



In Conversation

In Conversation with Nick Pike

Carol Baker

The world has a new affinity with technology. COVID-19 has impacted the supply-chain for every business from professional services, IT and telecommunications, through pharmaceuticals, healthcare, manufacturing and procurement, to retail, leisure, fast moving consumer goods (FMCG), to property and construction. No sector has been left untouched, and it is now critical for all businesses to have completely visibility of their end-to-end supply chains and the factors affecting every touchpoint along the way.

We talk to Nick Pike, Chief Revenue Officer at Vizibl (<https://www.vizibl.co/>), the leading cloud platform that enables organizations to drive 2x more growth over peers through Supplier Collaboration & Innovation (SC&I), to find out how companies can take this collaboration further as we emerge into the new norm.

Nick Pike is the Chief Revenue Officer at Vizibl (<https://www.vizibl.co/>)

Trusted by industry leaders like Vodafone and AstraZeneca, Vizibl is the leading cloud platform that enables organizations to drive 2x more growth over peers through its Supplier Collaboration & Innovation (SC&I) product.

With a co-founding team led by Mark Perera (founding CEO of Procurement Leaders) and Alex Short, Vizibl is transforming how companies tap into the power of their suppliers.



Q. When it comes to supply chain, procurement and technology what do you feel has caught the attention of CEOs and CFOs?

A. Over the last 10 to 15 years there has been little development or innovation in procurement technology, and this has impacted the supply chain. Although the function had become more focused for companies before we went into the current crisis, the crisis has clearly shone a light on procurement sourcing.

CEOs and CFOs want to know where they are in terms of supply chain issues with their partners. They want to know about which projects they need to spearhead given the crisis, compared to earlier in the year, and which key projects and products launches they need to undertake to drive the corporation's revenue and its success.

However, what is happening at the moment is that information is sitting in different parts of the organization, often housed in silos in a mish-mash of systems including legacy, and new tech – each having no clear link, or not



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feeding into the CRM system that the business has on its suppliers and their customers.

This is what really attracted me to Vizibl – we provide the solution and the expertise to fill the gap and enable visibility of information on suppliers' customers' activities.

There was a lot of legacy technology in the procurement space. People were trying to integrate information from all different kind of tools which were fairly old – and doing ok – but obviously this was in times when there wasn't significant change going on.

If you are not being forced to innovate and bring out new products because competitors are starting to replace you – as they are in retail; or if you are not physically trying to get drugs to market faster – as is needed for the pharmaceutical sector – then you are not getting the factors into your supply chain because you are unable to get goods at certain times. Previously having that information available in different systems and it taking a while to get to the information was okay for the CEO.

But as we have moved into a time where change is being thrust into most sectors, and particularly where the sectors are not responsible for everything they do, such as FCMG, pharmaceuticals or telco, then it becomes clear that they only control 30% to 40% of their destiny. The rest of their business sits in their various partners and suppliers.

The attractions with a platform such as Vizibl is that we can bring all that data that our customers hold on their suppliers into one place. Also, where suppliers collaborate with customers, it shows them how to get a better understanding of their objectives and helps them to deliver against their goals. In essence, this is what we do.

From the other side looking in, for customers it is a CRM system for managing their suppliers so that they have one place to go for information that allows them to start being able to answer some of these key questions of where we are against our goals, and where our project sits in current events.

Q. How do you see things moving as businesses go back to work, and do you think a lot of companies jumped too soon to furlough their staff?

A. Our main client base is predominantly the Global 2000, and those organizations haven't been too fast to furlough, instead taking a more long-term view. This compares to more medium sized organizations which to a large extent have stopped their businesses, furloughed staff, and now have to work out what they must do next.

Businesses have either reacted and slowed the pace of doing things down, or they have dramatically furloughed people. What we are seeing now is organizations are trying to handle the route back to the new norm.



Over the last couple of months, it is quite amazing how quickly that process has progressed with businesses going from shock and panic, through to asking how do we rebuild, how do we take this opportunity to emerge out of this crisis stronger and better, rather than just surviving?

This is the very dialogue we are now having with our customers.

Q. What are some of the plans that you have coming up?

A. Taking a list of things which companies need to be aware of when they emerge into the new norm, the overriding one is resilience. One of the questions that companies are now asking themselves is “how do we achieve strength of relationships with buyers and suppliers when there are issues?”

This need to be resilient is prompting us to launch a bespoke version of our Vizibl solution to customers that focuses on that resilience, and the need for companies to address the issues which are burning right now by exposing the critical project to work on the supply chain, and then being able to report that information back to the CEO and CFO. In addition, it is important to make sure that everyone is sharing that information in an efficient way, that it's not just being shared individual-by-individual by email or phone call. You need to have the right collaboration technology in place underpinning it, to solve problems faster and more efficiently.

It is the first step on the path. But then following on from that, I think it is also important to recognize that it is the first step that everybody has to take. That will get you back on your feet, but it won't get you back being successful.

So, steps two, three and four, also need to be looked at to work out what the shape of your business will be as the new normal world emerges.

For every company in every industry there is going to be force in the requirement to change, if they are going to be successful and thrive over the next five to ten years. It is a big accelerating event, and it has changed a lot of business thinking, bringing with it macro impact. I think we will see a couple of years of real accelerated changes as companies look to rebuild their businesses to what they want to be in the post COVID-19 world.

Q. Which industry sectors are key focus points for Vizibl?

A. We tend to focus in sectors where there is heavy dependence on, and involvement with, vendors and suppliers. For example, if you look at the telecommunications companies such as Vodafone – historically their business has been very network bandwidth orientated as the main generation of their revenues. What Vodafone and its telecommunication peers are now required to do is to work out how they build service on top of their networks that will enable them to differentiate themselves.



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Vizibl works with Vodafone across its global divisions and its technology organizations, and we have been looking at the new projects and innovations which are coming from their suppliers such as Huawei, Nokia etc – and how Vodafone can bring those to market faster addressing how it can identify which ones are aligned to their business goals.

In addition, we've been helping them work out how they can then focus and accelerate those projects, pitching new projects vs projects which are underlining company goals.

What we have seen is that as companies start to do this, not only do they become empowered, but they start to use a lot of capabilities within the organization such as different business units and places, but then they lose control on what is going on, and that is when they see duplication.

Often you find that a very similar project is happening in different parts of a large organization at the same time, and by deploying Vizibl we are able to shine a light on the duplication and show that elsewhere in the organization there are two or three projects which are the same which could be brought together. On average we see around 30 to 40% of duplication.

While saving money is one aspect, the other aspect is about making those projects aware of each other so that they can collaborate on the progress each has made in the various parts of the organization – and getting that to market faster.

Another example is when we look at the pharmaceutical industry. Traditionally, the pharmaceutical industry is looking to get drugs to market faster, and identify which candidate of drugs are going to make it through trials etc.

By working with universities, pharmaceutical companies gain from the collaboration, and likewise innovating with external partners is becoming really important to the pharmaceutical industry. Before, they would have done all of their research internally. Now we are seeing parity in terms of capability to bring external research which can be productized.

In order to achieve this level of collaboration pharmaceuticals need to use technology. What we are doing with the pharmaceutical sector is working with their key suppliers and vendors to provide visibility in the first stage of exactly where they are in their current relationships; what are they spending with that vendor; or what are they delivering in both directions; and getting the prerequisites in place to enable a relationship whereby they can collaborate together and innovate.

We find that the first thing you need to do to achieve this is to provide transparency of data. With transparency of data comes trust. Once you have trust, then you can focus on solving the problems which are important to you. This is more relevant in current times because the way we all used to build



trust was by spending time with people. Key executives would fly around the world meeting people to build that trusting relationship – now this needs to be done digitally.

So, it is important to have in place the right type of solutions and systems where trust is built by showing what you are doing by communicating consistently across the group, collaborating to bring new products to market. That is particularly relevant in terms of the focus given that pharmaceuticals need to bring on stream new drugs for both Covid-19 now, but also the expected follow-on post Covid-19.

Drugs are grabbing the headlines at the moment, but it is not just about the provision of drugs, it is also about the provision of everything else that the NHS needs such as masks and gowns etc.

We are also seeing this with our FMCG customers who need to recognize which cleaning products and sanitizers need to be commoditized and how they go about producing better cleaning products which are going to have a positive impact on our health.

This is where we are seeing the pharmaceutical world crossing over into the FMCG world.

The FMCG market is also a focus for Vizibl because the challenges facing FMCG at the moment are exactly what I have described in solving those supply chain shortages.

Q. What are the next growth areas for Vizibl?

A. At the moment, the top three sectors are telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and FMCG.

Having said that, the banking industry is starting to recognize its requirement to change as well, and we can see this developing into an important area for Vizibl. We are currently working with a couple of high street banks as they are forced into restructuring and changing their business models to react initially to fintechs and the fallout of 2008 financial crisis, but also as they face the post-COVID-19 world.

Historically, the banking sector would have done everything themselves in-house working on the basis that they employ more developers than the IT sector. But what we are seeing now is that the banking and finance industry is much more open to collaborating with their vendors and suppliers, but they do not have in place the processes and technology to support this collaboration.

This external drive to change is creating an internal openness of being more collaborative for the sector. It is quite a culture change for them, that is what the Vizibl platform tends to drive. It is a technology that enables collaboration



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from suppliers to their customers, and in the process what gets implemented is a method to make a cultural shift because we take away the barriers to collaboration, helping them to solve the challenges they have now, and also in the future.

Q. We are more connected to our staff than we were ever before, so when companies go back into the workplace how do they keep up that connection especially as many employees have said working virtually for the first time they feel as though everyone is truly working as a team?

A. Everyone was forced to go one way, and now they need to work out what it is going to look like going the other way – what will change, and how it will change.

We have customers who use us to do that internal collaboration so that when they bring the departments back together (and some are starting to do this) the challenge is to develop that hybrid work environment, whether it be in the office or remotely.

There needs to be in place the relevant processes and structures to ensure that those relationships which you have cultivated with employees, stakeholders, customers, suppliers, vendors and partners built in crisis time can be maintained, and you don't then go back to how things used to be.

You have got to work out what the new hybrid world will look like. It is a challenge that a lot of organizations will face – some will do what Twitter is doing, saying to staff 'don't come back we are going to run our business remotely'.

For others, it will be a mixture that they will need to create, and if you can put in place technology to remove the barriers to people maintaining those relationships, and maintaining those practices and benefiting from that change – that is where technology such as Vizibl will be able to help.