

MarTech Interview with Tom Aitchison, CEO at Swrve



SUDIPTO GHOSH

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Tell us about your role and journey into Technology. What inspired you to start at Swrve?

Throughout my 25 year career I have scaled successful global GTM organizations that have delivered strong revenue results and increased growth by up to 10X. It's extremely exciting to join an organization that has an important technology and one that delivers real meaningful business value and that also has a proven track record of doing that for the world's leading brands. The number one thing I look for in new technology ventures is the ability to help organizations transform their business through measurable value and results.

Swrve is uniquely positioned to be the definitive leader in [customer experience](#) as the only company to actually “deliver” value by delivering experiences with “real-time relevance” for global enterprise-level brands. Before I became CEO at [Swrve](#), I was Executive Vice President of Global Sales at Coupa, one of the leading enterprise [SaaS](#) companies in the world, with revenues growing from \$30m to over \$130m in just over 3 years. We transformed Procurement software by transitioning it from a complex specialized legacy function to a streamlined and simplified SaaS platform with a consumer like experience that drove “adoption by all” to capture more spend and drive more Value.

Has your previous role as a Sales pro made your job easier as a CEO now?

My experience in Sales has given me a results driven approach across functions. My mantra is FOCUS, EXECUTION and RESULTS, combined with an appreciation for focusing on customers –winning new customers and keeping them by delivering meaningful business value. With a proven track record of driving organizational success and scaling SaaS startups, I am honoured to have the opportunity to continue to execute on the vision of creating maximum value for Swrve's customers by enabling them to achieve the highest levels of engagement, retention, and monetization across all of their strategic channels by delivering real-time relevance at enterprise scale.

How much has the SaaS industry evolved since the time you first entered here?

SaaS has evolved from a technology delivery option to the most powerful platform for lasting value-based relationship with customers. What makes SaaS exciting is the speed and scale at which it develops over time. An excellent example of this is in the Marketing industry. Now that we are living in the experience economy, consumers no longer respond as highly to eye-catching billboard ads or well-written TV commercials. Brands' most influential Marketing channels lie in that ubiquitous device that fits in the pocket of our consumers—the smartphone.

This continuous connection brands have with their customers mirrors the continuous connection of SaaS, presenting both an opportunity and a challenge. Interacting in a way that is not value-added by delivering experiences that are not relevant or personalized across channels—will not just be an irritation to consumers; they will ultimately teach the consumer to ignore your brand. Which means it is more crucial now than ever for brands to be relevant, in real time with all their customer messaging just as it is imperative to deliver value throughout the SaaS customer value lifecycle.

Which technologies have been the biggest disruptors in the SaaS/Cloud ecosystem?

Well, besides the Internet itself and Wifi in general, Salesforce was definitely the first in terms of disrupting business-as-usual. It was the first real app, but even then it was mostly to replace existing customer systems of record that were complicated and expensive client-server offerings, which often required a huge amount of professional services. Second big disruption was when Amazon AWS and Cloud Computing were introduced. I remember the days when everyone had to have their own data centers, hardware, and staff—AWS lowered the bar for tech companies to startup more quickly and inexpensively, fueling the rise in the number of SaaS apps.

Lastly, I would say that lately it's the rise of SaaS apps that help you get your work done, maybe call them "workflow apps", where for almost every consumer task, and in almost every industry there are SaaS apps that are essential to getting things done, and those apps happen to be collecting a boatload of information about consumers, employees and their work, which can all be data-mined for insight and improvement of the customer experience. I would say that Swrve falls smack into the middle of this latest disruption.

What is Swrve and how does it fit into a modern Marketing Technology stack?

Swrve is a Cloud-based customer engagement platform that transforms the way in which the world's leading brands communicate and message their customers across channels with "real-time relevance". We processes billions of data points of customer behavior in real-time, seamlessly pulling in data from the rest of the stack, and then automatically transforming it into usable insights to determine and deliver the right message to the right person in the right channel at the right moment.

For example: Instead of blasting out discount offers to every customer at once, Swrve can help deliver personal value by targeting a brand's individual customers with personalized and

relevant communications. This creates real measurable value for the brand through increased engagement, conversion, and retention.

What role do modern CEOs and CMOs play in adoption and promotion of Marketing and Sales technologies?

Today's CEOs and CMOs are more and more committed to technologies that add value. Investing in technology for technology's sake is dead. If you can't directly or indirectly link and measure the incremental value any technology adds to the top or bottom line, then it likely isn't a strategic investment. CEOs and cross functional executives are on the line to deliver results.

Tell us how you stay relevant to the e-commerce technology trends. How do you see new automation tools impacting e-commerce businesses in the coming months?

Swrve plays a key role in streamlining and automating the buying process, helping brands understand their customers' behavior, and then driving communication that's effectively targeted, orchestrated and executed based on real-time data to ensure they are timely and relevant. That fuels engagement and conversion, and ultimately, revenue.

Consumers expect a lot because of what they get from [Amazon](#), and [e-commerce](#) businesses are increasingly aware that they must be acting on real-time data, or they end up annoying customers, and ultimately, losing them. For example, when a brand sends multiple emails and serves up multiple ads about an item that you were looking at, and then ultimately purchased, not only are they wasting money reminding you about something you already bought, but they're also annoying you.

So when brands try to think about how they might take advantage of real-time data eventually, they should really think first about the downsides of not having it right now.

Are e-commerce and B2B Marketing tactics converging?

I would say that some of the techniques are mimicking each other, but I don't think that they'd truly converge, at least not in the sense of the true definition of that word. It will still be very different to market and sell to a consumer than it will be to a business. In fact, I think that they're actually diverging! I mean, [Digital Marketing](#) used to consist of using cookies and data to send emails to an inbox, regardless of whether it was [B2C](#) or [B2B](#). Then [Digital Advertising](#) took off for both. And now it's becoming very different to interact with consumers on a personal level en masse than it is to do so with businesses you want to sell to.

Tell us more about your data-driven solutions?

Swrve's open data and [AI](#)-driven platform allows brands to leverage and process billions of activities from their customers, to make them actionable and deliver the most relevant experience back to their customers. With Swrve, communication and messages are based on unlimited numbers of attributes including profiles, behaviors, intents, location, recency, and frequency—essentially all of the available [customer data](#) in addition to their attributes—and we then apply [Machine Learning](#) and AI capabilities to drive further [optimization](#) of delivery and relevance.

How can businesses maximize their ROI from investing in your platform for digital customer experiences?

Swrve's customers are global leading brands who drive [ROI](#) by delivering, and in-turn driving, value from “real-time relevance”. The value of delivering the right message to the right person in the right channel and at the right moment can mean huge returns in terms of engagement, revenue, conversion, lifetime value, retention and reduced churn. Historically companies have invested more substantially in customer acquisition, yet those investments are wasted if you don't effectively maximize the value of the customer through valuable, effective, and relevant interactions delivered throughout the [customer journey](#).

Tell us about your technology integrations with other Technology platforms such as Website Analytics, Video, Contacts, Contracts, Email and Customer Service.

Swrve partners and integrates with leading vendors across the SaaS industry to ensure our customers can integrate with best-of-breed technologies. Our integrations with Oracle Marketing Cloud and Salesforce Marketing Cloud are designed to deliver mobile experiences that pair perfectly with email and web campaigns, directly inside their Marketing Cloud canvases.

By expanding their offering to mobile, [Oracle](#) and [Salesforce](#) customers can identify and act on the needs of individual mobile users in real-time to significantly increase mobile engagement and lift revenue. Swrve helps brands personalize, optimize, and confidently scale their presence on mobile. Our deep integration ensures that the full power of the Swrve platform can be used to help Marketing Cloud customers identify and act on the needs of individual mobile users in real time.

Which Marketing and Sales Automation tools and technologies do you currently use?

Our Marketing stack consists of [HubSpot](#) and Salesforce (technologies we use include Datafox, Apptopia, [LinkedIn](#), [Salesloft](#))

What are your predictions on the most impactful disruptions in AI and Machine Learning technology for 2019-2020?

We're already seeing the effects of using AI to predict user behavior, but we'll see the most impact of that when it's used to automate mundane tasks. At first it's surprising, but then you become accustomed to it because it's useful. Think of when Gmail first started suggesting what your reply might be.

It's gotten pretty good at learning what you personally might reply, and now is good enough that their sentence completion can make you feel like a puppet. 8 out of 10 times, it predicts what I'm about to type rather accurately. And so you keep using it, and so it keeps getting better at learning.

We see this with Swrve too. Our customers don't want us to use data to eliminate human-based Marketing and Engagement with their customers, but they do want us to automate mundane or repetitive tasks, or tasks that used to require a [BI](#) team to do.

What startups in the technology industry are you watching keenly right now?

We keenly pay attention to anything to do with the interaction of consumers with devices and experiences, and of course the use of AI and ML against vast amounts of data.

How do you prepare for an AI-centric world as a Business Leader?

Artificial Intelligence is poised to help brands and businesses in three main areas: reach, relevance, and timing. Today, 84% of consumers say the communications sent to them from businesses are irrelevant. 52% say they switch brands because of this. AI can help businesses analyze and interpret data in real-time to create more meaningful engagement and boost [customer loyalty](#).

With real-time data at their fingertips, brands can understand the behaviors of their customers at scale, make connections, and translate that data into valuable, actionable information. Swrve is at the forefront of the push toward Artificial Intelligence in customer engagement, and it's our job to continue showing our customers how AI can have a real, meaningful impact on their business.

How do you inspire your people to work with technology?

When you combine the energy, knowledge, [and skills of a motivated group of people](#), then you and your team can accomplish anything you set your mind to. Swrve is a company driven by technology and inspired by the power and value it delivers. We celebrate the business value our customers derive through their partnership with Swrve and our customer successes in weekly “Show and Tell” meetings where each group and office in the organizations briefly shares how they have taken a [customer success](#) story and utilized it to help the world’s largest brands create value with more real-time relevance in customer experiences.

One word that best describes how you work.

Versatile. We’re not rigid as an organization, and my work style reflects that too. We can adapt to our customers’ challenging circumstances and find the work-around that no one else can see. We adapt on the go and keep adapting.

What apps/software/tools can’t you live without?

Gmail, Gchat, Office, Zoom, [Slack](#), Salesforce, Phone, text.

What’s your smartest work-related shortcut or productivity hack?

“Capitalizing on the Commute” I commute about three hours a day, and use the time to schedule phone calls, do email and Zoom meetings across time zones whenever possible. If I’m not on the phone or in a Zoom meeting, I’ll usually use this as a time for uninterrupted strategic thinking.

What are you currently reading?

I get all my news online, and mostly listen to audio books, [podcasts](#), or Ted talks instead of reading anything in print. A recent favorite of mine is Simon Sinek’s “Start with Why”, on leadership and inspiration. I’ve also really enjoyed a multitude of presentations on leadership and innovation.

What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?

There are only 3 things you can do every day:

- 1) Do ALL that you can do,
- 2) Do the BEST that you can do,
- 3) Do what you think is RIGHT

Something you do better than others – the secret of your success?

- Be 100% authentic 100% of the time. Lead with a true passion
- Simplify, Simplify, Simply. People can't focus, execute and deliver results if they can't understand and relate to the mission at hand.

Tag the one person in the industry whose answers to these questions you would love to read

Jeff Bezos

Thank you, Tom! That was fun and hope to see you back on MarTech Series soon.

About Tom

Tom Aitchison is a global executive with a 25-year proven track record of driving organizational success and scaling established enterprise SaaS startups. As CEO of Swrve, Tom oversees the only true enterprise-grade, marketing and customer engagement platform that helps the world's leading brands confidently scale communications over millions of customers, delivering dynamic data and AI-driven interactions that are optimized for relevance in real-time.

Prior to joining Swrve, Aitchison helped scale business spend management leader Coupa Software into one of the leading Enterprise SaaS companies. Aitchison led the growth of Coupa Sales from \$30 million to over \$100 million in revenue in just over three years, resulting in a successful listing on the NASDAQ stock exchange.

About Swrve

MARTECH INTERVIEW SERIES

The MTS Martech Interview Series is a fun Q&A style chat which we really enjoy doing with martech leaders. With inspiration from Lifehacker's [How I work](#) interviews, the MarTech Series Interviews follows a two part format *On Marketing Technology*, and *This Is How I Work*. The format was chosen because when we decided to start an interview series with the biggest and brightest minds in martech – we wanted to get insight into two areas ... one – their ideas on

marketing tech and two – insights into the philosophy and methods that make these leaders tick.

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