your employees can pull from. We have been transitioning from a platform that was primarily used for ad-hoc projects into something where more revenue is now coming from subscription contracts.

CEO CFO: What is next for ConceptDrop?

Mr. Alexander: Our goal is to put people one click away from the right specialized contractor, so we are continuing to invest in technology that can do it. We recently partnered with Microsoft to launch a plug-in that lets you click a button in Power Point and send your slides to a prescreen designer in our marketplace. More than just that, we are looking at other categories we can add and we just rolled out copywriting as a service recently, so anything else falls within those short term projects and aligns with our mission and we are going to keep looking at building out our base of suppliers. The vision is to build the easiest way to outsource everyday projects.

CEO CFO: Why use ConceptDrop?

Mr. Alexander: ConceptDrop is the easiest way to create high quality marketing material. If you are playing the role of designer or copywriter or this is a bottleneck in your organization, we can help you focus on the area where you actually have thought leadership, healthy focus on your core competencies and quickly outsource some of these other things to us so that in the end, we could help you sell more and look better in front of your colleagues.

