

Best Business Insights MD 2023: Alaster Siddle

The Upper Quartile (UQ) works with customers across multiple sectors and geographies to provide exclusive business insights and support for companies. The firm's growing reputation has resulted in its customer reach extending outside of the UK into such countries as France, Germany, USA, and Australia. We find out more from Alaster Siddle in the wake of him being named in the Managing Director of the Year Awards 2023.

Intelligence and insights are major accelerants for growth. As history shows, the ability to capture data, interpret it correctly, and build a strategy for growth based upon it, has been critical in the success of many governments and countries as well as companies.

Existing to accelerate growth in both people and companies, The Upper Quartile has a clear vision to deliver added value to its ever-growing, elite customer base. Since its inception in 2015, The Upper Quartile has been building a reputation across multiple sectors that delivers support and substance relative to key decisions that executive boards and senior teams have begun to rely upon. Insights are within, but by no means restricted to, such areas as M&A activity, new business wins, account retention strategy, new market entry strategy, and marketplace reputation, to name but only a small selection.

Alaster Siddle, the Founder of UQ, has exclusively aligned with a combination of global academic institutions and UK research centres to add intellectual horsepower into the UQ insights and intelligence reports. This collaboration results in an ability to create a bespoke insights package designed to meet the specific needs of each UQ customer.

He tells us a little more about the firm: "Within UQ, we measure our success on the retention rates of our clients for repeat projects. The services provided by UQ are somewhat niche and, as such, our clients need to have the strategic agility to respond and act upon the insights and intelligence shared."

In addition, to avoid any complication or duplicity, UQ will only work with one client within any one segment. This allows for a true understanding to be gathered within the UQ research team.

The firm has experienced considerable growth within the last few years since its inception, with the number of projects UQ is engaged in

having grown from a very small base in 2019, to now requiring a strong team both in the UK and also within its research faculties. Alaster tells us that none of this would be possible without the support of the UK team.

"UQ has grown the team but most importantly UQ has seen school leavers and apprentices flourish within our business," he enthuses. "This has allowed young people to either take on much more within UQ or move on to larger organisations. This growth in our own people drives the ambition of the UQ leadership team."

Alaster himself has worked his way up through territory sales, business development, and national account roles and was given the opportunity to lead and support sales teams during his time at Mars Drinks. This exposure to such a talented group, combined with the support of resources available within Mars, redefined his belief system in people and the scope of their roles within the workplace, allowing him to progress into leadership roles such as a Sales Director position and a Main Board Global Head of Coffee role.

"This experience, both good and bad, allowed me to see what success could look like within my own SME size business," he elaborates. "I knew a key to any longevity was to ensure that I learnt the lessons of the past."

In terms of skillset as a Managing Director, Alaster says that the most frequent message he delivers is to ensure that "the team can truly see for themselves how good they are!" This mindset helps ensure that all discussions around growth, strengths, and areas of development avoid surprises by being linked to this core principle.

On a strategic level, UQ has been built around the principal of working with clients who appreciate the value and depth of support given to them through the projects UQ engage in. This clarity has prevented UQ from chasing revenue

and established a growing reputation for support within the current customer base.

"Perhaps my biggest skill is the personal agility to help and support others across all areas of the business," he ponders. "This is more in giving the team my personal acceptance that making mistakes is part of process, and that UQ needs them to be brave within their roles when it comes to adding value."

"In terms of invaluable skills as a Managing Director, resilience and energy are the two I hold with the highest regard. The ability to bounce back and keep pushing those around you forward are strengths that others cannot fail to admire. This is linked to a desire to build a culture that celebrates success. I feel a balanced approach sharing the above has played a significant part in the sustained, profitable growth within UQ of both the people and the P&L."

An important aspect for Alaster with regards to leadership style is mutuality and he firmly believes that this is a pre-requisite for any business to be a success. However, it is severely heightened when the headcount within your business is below 10.

Mutuality, he tells us, covers a huge scope of behaviours and feelings but is based on an underlying principal of fairness and covers everything such as day-to-day tasks and requests for holidays, through to involvement in high profile projects, through to wage and performance reviews.

"Within the current climate, ensuring mutuality is a core principle within UQ has meant that some of the more challenging topics within the workplace, such as mindfulness and wellbeing, occur naturally rather than as part of some regimented personal development review. From a communications point of view, short, frequent meetings for the UK team are a regular. This covers a Monday morning coffee table chat, through to a 15-25 minute meeting on a specific topic linked to a project or up and coming piece of research."



Within the world of research and insights, a high degree of crossover and integration on projects is essential and Alaster believes that building a culture of support and shared responsibility is key to ensuring projects are delivered within the agreed timeline. The sharing of progress and insights obtained in the initial stages of a project internally, delivers a much higher degree of clarity within the intelligence phase of projects undertaken by UQ's research faculties in both the US and UK. This culture is developed and refined for each project. However, the underlying theme being that in order to deliver the project along the way we need to consider each aspect as being of vital importance, and sharing this is key.

"We often refer to the analogy within UQ of there being stages similar in research to those within a relay race," he tells us. "UQ needs to continually practise the handing over of the baton to the next runner as to ensure everything allows for acceleration in the next phase. This skillset is challenged, reviewed, and improved with each project UQ completes!"

Working and thriving in such a fast-paced and every-changing environment, like R&I, Alaster has noticed some trends emerging, namely those surrounding AI and machine learning. His opinion is that with AI technology becoming so powerful that data driven insights will become less relevant to the decision-making process within companies. The more the intelligence is validated through direct dialogue and not through the clever manipulation of data, the greater added value this will bring.

"UQ plays such a small part, and thankfully flies under the radar, of the bigger hitters within the insights sector that our influence will deliberately remain minuscule," he comments. "However, pound for pound, what UQ delivers for our clients enables it to punch well above its weight in terms of the role our insights and intelligence plays."

Recently, in recognition of his work within the sector and regarding the growth the firm has experienced with Alaster at the helm, he was

named Best Business Insights MD 2023 in the Managing Director of the Year Awards.

And the future ahead is looking rosy for UQ too. Part of the long-term plan for UQ has been, and will remain, to give younger people an opportunity to shine. To ensure the pathway to success is aligned, UQ works to a simple anthem that was shared with Alaster during a session led by the late Stephen Covey during one of his talks relating to the seven habits.

"This anthem is that we need to ensure that everything UQ does "starts with the end in mind"! An ability to agree this, within the realms of insights and intelligence makes a huge difference to the depth of value delivered."

Contact Details

Company: The Upper Quartile Group Ltd
Contact: Paris Charnley
Web Address: www.theupperquartile.co.uk