Maurice Fuller

Hi everyone. I'm Maurice Fuller and thanks for joining us. Today I'm with Greg Reffner. He's the CEO of Abstrakt, and today we'll be covering conversational intelligence, a technology which is expected to play an important role in staffing and recruiting this decade. Greg, welcome and thanks for joining us today.

Greg Reffner

Yeah, I'm super excited to be on here, Maurice. Thank you for having me. It's something I'm very passionate about and I'm excited to dive into this with you.

MF

Awesome! Well, we're excited to talk to you. Perhaps you could start by introducing yourself and telling us a bit about your background.

GR

Yeah. I've been in B2B software sales Maurice for about seven or eight years now. The day I started was the day I met my wife, so I should probably know how long I've been together with her to correlate to how long I've been in software sales. Ultimately, I started my career as an SDR cold calling. I moved into an account executive role and then had a couple opportunities to lead and grow sales teams before I started Abstrakt. Really the genesis of Abstrakt which is now two years old to the day today, actually today is our second anniversary, was a lot of what I had learned throughout my individual contributor career in software sales. That's kind of what brought me to build Abstrakt: all the pain and suffering I felt in sales throughout my career. Yeah, that's a CliffNotes version of Greg Reffner.

MF

Excellent. Okay, cool. So tell us, what is conversational intelligence and where is it being used today?

GR

Yeah, so conversational intelligence is a software or a system or a platform that looks to historically record calls, whether they're Zoom meetings or phone conversations, and then provide some analysis or a level of intelligence as to what happened on the call. The genesis of this software really stemmed, Maurice, from sales managers, recruiting team leaders, and business leaders not being able to consume enough video or call recordings in a day to get a true picture as to what was actually happening on phone calls or meetings with clients or prospects. So conversational intelligence looked to solve for that by giving the CliffNotes version of what happened on a phone call or a demo, whether it be how often your recruiter interrupted somebody, filler words like um, like, you know, and how often are those being used, when objections were being mentioned. So sales leaders or business leaders could then hone in on those specific parts of a phone conversation as a way to get the high point, the important points, without having to listen to the entire call. So this technology has been widely adopted in B2B software

sales, and it's almost table stakes as part of a tech stack in the B2B software world. We're really excited because now we're starting to see recruiting firms adopt the same approach. I ultimately think the recruiting and staffing world is going to benefit from this so much more than even B2B software sales, just due to the nature of the business and being on the phone all day. Some organizations have a little bit higher turnover, so training and ramping time. I think it's going to be very heavily adopted in staffing and recruiting.

MF

The interesting thing is that you're doing this in real time. So tell us about the product. What is Abstrakt?

GR

Yeah, Abstrakt is a real-time call coaching software. We have I think about 14000 hours of development into the product so far. Ultimately what Abstrakt does is it listens to phone conversations and then in real time, based upon what my candidate or my prospect is saying, provides me as the recruiter or the rep with how to respond to that question or how to handle that objection. So Maurice, if you were a potential candidate of mine and you said "You know what? I'm not interested in a job. I'm super happy with where I'm at," Abstrakt would tell me exactly how to respond to that question in about 0.3 seconds. I [recruiters] no longer have to memorize battle cards or playbooks or objection handling techniques. I could be a fresh off college grad day one recruiter and handle objections like a pro with Abstract listening to my conversations.

MF

And so this information is just pulled right up on the screen real time as you're going through the conversation, like here's a response to an objection.

GR

Yes, sir. The fastest we've gotten it down to is about 0.3 seconds. That is about as fast as we can make it.

MF

Wow, that's amazing. So how is it being used by your staffing or recruiting customers today?

GR

Yeah. We'll take one of our examples with Blue Signal. They're a pretty big firm here in Phoenix, Arizona, and they're looking at it as a training and onboarding tool. Typically their recruiters are on the phone within probably six weeks, eight weeks, because the first six weeks or so are spent memorizing your scripts, memorizing the questions that you're supposed to be asking, and memorizing your objection handling techniques. And now they're getting people on the phone in about a week because they're able to deliver

those to those reps in real time without having to have a sales manager there or without having to go through weeks of training and onboarding. They can get on the phone, and if they face an objection, Abstrakt delivers that talk track to them immediately. It becomes an instant training tool to get them comfortable on the phone and confident on the phone, which by far the hardest part of cold calling in the recruiting world is the level of confidence. So if you know you always have Abstrakt there telling you how to handle those objections, the level of confidence that you have going onto the phone is exponentially higher, So that's really where we are, as an example of how they're using Abstrakt today to accelerate their training and onboarding.

MF

Got it. So training is going faster and more efficiently. Are you also seeing recruiters performing at higher levels of productivity because they have this technology that's sort of coaching them in effect along the way?

GR

Yeah. Let's just use simple math and maybe say a recruiter makes a hundred phone calls a day, and they typically connect with maybe 8 to 10 people—a pretty standard average. Let's say maybe typically 2 or 3 of those 10 connects resulted in next steps. What we're finding is we're able to double that next steps or that level of movement towards a positive outcome. So if I get 10 connects a day and normally I'm only getting 2 to a next step, well, now I'm getting 4. That's 2 more opportunities per day, and if you extrapolate that, that's 40 net new opportunities a month that we're adding just by bringing a real time call coaching tool into the mix.

MF

By my math, that's doubling your productivity, which is amazing.

GR

Yes, sir. Absolutely.

MF

Alright, let's go back and talk a little bit more about the training benefits. So you said that the training time has been significantly compressed.

GR

Yep, correct. We've gone from six weeks to a week or week and a half, so we're shaving almost an entire month off of training. Even if we look at our B2B customers, they're shaving sixty days, ninety days, off of training in some cases. Again, it all goes back to business leaders no longer needing to spend weeks training competitive scenarios and objection handling techniques because reps are being delivered those instantaneously on calls now.

MF

So what does a training program actually look like now with this technology in place? I would imagine there's some training that's involved, but it sounds like you're bringing the recruiters and salespeople into the process sooner.

GR

Yeah. A lot of what we're seeing now is more—which just makes me so happy Maurice that this is happening, and it's not even something that I thought was going to happen—but there's more of an emphasis on training on actually just active listening with recruiters and sales reps because now they're not having to focus on what to say next or are my tabs in my browser organized correctly to be able to find the information. Companies are now putting more of an emphasis on training on "just listen." Just listen with the intent to understand before you try to be understood and so there's more psychology being involved in training. There's more active listening training going on. There's more of an emphasis on just being present in the moment, and that just makes me so happy because that's how sales and recruiting should be. You're trying to build a relationship, and the only way you do that is just by listening and not talking.

MF

Yeah, that's such a great point. Listening is a key element of staffing, sales, and recruiting; it is understanding and bringing value to our customers. I wanted to talk a little bit about the transcript that comes out of the conversation and the value of that transcript that is derived from conversations with clients and with candidates.

GR

Yeah. So Maurice, this was one of the things where it actually became more valuable to our customers than I originally thought it would be. Typically with conversational intelligence tools and call recording tools that are on the market today, a call might be over and you might get a transcript or a call recording analysis fifteen or twenty minutes later. By then if you're in the recruiting world, you've already probably made another ten phone calls. You've already kind of moved on and placed that conversation in the back of your mind as a future to do list item. Well, with Abstrakt because of the nature of what we're doing, the second that call is over the entire transcript is available immediately for that recruiter. They can immediately take that call and take their next steps with their action items with it. So Maurice, imagine you were my candidate and I just got off the phone with you and you said "hey, send me some follow up information from our call today. I'm interested in this opportunity you're talking about." Well, if you got that follow up email within let's say five minutes of our phone call being over, that conversation is fresh. It's top of mind. You're still thinking about it, so the timing of me being able to deliver that follow up email to you helps solidify that conversation towards next steps.

How much different is that than if you get that follow up email 8 hours later because I had to wait 20 minutes for the call recording to go back and listen to it, I had to wait for the transcript to go back and see how you answered a certain question, and then I had to wait until the end of the day to send that follow up email with our next steps. So it just

allows recruiters and sales reps to be so much more timely with adding notes into the applicant tracking system and delivering that follow up action items next step email because they have everything from that call literally literally seconds after that call is over. Again, it's productivity and increasing the impact of the connects and the conversations that we have.

MF

And they can be more thorough, and they can address all the points in a more complete manner than they might otherwise.

GR

Yeah. I mean, how many times have you been on a call Maurice where you got off and you're like god, how did they answer that question? We've all been there if you've been in any type of sales or recruiting world where you're kicking yourself because you didn't write that one thing down and six months from now you're going to wish you had that information.

MF

Yeah, or you go back and you read the transcript and you discover something you'd forgotten was mentioned during the conversation.

GR

Bingo. Love it! Absolutely.

MF

Talking about transcripts, how do transcripts benefit new recruiters versus more senior recruiters?

GR

Yeah, so what's interesting about this is early on, Maurice, one of the pushbacks I got from some of our investors that missed the opportunity is they were like, well, if I'm a seasoned recruiter or a seasoned sales rep, why would I want this transcript? Why do I need this coach next to me all the time? And my answer to that is: Iron Man has Jarvis, fighter pilots have their heads up display in front of them, and every single sales rep and every single recruiter has a bad day. We've all kind of not gotten a good night's sleep the night before and maybe been a little foggy and forgotten to ask a certain question or not handled an objection the right way. Having Abstrakt there as a way to deliver those talking points allows me again, as a seasoned recruiter, to no longer have to worry about taking notes. I can again focus on active listening. I can engage with my candidate, I can engage with the client because I don't have to worry about writing stuff down anymore because Abstrakt is doing all of that for me.

MF

And it doesn't matter if I'm on RingCentral or some other phone system—you have a way of capturing these communications.

GR

Yeah. Actually, we like to say we don't have any integrations because we actually don't need any integrations. We work off of just the computer audio, so Abstrakt runs alongside literally every single system in the recruiting staffing world today.

MF

So this area of conversational intelligence is certainly going to develop and become much much more sophisticated over time as computers become faster and software evolves. It's already being used in contact centers. It's starting to be used in staffing and recruiting. How do you see the future of this technology playing out in other areas like, for example, medicine?

GR

Yeah. It's exciting to think about the possibilities here, Maurice. This is one of the reasons why I love what we're doing here at Abstract, because of the potential application. In relation to medicine, imagine you go to the doctor and you don't know what's wrong with you. Imagine you're talking to the doctor who has an iPad and on that iPad is Abstrakt, and it's listening to what you as the patient is saying. As you're talking about your symptoms, it's telling the doctor in real time what questions to ask you, what tests they should be considering running. I got the chills just thinking about the possibilities.You think about a doctor who has books and years of schooling; there's no way they remember all that, maybe 50% retention at the end of the day. Imagine if your doctor had an entire twelve years of books sitting in their iPad in front of them, delivering that information to them in real time based upon what you as the patient will say. That's a phenomenal, phenomenally exciting future for medicine in looking at how this technology could be applied.

MF

Yeah, it's almost like you're the doctor, but then alongside with you there's a whole team of experts that are listening in on that conversation as well and weighing in on the conversation, making recommendations about questions to ask or next steps that would be taken or possibly advising on what something might be that the patient is experiencing.

GR

Correct. Yes, Sir. Absolutely, that's just one area that we get to. We think about contact centers and things like that. We've all been on phone calls trying to get service or support and we're sitting on hold while somebody tries to find an answer to a question. Imagine if every time you called in to support, they always knew how to help you. That's a world we would all sign up for.

MF

Yes, without multiple layers of escalation. I think it's exciting this idea that more quickly we can get to resolution of problems. We can diagnose medical problems sooner. We can solve technical problems faster. The world can become more efficient as the world becomes more complex.

GR

Yeah, and by leveraging technology. I love the efficiency component. Think about medical. If anything, the past couple years has taught us that if we could find answers to things faster, that's in everyone's best interest.

MF

Yeah.

GR

It's scary on one hand the rate at which technology is advancing, but to be a part of it and to be able to help guide it in an ethically and morally sound direction is something that I'm really excited about.

MF

Yeah, and what's great in your case is that you're basically providing a technology to support a use case that you yourself are very familiar with because you worked in sales for so long. This is something that would benefit you or people like you in that context, then it extends into other fields as well.

GR

Yeah. I think one of the reasons why I was able to get some investment being a first time Founder is because a lot of people looked at Abstrakt and said, "you built this wishing you would have had it in your career," and that's so very true. Even today, on every single call that I run, I have Abstrakt working right there with me because it's the tool I wish I had.

MF

Alright, fantastic. Greg, how can folks get in touch with you?

GR

LinkedIn: Greg Reffner. Email is greg@abstrakt.ai. LinkedIn and email are the best way to get a hold of me.

MF

Alright, fantastic. Greg, thank you very much. This has been an awesome discussion. Thanks everyone for listening, and we look forward to seeing you on the next Staffing Technology podcast.

GR

Cool. Thank you Maurice for having me. I appreciate it.

MF

Absolutely.