Maurice Fuller

I'm Maurice Fuller, and thanks for joining us on the StaffingTech podcast. Today I'm with Jan Jedlinski, CEO and co-founder of Candidate.ly, The World Staffing Summit, and Gustav. Jan, welcome to the podcast. I'm really excited to talk to you today.

Jan Jedlinski

Hey, Maurice. It's great to be here.

MF

So we met originally in 2018. I know you've been part of the staffing industry for quite some time, so if you could tell us about your company, your background, and the journey that led to where you are today, that would be really great.

JJ

Absolutely. My journey in the staffing industry actually started in 2016. I started a staffing company with my co-founders, and we set out to build a better staffing business with a better brand and better technology than other staffing companies that were out there. We said, look, there is a gap in the market to create a better staffing business driven by technology. So we started essentially placing a lot of candidates. Back then, it was still in Austria, Vienna—this is where we originally come from. We did this business for about a year or one and a half years, until we realized that there was actually a much bigger opportunity for us to build technology not only for ourselves but also for other staffing businesses. That's when we got in touch with the staffing market in the U.S.

I traveled to the U.S. to a conference called VMSA. I got to know the entire MSP VMS space and learned about all the processes, and then we decided to start building a VMS product for the market. At some point, as we started building it, we got accepted into Y Combinator, which is a startup accelerator in California, with the idea to build a better and bigger and more modern VMS product to compete with the big guys in the market. We moved our entire business and the founders and everybody to the U.S. and stayed there to continue building the business, until after a couple of years when we realized, well, it's a lot of technology actually to build a full enterprise VMS.

We got in touch with a lot of staffing companies that started using the initial product that we had built, and this turned out to be the use of product as it is today, which is a sub vendor management product that ties into an applicant tracking system of the staffing firm, and this was our initial product that we launched in the staffing market in the U.S. Just recently, we launched Candidate.ly, which is our newest product, and this is something that I'm super excited about. We call it the digital storefront for staffing and recruiting companies, and I'm excited to tell you more in a second.

MF

We'll be talking about Gustav later on in the podcast, but I really want to get started by talking to you about Candidate.ly because it's so exciting what you're doing in terms of reinventing how we engage with our customers and how we present candidates. So tell us about Candidate.ly, what it is, the use cases that you're addressing, and the kind of results that your customers are seeing initially with your product.

JJ

Absolutely. When you look at the markets over the last few years, the candidate presentation for staffing and recruiting companies hasn't really changed. It went from paper-based to fax to email, and the only way to present your biggest asset—which is candidates for the staffing firm—is done via email, which I think these days, specifically after the digital transformation of the last one and a half to two years across other industries, is actually ridiculous. The staffing company today is using a very manual process to interact with their most important assets and with their customers. On the other side, the customer is used to very digital interactions. When you look at markets like real estate, groceries, and how other companies are transforming those markets digitally, the staffing market is way in the past.

With Candidate.ly, we are building the digital storefront for the staffing and recruiting company. We can think about it a little bit like a Shopify store for the staffing firm to be able to present and market your candidates to your customers in a digital way. The use cases are candidate presentation, meaning this would be something that your account managers would be doing on a daily basis, presenting candidates to a specific requirement and a specific customer. Instead of attaching the resume to an email, you would create a digital link of that candidate to share with the customer and have a better way to present and track

all of the client interactions. On the other side, the same product essentially gives you a way to market candidates that previously might have been untouched or lost, even in your ATS: candidates that have been coming off assignment, candidates that you have interviewed but not placed. Now you have an easy way to give your customers access to your available talent pipeline, pretty much right from your website.

MF

It's super exciting on both fronts. When you think about how candidates are being presented today through Word documents or Adobe PDF documents, it's really antiquated. This goes back a couple decades. It's time for us to modernize the way that presentation works. Essentially what you have is a web page for presenting candidates, and it's a much more exciting way of presenting the candidate, in part because it's cleaner, but it also gives you on the staffing side visibility into what's happening on your client side.

Traditionally when you present or submit a candidate through an email, it kind of goes into a black hole. You don't really know what's happening on the other side when they're looking at your candidate, but now on the webpage, you know exactly when they're on that web page and when it's being presented or forwarded to others. So you can take advantage of that to accelerate the staffing process and even connect with your client or hiring manager at the moment at which they're looking at that candidate.

JJ

Absolutely. That's the biggest selling argument. The conversation that I have with customers that are already using Candidate.ly or the prospects that I'm talking to is about the insights into client interactions. Unless you have an email open tracker installed, you would have no idea what's currently happening with the submission that you sent via email to a customer. Now with Candidate.ly, you essentially have immediate and live insights: if the customer has clicked on a candidate, if they are viewing the candidate right now, how long they have viewed the candidate, if they have forwarded the candidate to somebody else internally and are collaborating with their team on your submission.

You can literally pick up the phone, in that moment when the customer is looking at the candidate, to call them and ask them if they want to have more information. So you're now turning this entire process into a very data-driven

process. You have insights into all of the interactions. It is a better way to present candidates and you're creating this wow experience for a customer, instead of having attachments and the usual conversation of "oh, I know you sent me an email a couple days ago with an attachment... Where is that? I can't find it—can you send it again?" This goes back and forth, and the candidate drops out of the process a week later, before the hiring manager has found your email and the attachment. Now we have a centralized place to give your customer easy access, both on the web and mobile, to your submissions and a much better way for them to get quick feedback to move forward to the next step, which is usually an interview and a conversation.

MF

Got it. This has been helping your customers speed up the staffing process. What is some of the feedback that you're hearing so far?

JJ

It's a new product, so we are obviously still experimenting with a lot of aspects of it, but I'm super excited about the initial feedback that we have received from both very large staffing and recruiting firms and individual recruiters that are using it. What this tells me is that the product is really geared towards a customer segment of retail end-clients that are not working MSP VMS, and they want to give their customers a better way to interact with them.

We have cases where customers essentially signed up to the product, literally shared a candidate, then a couple hours later made their first placement using Candidate.ly, which is super exciting because from that essentially proves that this process is much better than just email interaction and the process in the past. There was a 30 or 40% increase in faster candidate placements between the customers that are using it and their clients.

That was super surprising to me because I thought there would be a lot more push back from the end-clients. I was thinking, how will some customers react to this? We literally got zero bad feedback on it. Actually, a lot of end-clients gave really good product feedback on what we can improve as well as feature requests that they forwarded to their staffing. On the end-client side, there is good adoption going on as well.

MF

That's interesting that you're even getting feedback from the clients themselves on how to improve the product. This is really great. This is a great step forward for our industry, and staffing firms are always looking for ways to differentiate themselves and set themselves apart. If you're on the hiring manager side and you see these different candidates being presented to you, several from Word or Adobe PDF documents, but then you have this other staffing firm that is presenting them as an amazing, gorgeous looking web page, you're gonna pay a lot more attention to that web page because it's just so different and it presents the candidate so much more effectively.

JJ

Absolutely. It hooks you, right? It's a nice user interface, and it's a user interface that the average user is confronted with every day in their private life—in interactions with Uber, with Instacart, with DoorDash, with their pizza delivery service, you name it. We're basically translating this consumer type experience to the candidate presentation in staffing, which gives the staffing company a great advantage and also a way for them to be more modern to their customers, and that's super exciting.

The cool thing about this is that what we are emphasizing is really the staffing agency's brand. When you look at Candidate.ly, Candidate.ly can be out of the box, customizable on your own subdomain, with your own colors, with your own header, with your own logo. For the customer, it's not visible that this is Candidate.ly. This is on purpose; we want to make sure we don't promote our brand and product. We want to give the staffing company the superpower to now, out of the box, be a better and more digital business. We put our brand obviously in the back to just enable the technology that is underlying the entire process.

MF

That's consistent with this whole idea of a digital storefront. You customize it to your brand. The whole presentation is optimized for your brand. A couple more questions on the technology: you're currently integrated with Bullhorn, is that correct?

JJ

That's correct. It's important for us obviously to be integrated with all of the major applicant tracking systems in the market. One of our initial partners for the project is Bullhorn. Our Bullhorn marketplace partner helps out Bullhorn customers essentially with one click to turn on their candidate integration. Many more integrations to other ATSs will follow very shortly.

MF

If a customer is not on Bullhorn, I assume you have a roadmap of other ATSs that you're integrating with.

JJ

Absolutely. We have customers that are not Bullhorn users that have already started using Candidate.ly without an integration—for example, JobDiva customers or Ceipal customers. Those are the integrations that will follow very shortly. We have JobDiva on the roadmap. We have Ceipal on the roadmap. We have a couple Salesforce products on the roadmap that are used by some larger staffing enterprises, and there are a few other ATSs in the market that are also on our roadmap. Very soon you will have Candidate.ly integrated with the majority of the ATSs that you would know from the staffing and recruiting market, as well as an option to have it integrated with Zapier, which can connect the product to another 1500 or so tools that you're using on a daily basis already.

MF

Awesome. One thing that I'm really excited about is the way that you're developing this product in the open. You have an open roadmap, as far as the features that you're planning on bringing into the product. Normally when you work with a staffing or recruiting or tax supplier, you're buying into that future with that supplier but you don't always know where they're headed. But you guys are super open in terms of here's the roadmap, here's where we're headed, and you have a process by which others can contribute their ideas on where the roadmap should be headed. Tell us about that.

JJ

Absolutely. I think that's the most important thing for us, and this was a big learning experience from building new stuff. The customer feedback massively accelerated the product, and that's exactly what we also want to do for

Candidate.ly. Our mantra is essentially, let's build a product that people really love. We'd rather have 100 customers that really love the product than 1000 or 10,000 that signed up and maybe picked around. We really focus on how we can improve the product and do daily/weekly releases on features that are coming from live customer feedback.

We have a process internally where we have a product called Product Board where we prioritize all of the feedback that is coming in from customers, and we are very responsive. The first thing for us is that we have a live customer chat, and we encourage every customer that signs up to give us fast feedback in any case, even if they see just a little button that doesn't work for them. Anything that would make them happier. That usually drives customers to really message us because often the small stuff is overlooked. That feedback is then turned into the product roadmap, which is live on our website, which will also become live very soon on LinkedIn and other social media channels and basically encourage the audience to give us feedback on what else they would like to see from the product.

Obviously on the other side, we are very cautious to not just build on every piece of feedback and every item that somebody requests. We look at the overall product, look at if feedback comes in—is that something that every user could use? If the answer is yes, it comes to the product roadmap. If it's just a custom feature that somebody requested, it usually is then either considered separately or not considered. Yeah, I'm super excited about this. You'll see some posts from me on my LinkedIn channel, the Candidate.ly channel, with live videos on what features we have built and features that are coming up, so stay tuned for that.

MF

I think what you're doing is the future of how software will be built, and I would love to see more staffing technology vendors do what you're doing as far as opening up their roadmap and letting everyone know where they're headed so they can participate in that process. Let's talk a little bit about Gustav, your original product, your VMS—a very successful product. It's being used by hundreds of companies all around the world. Tell us a little bit more about Gustav and the impact that it has had on your customers.

JJ

Absolutely. The Gustav story is super interesting. As I mentioned in the very beginning, we had initially set out to build an enterprise VMS to compete with the Beelines and the Fieldglasses of the world. At some point we had built, I would say, four or five steps out of the nine steps that you typically will find in the VMS, from onboarding vendors, sending requisitions, to payments and invoicing and consolidated invoicing and so on. We realized it's a lot of technology to build, and it's hard to quickly get adoption.

We had one conversation with one staffing firm that said, hey look, I could use this product as it is today. And that again stems from quickly getting feedback and iterating on the product until we had the full VMS vision built. Midway through, some staffing company came across and said, I could use this to work with my subcontracting vendors. This was an IT staffing business. And that's when we said, that's an interesting thought: before going in and spending a lot of time and money on developing features that maybe nobody will ever need or maybe we will not be able to sell or, you know, having the sort of thought in mind that this will take us too long, let's start with the staffing segment.

The use of the product essentially developed into a mini VMS, is what I would call it, used by IT and healthcare staffing organizations to have a centralized way to collaborate with their subcontracting partners. How should you think about the product? If you're a staffing firm and you get a lot of requirements and you have your internal recruiters, but you also have other partners in the market that help you source candidates, typically sharing jobs with them and receiving candidates and communicating about submissions was all email based. With Gustav, you plug in this mini VMS into your applicant tracking system, and you now have an easy way to collaborate with all of your partners.

The product is currently used by staffing organizations that have a massive base of sub vendors that they usually source candidates from. It's used by mini MSP programs that want to centralize just a few partners and have it tied into their ATS, as well as master vendors that are centralizing their partner program. We didn't build an enterprise VMS product; we developed a product that is a niche product, I must say. It's not something that every staffing company in the world needs or will need, but it's a specific use case that we solve really nicely. We have a deep integration with some ATSs and have a product that people over the last couple of years have used and will continue to use. That's a little bit of the Gustav story.

MF

It's very interesting how you were initially looking at going after Fieldglass and Beeline and whatnot and discovered really that there's a massive market for a subset of the features to support sub vendors. It's great that it's been so helpful with all these staffing firm customers that you have to help them manage more effectively their sub vendor base.

I'd like to move onto World Staffing Summit. You ran a very, very successful conference earlier this year, and you have another one coming up. Tell us about the next World Staffing Summit and what we can look forward to.

JJ

Absolutely. The World Staffing Summit was initiated by our team mid last year, actually. We said everybody's sitting at home, everybody's bored, everybody's lonely. How can we create content for the industry that is interesting, that is engaging, that will help everybody in the staffing industry to have a better year and have a better way to run their business in the future? So we got 50 speakers together—people like Doug Leeby from Beeline, like Jason Ezratty from Brightfield, and many more that participated, as well as you, Maurice—at the conference to create content for the industry.

The conference was online. We had over three and a half thousand participants live on the day and many more who watched the recorded videos afterwards. It was a free event, so there were no tickets that were sold. Everybody was welcome, and it was a great success all across the board. We had great learnings from the event, and we'll translate those into an even better and bigger event in January 2022. In the week of January 27, you can look forward to the World Staffing Summit number two.

It will be a four day event across a couple of continents, so we'll have a couple of timezones covered and more topics also covering the European and Asian staffing markets. We'll have a lot of interesting technology trends. We'll have a lot of interesting panels and conversations and workshops and master classes. The goal for us is to create essentially a place for staffing professionals to come and learn and improve their day to day and see what's next in the industry and just give them a better way to run their business and collaborate with peers. I'm very excited about the next event and I hope to see you there. I'm looking forward to collaborating with you, Maurice, more on that front.

MF

Thank you. I'm really excited about it as well. What's really exciting too is that, historically, a lot of these conferences have been focused on a certain region like North America, Europe, or Asia, but now you're really bringing the entire globe together in one massive conference. That's a really big step forward for our industry and a big accomplishment on your part, so kudos for doing that.

I want to wrap up and just talk about your company and the future of software development. It's so exciting what you're doing because you're really a global company. You service customers all around the world, but your company is also a global company. You have developers all around the world; you're a global company serving global customers. So tell us a little bit about what it's like to be the CEO of a company that is so scaled out across the globe.

JJ

Absolutely. I'm actually very excited about this. I couldn't imagine when I started the business that one day we would have a globally distributed team, customers all over the place, and be operating the business from our living room or our home office or wherever we want to be. It's a very exciting time to start companies because with the very small team that we still are, we're able to create a massive scale both on building technology and running global events like the World Staffing Summit. All of that is enabled by technology that was created just over the last couple of years, which is fantastic.

Yes, you're right. We do have a remote team with people all over the place from Poland to South Africa to the US to Brazil, all of them working on the Candidate.ly and World Staffing and Gustav products. We actually started fully remote in 2017 when we moved from Austria to the US and gave up our Austrian office—or at least the physical office. We said, it's time for us to look at how we can run this business without the need for a large physical location that is super expensive. And it worked out very fine for us. Last year, or one and a half years ago when everybody started to go remote, for us it was pretty natural. I feel like this is the future of how companies are going to be built. When we look at startups that are now started in Silicon Valley, nobody's talking about office space anymore. Everybody's fully remote, embracing tools that are coming out that are helping to run their business.

On the other side, I'm super excited about the staffing industry and the future for the staffing industry because I feel like today if you want to start a staffing company, you need your laptop and you need an employer of record that can help you place candidates all over the world, and you need a LinkedIn account and a few other tools, and there you go: you basically have a staffing business. That's something that's really exciting because suddenly local staffing and recruiting businesses that previously maybe only thought of servicing local clients and local candidates now can think much more globally. I think over the next couple of years you will see a lot of movement in the industry, specifically around embracing technology and services that will help to create much leaner and more scalable businesses—obviously also outside of the technology/Silicon Valley/SaaS world but specifically for staffing.

MF

I think you're exactly right. I'm seeing companies that are being started and are pursuing exactly that model with folks all around the globe, with everybody working remotely. You know, it's interesting. Jack Dorsey said sometime during the pandemic that nobody at Twitter or Square would have to come back into the office. That was really a pivotal moment I think in the world to say hey, it's okay to work remotely and we can be just as effective, if not more effective, with a remote workforce.

It's been super exciting talking to you. I learned so much. If you're listening to this podcast, and you're looking for ways to take your staffing business to the next level, through candidate presentation, technology, or through technology to manage your sub vendors more effectively, I would definitely encourage you to reach out and connect with Jan. Jan, I have no doubt that you're going to have a massive impact on the staffing industry in the years ahead, and I'm really excited to see what's next with you. Thanks again for joining us, and I look forward to being in touch with you.

JJ

Thanks so much Maurice for having me. It was a great conversation that was a pleasure as usual, and I'm looking forward to catching up with you in a few weeks or in a few months. Maybe we'll do another recording to see what's happened. I'm looking forward to seeing you also at the World Staffing Summit. Thanks, Maurice.