



A Glimpse at the Workings of a \$40-Million-Plus SaaS Company

Ahrefs makes over \$40M in annual revenue, while functioning in many ways differently from most Software as a Service companies of that size. In our interview with CMO Tim Soulo, he shared ways, some unconventional, by which Ahrefs has achieved its success.

1. A 50-strong workforce

You'd expect a business of Ahrefs' earning power to have staffing in the hundreds. But no, their CEO and founder Dmitry believes that by keeping their headcount around 50, they can avoid some bureaucracy and politics, as well as keep things running lean.

2. No sales, no leads, no CRMs

Ahrefs aims to be an efficient company, one that doesn't follow playbooks and that does things their way. So they have no sales team, and they don't generate leads. They don't have funding - they're bootstrapped, and want to help other bootstrappers. They generally keep a lid on their numbers, revealing just enough to assure people that whatever they're doing, it's working.

3. Quality content that helps

Subscribers to Ahrefs' email newsletters are getting content with a lot of effort behind it, effort that seeks to make its readers better off. It's high-quality and educational. The same can be said for their YouTube videos, which provide useful ideas and techniques regardless of whether viewers use their product, in an aesthetic pleasant to watch.

4. "...make people see themselves using your product..."

Tim Soulo recalls reading a line that stuck with him: "The first time people use your product is in their heads." Ahrefs' articles and videos all try to provide solutions, and at the same time they demonstrate how their product can help. It's this kind of content marketing that has grown them to where they are, without the benefit of sales people or paid acquisition.

5. Keeping things in-house

In the course of his career with Ahrefs, Tim has tried outsourcing nearly any marketing task nameable. What he eventually realized is that no freelancer or agency



will care about your business as much as you do, or as much as someone who belongs to the company.

6. The human connection

Of Ahrefs' team of 50, 60 percent are remote (but in-house) employees scattered across the globe. Once a year, every one of them has a two-week expense-paid trip to Ahrefs headquarters in Singapore, where they can work from the office and hang out with the team. A recent company retreat took their staff skiing in France, where some of them were even allowed to bring family. Physical togetherness and bonding are well-valued in the Ahrefs culture.

7. A 100,000-subscriber YouTube Channel

Besides the aforementioned content, Ahrefs' YouTube channel boasts thumbnails you just have to click on, and well-crafted videos complete with animations, callouts, etc. Three people work on each weekly episode. Tim, however, credits gradual improvement for the channel's success. He tells of five years ago when he was shooting himself on an iPhone and tapping the rudimentary animation skills of a fellow Ukrainian. Years of getting better and little-by-little looking for things to improve have paid off.

8. Finding a great CMO

When asked how he became a CMO, Tim credits it largely to his CEO Dmitry, who hired him. He does, however, admit a couple of criteria that played a part and that he would recommend for anyone looking for their own CMO:

Did that person ever try to kick-start something completely on their own, and how far did they get with this? Tim himself, before being hired, had tried to bootstrap his own business, and so had experience in growing revenue, hiring, reinvesting, marketing and product development.

Do they share the same values that you have? Do they like your product? Do they seem like a good fit for your product? It's your company, it's your vision, and the marketing person only transmits your vision and your product further to the world. So if you see that you have the same values with a person, that could be an indicator of a good fit.

9. Keeping that CMO

As to why he's stayed with Ahrefs, Tim enumerates the following factors:



Compensation - This is a consideration, not just in terms of size, but one's ability to influence that size. If you feel you have control over your compensation, if you feel that as you're growing as a professional and bringing more value to the business, you get equivalent amount of compensation, that's a good sign. Granted, though, there comes a point when additional pay no longer changes your lifestyle, so other things must be considered.

Freedom - Tim likes the freedom he's afforded at Ahrefs, where no KPIs are imposed beyond doing his best work. He can pursue the projects that interest him, is trusted as to what makes good use of his time, and needn't seek permission for every decision he makes.

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