EPISODE 17

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:03.4] DT: The year was 2003, a 19 year old freshman was sitting in his dorm at the University of Houston, bored with his classes, "Political science just isn't for me," he thought. His passion for code and writing was the real thing fueling his mind. His personal blog was reaching more than 20,000 people at the time but the software it was built on hadn't been updated for months and the developer responsible for it had disappeared off the face of the earth.

He started searching for alternatives and then he noticed that the platform he was using was open source. He forked the project and created a new platform out of it, not knowing at the time that this platform would go on to be one of the most influential pieces of software ever written.

[0:00:35.9] SS: That platform was WordPress and today WordPress powers more than a quarter of the entire Internet. That 19 year old college dropout is now the 32 year old CEO of a multi-billion dollar company with a few hundred employees working all over the world. The company is called Automatic and you're almost definitely familiar with and are probably using their product such as wordpress.com, Gravatar, Akismet and WooCommerce.

[0:01:01.3] DT: Hello Hackers and thanks a lot for joining us for another episode of the Hacking UI Oodcast where we hack our way through design development and entrepreneurship. I'm David Tintner.

[0:01:08.5] SS: And I'm Sagi Shreiber. Our guest today is driven by the mission to allow anyone in the world to have a home on the internet where they can express their thoughts and base their business.

[0:01:16.9] DT: Ladies and gents, it's our pleasure to present to you Matt Mullenweg, CEO of Automatic and the founder of WordPress.

[0:01:24.2] SS: We had the pleasure of talking to Matt not only about is amazing life's work and mission but also got into meditation and the things we all need to practice on a daily basis to stay sane in our stressful, success driven lives. So D, are you ready?

[0:01:36.1] DT: Let's get hacking.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:48.3] DT: Hey everyone, we are here for another episode of the Hacking UI Podcast with Matt Mullenweg, how's it going today Matt?

[0:01:53.8] MM: It's going great, how are you?

[0:01:54.4] DT: Awesome and thanks a lot for joining us, we're really excited to talk to you today. So just before we begin, you think you can get everyone kind of just a little bit of a background about yourself?

[0:02:05.0] MM: Sure. Like I said, my name is Matt, I was born and raised in Houston, Texas and while I was there I cofounded a project called WordPress, which is an open source blogging software. A few years I later I moved to San Francisco and started a company called Automattic, which basically does commercial services around WordPress. So we make wordpress.com, which is the easiest place to host WordPress. Jetpack, which is an add on for WordPress and now WooCommerce which is a eCommerce solution for WordPress. So it's alll, it's WordPress all the way down.

[0:02:37.9] DT: Awesome. I think just about every single one of our listeners has used WordPress before and actually Hacking UI is built on WordPress and your reach has just become incredible as a company. But I want to ask you about the beginnings and how you got started with WordPress, can you take us through that a little bit?

[0:02:56.8] MM: Sure, in the beginning it was really just around blogging, you know? I had a blog myself, I still blog to this day. So I've been doing it for a long time but the software was a little hard to use and I thought it was just challenging and I had some friends in high school that I also wanted to blog but they were artist and musicians and weren't really interested about learning all the tech stuff. So I just began working on what could be easier ways to get everything going?

[0:03:26.7] DT: Okay, cool. You started, this was when you were still in college, right?

[0:03:31.9] MM: I was, I was attending the University of Houston and focusing mostly on political science.

[0:03:38.4] DT: Okay. So while you were in college, can you walk us through that? How much time were you spending on WordPress? I mean, this was I guess basically a side project at the time.

[0:03:46.4] MM: If you were to look at my grades, you'd probably say I was spending a little too much time on WordPress.

[0:03:52.3] SS: Were you interested in like were you getting into computers like before that because like political science has nothing to do with what you're doing right now, right? I mean when did you start doing code?

[0:04:05.3] MM: I was into computers from a very young age because my father was a computer programmer guy. So just, you want to be like your dad. So yeah I started working on it, learning it but mostly making things like basic websites and HTML. It wasn't until much later that I began to really learn the craft of code.

[0:04:28.2] DT: I can totally relate, I actually studied journalism in college and was just the same, I wanted to pick up HTML and a little bit of CSS just because I wanted to start creating something. I didn't at the beginning care so much about coding or the architecture of what I was making, I just wanted to actually create something and put something out there so I can totally kind of relate to that.

Okay, so as you were in college and you start making WordPress and things start picking up, I guess pretty quickly it started to catch steam?

[0:04:59.9] MM: Yeah, well actually, not that quickly. I would say that we worked on WordPress for many years before it had it's sort of breaking point which was other software in the space started to not work as well and so yeah, people just started using it more and more.

[0:05:19.4] DT: Okay, great.

[0:05:21.4] MM: That sounds kind of basic, but it was very much you know, we kept working on releases, doing new things and it was very organic adoption so it wasn't like one moment when everyone was already settling on it.

[0:05:34.6] SS: When you did WordPress, I mean, how did you — what did you do to get more people on it in an organic way? Did you blog about WordPress, like kind of WordPress blog? Or I mean, how did you get the reach of the people and create basically the whole community that was created around WordPress?

[0:05:53.4] MM: The earlier days was very much just me telling everyone I knew. I would comment on blogs I would blog about it myself, I would be informed, just promoting it every place and way I could.

[0:06:08.9] SS: Nice.

[0:06:10.3] DT: Cool. Just reaching out to everyone that was in your network basically? I guess building your network as well?

[0:06:14.9] MM: Yeah, that's the idea.

[0:06:17.1] SS: Yeah, I mean they say it's like when you have some kind of like whatever side project it is, you have to really market it hard. Not market it, but like tell everyone about it. But they also need you need some sort of kind of massive action for something to succeed. You don't seem to tell us about something, which is like out of the ordinary, which is basically all the people we talk to by far up to now, did talk about some kind of massive effort on their side. But was it wasn't truly that organic? There was no something specific like really in terms of action that you took to promote WordPress to get it to the breakthrough point that it got to?

[0:06:59.7] MM: Very much word of mouth.

[0:07:01.2] SS: Really? That's amazing. That's crazy. Word of mouth like over a year you say, okay. Nice. So then WordPress grew and you acquired — can you tell us a bit about the story about how did WordPress start making money because it was also open source?

[0:07:23.0] DT: Yeah, when exactly did it go from being like your side project to being a real company, something that you knew was going to not be just a side project anymore?

[0:07:31.9] MM: Sure. That was probably around when Automattic started. So I had had a job at CNET and just as WordPress adoption began to pick up, I had pitched actually the idea of what became WordPress.com to CNET because I thought, "Well, I work at the company, might as well do this at the company."

[0:07:49.7] DT: Really?

[0:07:50.5] MM: But they weren't as interested in the idea but I felt like I had to do it. I just couldn't not work on this thing that became WordPress.com. So I ended up resigning, I stayed for a few extra months to help them finish up some projects and then struck out on my own. In that time, I was also able to hire some of the first few employees of Automattic, which are people I was already working with around the world on building WordPress. So there was a fellow in Ireland, a guy in Texas, a guy in Vermont and we just all began — we were already working together, we just started to leave our day jobs and work on it full time.

[0:08:29.1] DT: That's amazing. So how much time were you actually like working at the company while still working on WordPress? Was it the entire time you were there that you were managing your time like that or just at the end when you knew you were going to leave?

[0:08:39.8] MM: Oh I was always working on WordPress, that's part of why they hired me and part of why I went to CNET was that they allowed, you know, they were supportive of me working on WordPress, an open source outside of my normal job.

[0:08:50.4] DT: How were you managing your time to do this? I mean, this must have been a massive project in addition to a full time job?

[0:08:55.6] MM: They keep asking about managing time, I don't know if I ever really think about it that way. Certainly not then and probably not now yeah. Time was just, it's there. There are things you want to do and you prioritize and generally not having time for something just means it's not a high priority. So WordPress was a top priority for me then and still is now. The time kind of finds itself.

[0:09:18.3] DT: Do you think that there are some major sacrifices or something that you're making in order to give it that much time though?

[0:09:25.3] MM: Well certainly you could argue that I wasn't, I didn't finish school for one thing. There are, maybe I sacrificed like some social life or some things that other people might do there. I'm definitely not as up to date on TV shows and things that people talk about but that's okay. I still have a really great time when I can and then I'm able to work on something that's very fulfilling and rewarding for me.

[0:09:48.9] DT: Definitely.

[0:09:50.3] SS: Can I ask just like for also all the people that are listening that don't know, what did WordPress start making money out of and I mean, was it like those WordPress.com and you sold different packages of, you know, have your own domain for five dollars back in the day. I don't remember what it is now but can you tell us a bit about how you monetized at the beginning?

[0:10:12.0] MM: Sure, so really the first product that we sold was called Akismet. Akismet is an anti-spam service. So you would drop it in your blog and it would help protect you from comment spam. We made it free for personal use and then I think five bucks a month for professional use if you're a business. So that was the idea, that was kind of the big thing and it went well. So no complaints there.

[0:10:39.1] SS: So Akismet was the main source of income back when you left your day job?

[0:10:43.4] MM: Yeah, that sounds about right.

[0:10:45.3] SS: Okay, then you had like planned for how you can monetize in more ways?

[0:10:50.5] MM: Well we want to create WordPress.com, which was the idea that we could take this thing WordPress that you needed, a web host and to no database and everything like that to get setup and make it just as easy as clicking a few buttons.

[0:11:05.2] SS: So then you just worked on that when you left your day job in order to develop that and turn it into the business that it is today?

[0:11:11.1] MM: Yeah, that was the idea. So we began working on WordPress.com pretty much right away. But Akismet was the first product to launch.

[0:11:18.7] SS: Okay. And now, can you tell us a bit the evolution that it went from then to now? Like I know it's kind of long and probably can take an hour to just tell the story but just like really short, you had a couple of acquisitions, I know you raised some capital, right? So can you walk us through, since then up to now like really quickly?

[0:11:41.5] MM: Sure. Well in 2006, a bit after the company started, two big things happened. One was we raised about a million dollars and I hired a CEO, a fantastic guy I still work with today named Tony Snider. 2008, we raised a second round, which was about $12 million dollars of capital into the company. Then that was it until 2014, which was when we raised about $160. Big rounds to allow us to really invest and expand into new areas that we were curious about. Like for example, we became actually something that is just about to launch, which is we are the registrar for the .blog TLD.

We're introducing the .blog to the world so everyone can get a .blog domain and we expanded into eCommerce through the acquisition of WooCommerce, which is, you know, a way to transform your WordPress into an online store.

[0:12:32.9] SS: Cool, it seems like you're going in a direction of one, developing the blogging atmosphere that I guess like WordPress came from and still is with the .blog domain and stuff like that. And on the other hand, going for the commerce side, is it correct or?

[0:12:50.9] MM: Yeah, that's basically, everything we've done over the years has been led by our users. So we heard the people wanting to — they were like, "I have a great site, I love it, I love the way it looks and I want to sell things." That's why we moved into that area.

[0:13:05.1] DT: So I definitely feel that the users and the community with WordPress is one of the biggest assets that it has. Do you have any ideas of how it grew or anything that you did specifically to make it such a strong community with such active users pushing it forward?

[0:13:17.9] MM: Yeah, the key to community is really just treating people well. I know that sounds really simple but it's like, if you had a party and you didn't kick out people who were causing a ruckus and you didn't feed people or whatever it is, they would leave. And so, I think online community is so much the same way like you have to treat folks well and make sure there's a good environment for them to participate in so they'll want to do it. Because especially for open source, people are there because they want to be there, not because they have to be there.

[0:13:52.4] DT: I think one of the things that a lot of companies or people who are building products they want to make money off of struggle with when they're talking about like treating their users well is that they also want to get something from them, they also want to get whether they want you to pay for service or maybe they don't have the ability to provide a free service or they don't have the time. But I mean, you really invested in that and I guess believed in, like you said, treating people well and giving lots of free services and free tools and real value to users.

Any tips for someone who is starting a business today and kind of on the fence of how much to give to users when they're struggling with what they should be charging money for?

[0:14:31.4] MM: I'd say you always want to create more value than you capture. So as long as you feel like you're doing that well, it's all good.

[0:14:39.4] SS: Great. So Matt, can I ask you, what is the thing that you're most passionate about right now in what you do?

[0:14:47.8] MM: Right now an area I'm thinking a lot about is design, and our design also interacts with diversity and inclusion.

[0:14:54.4] SS: Okay, diversity and inclusion. Okay, can you expand on that?

[0:14:57.8] MM: This is partly driven by a new hire we just made at Automattic, which is John Maeda who sort of has a long history in design and computational design going back to the MIT Media Lab, he was the president of RISD, the Rhode Island School of Design, and was recently the first design partner at Kleiner Perkins Investment. Now he's the head of design at Automattic.

[0:15:24.3] SS: Amazing, congrats.

[0:15:25.5] MM: His full title is Global Head Computational Design and Inclusion. The part of his influence is that, you know, you all are the Hacking UI Podcast, part of what design is how it works on how it looks but companies can also be designed and services can be designed. As you think about a really successful design, people being able to use it is key to it. So that includes social issues, it includes accessibility, it includes is it working on different devices? Like all of this different things are different elements to, lenses to what you can view this on. I think all of those lenses are worth investing quite a bit of time and thought into.

[0:16:04.8] SS: Yeah, of course, especially these days where you also probably know of all those AI like the companies that are working on artificial intelligence to create websites, that will be, I mean cross platform and everything and, you know, very tailored to the needs of the people that create them. Do you have anything in mind regarding that as well?

[0:16:28.2] MM: Most of the AI stuff I've seen has just been just marketing, it's not actually like making anything better.

[0:16:36.0] DT: So what are some of the first things you're going to invest in with this design thinking, this new passion?

[0:16:40.4] MM: Well, we're really looking at every single one of our products and the flows. I like the word flow a lot, in terms of how do you go from one part to the next? How do you get from one stop to the next? What is the most intuitive way for you to connect your imagination or what you want to happen with what actually happens? Yeah, I think WordPress has been successful thus far by many external regards. But I believe we are in the very early days of bringing people online and giving them their home on the web, a place that they truly own, which is their own domain, their own website. There's several billion people that go there and if we're going to make it to those several billion people, we need to really improve the userability and the experience of WordPress.

[0:17:28.3] DT: That's awesome and I want to follow up with that but just before I want to do that, I want us to take a quick break and give a shout out to our sponsors for this episode.

[SPONSOR BREAK]

[0:17:35.3] DT: This episode is brought to you by Rindle, a new app that lets you improve your workflow on a very personal level. Look, there's a million to do list apps and project management apps out there and we've actually tried almost every single one of them for Hacking UI, but Rindle gets that. And it's not trying to replace Trello or Asana, it access the perfect bridge between them. Rindle allows you to work the way that you like regardless of what the rest of your team is using or how frequently they update their status, Sagi. It syncs automatically with Jira, Trello, Basecamp, GitHub, Asana and a bunch of other apps so you can collect all of your tasks in one place and see what they hell you actually need to do today.

This is perfect for me because with Hacking UI, we're now using a few different apps to manage our work. We're adding our task to a few Trello boards or discussing stuff in Slack or over email and we're scheduling our content task in Asana. We need that separation on the team level but on a personal level, this just makes my head spin. I can do my own task list in Rindle and have a sort of mission control center for me to get a high level overview of what I need to focus on. Rindle is still in private beta but the ui looks amazing. It's simple and has just what you need,

nothing more. You could join the beta for free, no credit card required and they're doing something really nice now for early adopters, all premium plans are 25% off. Just go to hackingui.com/Rindle to sign up. Again, hackingui.com/rindle to join the beta for free.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:18:57.2] DT: One of the things you said was giving people their home on the internet and one thing that I find really interesting is that when you're creating kind of your home on the internet with WordPress and you're having your own domain, it's a little bit against some of the trend that it appears other companies are doing, trying to bring you into their own network, trying to give you like a sort of home in a different way, be it your Facebook profile or every other you know, social media profile. It feels like you guys are pulling the other way. Is this kind of a tension that you feel as well?

[0:19:25.9] MM: No, I think this are highly complementary. Having your own home on the web gives you a place to point to from all of the social networks that you participate in. So that's a better way to think of it rather than being mutually exclusive with anything.

[0:19:43.0] DT: So WordPress will be the center point for everything else to lead into? Is that kind of division if we can sum it up?

[0:19:48.5] MM: Yeah, maybe a way to think about it is that the social networks are like great parties to go to.

[0:19:54.6] DT: Nice.

[0:19:56.0] MM: And everyone's there, but it doesn't belong to you, you wouldn't live there. You shouldn't live there. It's like a club. But, you know, you have your home that you return to and it's where you actually have the ability to influence things and control things and change things. That's something that is more permanent.

[0:20:14.1] DT: I definitely agree and definitely feel this. So Sagi and I in our program The Side Project Accelerator, the very first thing that we actually make all of the students do is open up

their own WordPress blog and create their own, as you would call it, their own home on the internet for exactly this reason. I totally agree with what you're saying, and start creating content of their own. Now, do you have any, I guess you've been creating content forever and you have lots of different websites in your name and you've said you've bene blogging forever as well, any tips on starting to build this home? You have the tools with WordPress, but okay, now how do I begin, how do I start building this home on the internet and setup my own place?

[0:20:51.6] MM: Go start at WordPress. That is the number one way to do it. You can go to WordPress.com, which is easy to get started or use a web host like Pressible. Just start creating and hacking and playing with it. There's really nothing you can break that you can't fix and so have some fun with it. Make it your playground or your sandbox.

[0:21:11.9] DT: This is like the technical side of it but what are you putting on WordPress? What are you suggesting people to write about and to share or to start getting out there?

[0:21:22.3] MM: You know, a good start is look at the things you're already posting in other places. Maybe you're sharing links with your friends, maybe you're just emailing things to people? Maybe you're the person that finds cool stuff in the news and then sends it to people? You know, whatever it is that you're already doing. I'm sure you take photos on your phone like you learn something today, you had a podcast. Put that on there.

[0:21:43.0] SS: Yeah, it's actually interesting because before you have original content of your own, you must have content that you go to and consume and by sharing that, other people can enjoy that content as well so it makes sense.

[0:21:56.3] MM: Totally. Curation and filtering things are hugely valuable.

[0:21:58.0] SS: Yeah, for sure. I want to go back for a second to the, I want to just like crack your vision. I don't think I got a clear picture of your vision so far. I think I do like in terms of design thinking. I know you're now that you're a very design oriented and I love that as a designer of course.

But I want to understand, because I think there's something big that you're thinking though we haven't cracked yet. Maybe like you saying, we want — it's like your mission is to bring people online on the internet and give them a home to create their own home, which is their own website/blog, right? Are you going to challenge this whole technical issue of buying a domain plus hosting plus? Like, is there going to be like, you're imagining kind of like a one click kind of like setup of this kind of home?

[0:22:53.3] MM: You know, it's not one click but that's essentially what we do on WordPress.com, that's like my life's work.

[0:22:58.7] SS: Yeah, on WordPress.com. Actually it is, yeah right. I mean on wordpress.com it is. In terms of like setting up in a manual way like most of the people do with WordPress.org. Do you think of like one day there will be a better solution to those pains? I mean, for entrepreneurs that launch more websites and stuff like that?

[0:23:18.6] DT: Yeah, I guess what Sagi is asking more is like, today I think that we use WordPress.org for Hacking UI and we don't use WordPress.com because we want, and I think a lot of entrepreneurs are in the same boat, that they want their own self-hosted thing and they want something, I dunno? The more customization, more options, more control over everything. But do you think that is the future vision basically to not have these two separate worlds, to be WordPress.com, that easy setup option to be good enough for everyone?

[0:23:46.2] MM: Well, so for millions and millions of people, WordPress.com is good enough and you can go there today, pay $36 bucks and get a domain and a beautiful site that you can setup probably in about 10 minutes or less. Now, in terms of what you're saying like if you want the control of running any plugin or modifying the code or anything like that, basically every web host now offers a one click install of WordPress.

So whether that's Bluehost, GoDaddy, Flywheel, Linode, Pressable, any of them. WP Engine, you can go to them and they'll setup and manage and keep an updated WordPress for you. So they'll do a lot of the WordPress management then you can focus on whatever it is that you're interested in modifying.

[0:24:28.5] DT: Awesome. All right, so Matt, let's take this a little bit forward and ask you, I want to kind of understand the culture today Automattic and culture behind everything that you're doing to run this giant operation that you guys have?

[0:24:39.2] MM: Sure.

[0:24:40.0] DT: Okay, can you kind of explain the setup of things there? You mentioned before like you have lots of different products, lots of different things that you're running. How is it kind of structured and who is working on what?

[0:24:51.1] MM: Wow, so Automattic now is 500 people, they live and work in 52 different countries. So kind of implicit there is that basically everyone works from home at Automattic. We try to find the best people from all over the world and we hire them regardless of where they are. If we got a great application for whatever country and then make it through our interview process, that's why we hire them. The company's divided kind of around some of the areas you mentioned. So the biggest focus is definitely WordPress.com after that WooCommerce and then Jetpack being kind of the third largest area.

But we do have lots of stuff we do like side projects. For example we have a product called Simple Note, which is a simple notes app, it runs on android, iOS, desktop, the web, everything. I personally live in it every single day and organize a bunch of my life through it. But yeah, that's just kind of something we do on the side so it doesn't even have a dedicated team per se but lots of people who are passionate about it work on it in their spare time throughout the company.

[0:26:01.5] SS: Very nice. It sounds awesome. It sounds like — so you say besides the whole used operation, you still have like side projects of the company in a way?

[0:26:11.5] MM: Yeah, exactly. And the company's designed so that people can do all those side projects like under the Automattic banner because Automattic, the company is called Automattic and not WordPress for a reason. It's because we expect to do many things other than WordPress and in addition to WordPress in the future.

[0:26:28.2] SS: How do you support all of those side project? Let's say someone in Automattic has a side project, is there culture of like, "Yeah, make your own side project, have it be whatever you want to be. If you want it to be under the umbrella of Automattic then you can maybe do that." But do you support side projects in general even if they're not under the Automattic umbrella?

[0:26:49.2] MM: Yeah, so what we support for people is doing anything that is not what they might do in their job, they can do on their side and do completely on their own. Anything that might be part of their job, we ask it to be a kind of an Automattic production. It doesn't mean they need to get approval or anything but just it's kind of under the Automattic umbrella. If you want to sell like T-shirts or something like that, sure. I mean that's not our business. But if you wanted to sell a WordPress plugin, that gets a little bit closer.

[0:27:21.0] DT: I see. A lot of companies are against supporting side projects for their employees at all but do you see a benefit of employees working in side projects?

[0:27:30.4] MM: To me, the key is that there's no conflict of interest. So it's not about whether there's something's on the side or not. It's whether it's creating a conflict, real or perceived, between you and your colleagues.

[0:27:42.5] DT: Okay. What about as far as personal growth and growth in the career? You think it's something that, have you had any, aside from the projects we've already talked about, have you had any other side projects of your own?

[0:27:55.0] MM: Yeah, I mean there's tons of stuff inside of Automattic. Like we're thinking about relaunching, we have sort of a combination blog and wiki service that we're thinking about putting out there because it's kind of fun. Lots of themes, I work on the default theme for WordPress every year which is usually…

[0:28:11.2] SS: Really, you get to work on it?

[0:28:13.9] MM: Yeah, I work on lots of stuff.

[0:28:16.2] SS: Like I said, amazing. Do you get to write code?

[0:28:19.5] MM: Well I didn't write any code for the past few years, but there's a lot more in code to making a successful default theme and making it successful within WordPress as well. These sorts of things on the open source side, many folks in Automattic contribute to open source, WordPress and otherwise. It's one of these, I think where it gets tough is when your normal work and day job can be so busy that you feel like you don't have any gas left in the tank to do other things. That I would say is a real problem. Especially at Automattic because we are moving so quickly and working so hard towards our goals. But when you can carve out the time, it can be very satisfying.

[0:29:01.3] DT: I read that actually you guys have one of the lowest employee attrition rates out there, is that still true? I mean, employees must really like this move fast and even if they're working really hard, they must really like it.

[0:29:11.5] MM: Yeah, I think we try to create an environment that you know, similar to what you said earlier about what makes a good community? It's respecting people. I think companies should respect people and treat them well and when they do, they reward that with loyalty. I wouldn't expect anyone to be loyal if Automattic was treating them badly or is a bad place to work

[0:29:32.7] SS: Also, by the way, I got to say, you being one of the founders and a level of this company, you're very calm, you sound so calm. It's very nice to — I'm almost getting more calm that just talking to you. It's very nice. All right, Matt, so you are one of the founders of WordPress, the world's largest blogging platform and maybe we can pick your brain about some tips for blogging?

[0:30:06.1] MM: Sure.

[0:30:06.9] SS: I mean, you blog all the time, do you have any tips for people writing articles on how to write the articles like do you have a specific pattern that you follow in order to write your stuff?

[0:30:17.5] MM: You know, the most important thing is just to write, just do it. I know that sounds like very Nike but you should really sit down every day and write something, even if you don't publish it but writing is a muscle and just like if you wanted to exercise every day or meditate every day or whatever it is, the daily practice will make you grow, probably more than anything else so more than anything else I could say. If you write every day, you will become a better writer and I believe that inspiration favors the diligent. When you force yourself to write, it will help you think of things to write about because you'll just be training that part of your brain to be fired up and constantly looking.

[0:31:00.9] DT: Is that something that you do every day. Are you still writing every day?

[0:31:04.2] MM: I do write every day, I don't publish every day, I would like to publish more but yeah, I absolutely write every day. I have to for work because we're a distributed company.

[0:31:14.6] SS: Nice. When you write, usually when you write your blog posts, do you write it in WordPress a week?

[0:31:21.5] MM: I start in the WordPress — I don't know if you now but we released a new desktop app which is pretty cool. If you go to…

[0:31:27.7] DT: Nice, we need to check that out, okay.

[0:31:28.9] MM: Apps.wordpress.com. You can see both our mobile apps and our desktop apps. So I'd say about probably two thirds of the time, I start in one of our apps, whether that's a draft or actually doing the full posting. Then about one third of the time, I actually start in Simple Note, Especially if I'm on the go and I just want to like dash off some quick thoughts, which I am or if I'm already inside of simple note which I am probably at least an hour a day I'll just start right there and then later I'll copy and paste it in the WordPress.

[0:32:03.1] DT: What kind of stuff are you writing about?

[0:32:05.2] MM: A lot of it is product driven, things related to our business, how we work, how our product works, how we're interacting with each other, none of it is people driven so a big

part of my role is hiring, a big part of my role is the organization of automatic and how the teams are — who the leads are, how they interact with each other, how we're organized the structure and then some portion is externally facing. I might be connecting with investors or writing publicly or talking about an idea or a vision for future version of either core WordPress or something outside. Those are probably the big buckets.

[0:32:52.6] DT: How are you deciding what should be published and what stuff remains hidden? Aside from obviously you know, company, secret and information that you cannot share to the public. When you're writing your own stuff and you're not publishing it, what would be the reason behind that?

[0:33:09.3] MM: Time, it's really the only good reason. It takes time to publish.

[0:33:14.3] DT: Definitely.

[0:33:17.7] MM: It's sometimes less of our priority than necessarily getting whatever it means to an end, the purpose of why I was writing in the first place. I do often think that especially when I do a longer internal post like this would be good for the blog.

[0:33:30.0] DT: Definitely, I think one of the things I want to ask you about is I guess, now you obviously made a huge name for yourself and running like a super successful company but a lot of people, when they're starting out to blog, one of their biggest fears and one of their biggest challenges that we've had people tell us and I know I have experienced myself too is being afraid that "I'm not qualified to publish something or I'm not… let's say like a thought leader on the subject."

I mean, obviously you weren't always a thought leader, you weren't always qualified to talk about a subject. Any tips for getting over that fear?

[0:34:00.4] MM: Well first, what does it even mean to be a thought leader? If the people you look up to is thought leaders, they probably did it by getting out there and embarrassing themselves and, you know, talking about things that they understood little of it, the thing is

though, no matter how little you think you know, there's probably someone else who knows less. and you can help them learn and the best way to learn is to teach.

So don't feel shy about teaching and just be open-minded and humble. Perhaps through publishing, you're going to come at this, "Hey, this is totally wrong. You know what? Thank that person. Just ignored you and said this person doesn't know what they're doing, I'm just going to leave but they took the time to you know, help correct you and now you can update your post with that new information or maybe that leads you down a whole new line of research or Googling or something that broadens your knowledge.There's so much to do.

[0:34:57.4] DT: Definitely, like you said, it gets just getting over that fear of embarrassment and realizing that I guess the worst case scenario is not so bad. You know, like you said, maybe someone calls you out on something, maybe you got something wrong but also in this world of with blogging now, you can, like you said, update a post afterwards, it's not like publishing a book anymore. Where once it's out, it's done for and that's it. I think that's really a good tip that you said there. You can update it afterwards.

[0:35:25.7] MM: You know what? I frequently do. I update my post more after they're published than before they're published.

[0:35:32.6] DT: Really? That's good to know, definitely. So what else? I want to dig into this some more about people that are starting out because this is something that we get a lot of problems, a lot of people coming to us with their problems today for starting and you said before, your tip was like, just publish, just get started, but what else do you have for getting over that and just getting started?

[0:35:53.8] MM: I mean, it's a little topological but it's just a decision, you could do it today or you cannot do it today. Whatever it is that you're procrastinating or putting off or you'll always be able to find things to do instead of it. But just sit yourself in front of a blank page, turn off your phone, turn off the Wi-Fi, turn off everything and if you can sit there for an hour and not produce one single thing, good for you. Maybe you needed that meditative time to relax but the reality is, it will probably start to unblock a bit.

[0:36:26.9] SS: Speaking about meditation, I mean, you sounding so calm and all, do you meditate?

[0:36:32.0] MM: I do. That's all nice. I try to every day. In reality, I probably get to it every second or third day but I use an app called Calm.

[0:36:43.4] SS: I know that, cool.

[0:36:45.0] MM: Calm.co. So you can do it, use it on the web in addition to using the apps. I've had just a nice mix because I was learning, I would do a lot of the guided programs. They have a seven day and a 21 day program that are both really good. If you can get through the 21 day program, you will be just a better person. Full stop. Then they also do a little new ones every single day. So every day when I launch, I could either do one of their sort of stock ones like a body scan meditation or a loving kindness meditation. Or I can check out what's new that day.

[0:37:20.8] SS: Cool, so it sounds like with your busy schedule, you still find time for sitting quiet and meditating, which is pretty inspiring I must say.

[0:37:30.7] MM: Yeah, well it only takes a few minutes. So we all have the same number of seconds in the day.

[0:37:40.2] DT: What are some of the direct benefits that you feel you got for meditating?

[0:37:43.6] MM: I think of it, I actually think it's fun to think about it for my engineering mind point of view. So meditating essentially, something happens and you react to it and essentially what the practice of meditation does is start to insert a little like interrupt, like a background process in between what happens in your reaction. In which that allows you to change that reaction or observe that reaction and think about what's behind it.

This is incredibly powerful because essentially moves you from the world determining what you do and the randomness of the universe to you determining what you do, consciously and making choices. The truth is that, I mean, even the Dalai Lama talks about how he has angry reactions or jealous reactions or you know, he's a human just like the rest of us. But then he

observes that and then what he actually does is a result of that observation, not sort of the base in motion.

[0:38:46.0] SS: That's amazing. I actually am really into Buddhism and meditation so I haven't meditated for so long. So for me, I really want to get back into it.

[0:38:58.1] MM: There's a good book called *Search Within Yourself* and it actually, the fellow at Google who created a mindfulness program at Google and he makes a really good, a lot of the business case for why meditation, both for yourself as a leader or an entrepreneur and for your company as a whole, can be a really valuable practice.

[0:39:17.2] SS: Nice.

[0:39:18.8] DT: I could definitely say that and I think you touched on something that we haven't actually talked about on this podcast so much. You know we focus about on entrepreneurship and tips for how to make your business better, your side project better but we don't touch on a lot which is still really important is the person behind it all and treating yourself well and managing the stress and managing your life in a better way and I think that what you're talking about with meditation is one of, a really excellent technique to do that and something that is probably useful for a lot of people, especially in these type of stressful lives.

[0:39:49.7] MM: Yeah, you can't separate it. There's no way to separate it.

[0:39:54.1] DT: Also I think that it's something that happens with entrepreneurship too is that people talk about a work life balance and they don't find that a lot. Your work becomes your life. So if there's not that work life balance or and if you don't have that separation already with work then also why separate it with your, I guess like your own personal advancement? Definitely I think it's something that's completely intertwined.

[0:40:16.7] MM: The trust is you can take probably a lot of the advice you all have given on entrepreneurship or businesses and just turn it around. Meaning that if you do a performance or for your business or you track metrics, do that for your life as well. Look at the prioritization. If

you sat down and said, "Okay, outside of my business, my relationship with my parents, my sister and my significant other are very important to me."

How would you rate yourself on those? When was the last time you talked to them? You know, do they know that you love them? I mean, they know but have they heard it today? You know, what are the things you can do there? You know, in your personal life, sometimes even small investments of time. 10 minutes here, five minutes there, can have a really big impact.

[0:41:05.3] SS: Yeah, I know for myself and for my wife that we had this. I was very kind of into looking into my life and my career. But the one time, she will kill me for sharing it. But one time, I just saw she was not in a very happy mood and I just told her, "Okay, let's go for coffee for like dinner and coffee," and we just went for dinner and coffee one night. We got our parents as babysitters and then we just sat down and opened an old book and said, "Okay, let's put down some stuff that make us happy in life and not only mine because I have a good career going on, but let's talk about you and let's talk not about only career and everything else and just like you know, in half an hour, we managed to make some decisions that completely changed our lives, which was for her leaving her job and going back to finishing her degree, which she stopped when our older child was born.

For me it was like, "Okay, I got to see how I keep pushing into leave my day job and work in Hacking UI full time. It was very life changing in only half an hour we're just like writing in notebooks, the two people together. So that was like what you said about reflecting and you know, having metrics for your own personal life like you have at work is so important I think.

[0:42:23.1] MM: Right, and thank you for sharing that.

[0:42:26.1] SS: Yeah, thank you for you opening the subject. I think it's such an important subject and we certainly did not expect to get into the subject with you, the founder of WordPress. We were like, "Okay, let's talk about everything WordPress and all your activity," but yeah, we are saying this whole other site which is so important and especially in your company's size and your role at the company, which is so I guess demanding if I can say, right?

I mean you can be a stressed out person right now with that size company and so much responsibilities but you're taking, I mean you're looking after yourself so it's very important for people to hear in this podcast to also kind of like take inspiration from that I think and to check out how they can take care of themselves. We should all do that, I think.

[0:43:19.5] MM: Yeah, I definitely get very stressed out. But then you have to come back from it.

[0:43:26.8] SS: Yeah, totally. One tip I can share, just about like stressing out, one Buddhist teacher that I talked to once, he said whenever we get stressed out, it's kind of like a lot of candles are just opening up and creating a huge fire. So the stressing out is a fire, but then if we are mindful of what caused the fire, we notice that it's mini candles. It's also for being angry, it's also for like everything.

So it was like, "Okay, what made me now be so stressed? Okay, it was that email that I got. Okay, and in that email, what was written? Okay and so it was like this person said that and then you found out that the person who said that really didn't mean that it was this thing was so urgent or whatever. And then you find out that you don't have to be so stressed out. But just because you were mindful of that moment and try to see the candles that created fire. It's kind of like a nice trick to do, it helps me a lot I know.

[0:44:28.2] MM: Cool.

[0:44:30.6] SS: D, did you have any questions?

[0:44:33.4] DT: Yeah, Matt, I'm just curious, I mean, the meditation trick you did before, not trick. The meditation habit was excellent. Any other habits that you have that you think are working well for your habits or you're trying to improve?

[0:44:46.5] MM: That's a good question. It's kind of the stuff that everyone already knows, eating well and exercising.

[0:44:55.5] DT: Definitely.

[0:44:56.4] MM: I'd say just like meditation helps your mind, those things help your body and I have lots of room to improve there and where possible I try to.

[0:45:09.0] SS: Do you have any specific sport that you do?

[0:45:10.9] MM: This year, so I try to do as little exercises, pretty much every morning; stretches, pushups, things like that and planking. But running is something that I kind of started doing the past few years. I've stopped the past few months but prior to that I was running a couple of half marathons and really enjoying it. So I need to restart that.

[0:45:37.5] SS: Cool.

[0:45:38.1] DT: Yeah, half marathons are serious, that's not casual running. That's pretty serious running there.

[0:45:44.0] MM: It's a good — it's funny, I don't know if I could ever imagine doing a whole marathon but half is a good length.

[0:45:54.3] SS: Nice. And in terms of like eating healthy? Do you have like a specific recommendation on how to learn to eat healthy and how do you know what to eat or not?

[0:46:04.6] MM: We all know, right? I'd say just if you can keep the bad stuff to a minimum. Like I'll have a cake too, but if you can minimize that and try to maximize the veggies, the eggs, the stuff that you know is good.

[0:46:22.1] SS: Yeah, for sure. So yeah, we've been through habits, we've been to the story of WordPress, we've been through meditation.

[0:46:31.2] DT: Matt, thank you so much for joining us. I mean, before we finish up, anything else that you want to add or anything else that you want to tell our listeners that's coming out soon or that they should look out for?

[0:46:40.9] MM: Very soon, .blog will be launching to the world. So you can go to get.blog and reserve your name, it's wide open, so you can have — you could even go for like ui.blog if you wanted.

[0:46:52.0] DT: I actually already purchased or tried to reserve david.blog.

[0:46:56.6] MM: You might have some competition on that one, but we'll see.

[0:47:01.4] DT: You know, I figured if maybe I'll get lucky.

[0:47:05.9] SS: That's why he reached out — no I'm just kidding.

[0:47:06.8] MM: There's lots of good ones available and of course, I've talked about WordPress.com, Jetpack and WooCommerce. If you're not familiar with those yet, go and take a look at them and see what's there and they might provide a solution for something you want to do online.

[0:47:25.3] DT: Cool.

[0:47:26.0] SS: Very nice. Matt, thanks so much for your time and for talking to us about all those subjects also regarding your personal life. So thanks so much for being open.

[0:47:35.6] MM: Of course. You all have a great day.

[0:47:38.5] DT: Definitely, you too. Thanks a lot Matt.

[0:47:39.7] SS: You too, thanks man.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:47:53.7] SS: All right, so that's a wrap. Thank you hackers for joining us today, we hope you enjoyed the show, you can find all the links and resources from this conversation on

hackingui.com/podcast. Just before we go, we want to share with you something that you might find useful.

[0:48:09.7] DT: As you know, we are veracious readers and consume a ton of articles, books, podcasts, and videos about design development and side projects. We curate the hell out of everything. Each week, we send a short round of email of our favorites. If that sounds like an email you'd enjoy getting, then we'd love to have you join our awesome community, which already has more than 20,000 happy members from all over the world. you can sign up on hackingui.com.

[0:48:31.7] SS: By the way, on hackingui.com, you'll also find some other cool stuff like the Side Project Accelerator, our eight week online program in which we teach everything that we learned in the three years working and scanning Hacking UI as a side project before we quit our day jobs.

[0:48:44] DT: And, you'll also find our resources page which reached top of the week on product on tech. Our events section which is filled with conferences and meetups for designers and developers.

[0:48:53] SS: Hey D, don't forget the T's man. We've also got some cool T-shirts for designers.

[0:48:57] DT: Sagi, again with the T-shirts?

[0:48:59] SS: Hey, I designed those. But really, last thing, if you enjoy this, we would really love to hear from you, you know, by tweeting us at hacking UI or by reviewing the podcast on iTunes, those reviews really go a long way and help us and even make our day.

[0:49:13] DT: All right, we'll see you next week hackers. And remember to keep hacking.

[END]