EPISODE 25

[0:00:00.4] DT: The New York designer stared out of his office window at the bustling Manhattan streets below. He took a deep breath. There was so much going on, but good stuff. He has it all perfectly under control. This designer, as we see him, is a super hero. He lives in two worlds. One is really public facing and the other, his full-time job and one of the most important companies for designers in the world is shrouded in a bit more secrecy. But in an extraordinary manner, this designer's two worlds coexist and support each other on harmony.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:29.3] SS: Hello hackers, thanks a lot for joining us for another episode of the Hacking UI Podcast where we hack our way through design, development, and entrepreneurship. I'm Sagi Shrieber.

[0:00:39.1] DT: I'm David Tintner.

[0:00:41.3] SS: Our guest today is none other than Khoi Vinh, principle designer at Adobe, former Design Director of The New York Times, founder of the popular blog, subtraction.com, and a true family man. In this interview, we dissected how he does it all and discussed some of the new stuff Khoi and his team are cooking up.

[0:00:58.0] DT: All right Sagi, you ready?

[0:01:00.7] SS: Let's get hacking.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:012.7] SS: Welcome everybody to another episode of the Hacking UI Podcast and today we have Khoi Vinh. Khoi, what's up.

[0:01:20.0] KV: Hey, how are you?

[0:01:21.5] SS: Hey, all good and so great to have you on the show man. We've been looking forward for this for a long time.

[0:01:27.4] KV: Yeah, thank you Sagi, thank you David.

[0:01:30.0] SS: We are big fans of your, both design work and all of your writings and we have so much to talk about. But before we even start, can you maybe just give us a bit of background because you have so much background? So, how about you just give us a bit of background about yourself?

[0:01:45.3] KV: Sure, my name is Khoi Vinh, I work at Adobe right now where I'm focusing on a number of things. One of them is Adobe XD. I also have a blog at subtraction.com that I've been running for quite a long time, maybe for too long to count now. In the past I've worked at the New York Times where I ran the design group there for five years. I had a startup called Mixel that was acquired by Etsy and I worked at some other startups and launched a number of side projects and going further back…

[0:02:18.7] SS: Wrote two books.

[0:02:20.2] KV: Yeah, I wrote two books. Going further back I was in the studio/agency business for a while and cofounded a design studio called Behavior. So I've kind of been around the block, as they say.

[0:02:33.0] SS: All right, great. Now you also have another kind of product that you have Kidpost?

[0:02:38.2] KV: Yes, that's right. I've got a side project called Kidpost, which makes it really easy for parents to take the pictures that they post at social media and get this pictures out to folks who are not active on social media, mostly grandparents. So you just add a hashtag, Kidpost looks for that hashtag and then bundles it up into a daily email that goes out to your friends and family. Really easy and free to try.

[0:03:06.2] SS: That's amazing. I think I want to try it.

[0:03:09.9] KV: Yeah, give it a try.

[0:03:10.9] SS: Especially when you have kids, you send so many, like you just want to send your whole family photos and it's just hard. How about we start from the New York Times, because I think that's something that it always stands in your background as something that you have glory years, you were also named I think one of the top 50 influencer designers back then right?

[0:03:35.1] KV: Yes. Fast Company named me one of the 50 Most Influential Designers in America I believe, maybe about four, five years ago.

[0:03:47.0] SS: Amazing. Congrats.

[0:03:48.9] KV: Thanks, yeah. That and a dollar buys me a cup of coffee.

[0:03:56.3] SS: Back in the New York Times, what were your responsibilities and how many people did you manage?

[0:04:00.5] KV: I joined the Times in 2006 and that was at a point in the history of the company where they were really trying to double down on digital and be much more ambitious and aggressive about building out digital products. So I built a design team of about 15 to 20 product designers and we worked with the editors on the various news desks to create interactive experiences on newyorktimes.com.

We did the first Kindle apps first android and iPhone and iPad apps, we were just thinking about ways of the times could really grow beyond, it's digital roots and even beyond just having a website where we published the news. That was a really great experience for me because I got to see this company undergo an amazing transformation and play a role in helping to guide it and also work with some of the smartest people on earth really.

[0:05:09.2] SS: Yeah, I think that I remember even I think back then, towards 2010 or something like that, where I don't remember if it was at subtraction.com or in New York Times

itself. They were talking about how they transformed the way they are doing design in the company, like in general. Their whole design methodology there, or something.

[0:05:31.2] KV: Yeah, I mean, that's really true for the digital perspective. I mean, for a long time, the way The Times approached digital products was an extension of the way they approached design and print, which is about art direction and about thinking first and foremost about the editorial perspective.

So our team tried to put an emphasis on the user experience and on creating lasting products or lasting experiences that will continually engage users and it's basically product design, it's very different from art direction.

[0:06:17.0] DT: That must have been such a, just crazy times to be there because there was such a turning point for kind of everything that's going on today in the world of journalism and online media in general. What were some of your biggest take aways form your time there?

[0:06:29.2] KV: I think my biggest take away from working at The Times is that creating content and monetizing it or building a business out of content, or running a huge business on content is incredibly difficult and it faces so many challenges from so many problems. From the perspective of keeping the editorial talent engaged and help bring them to a bridge the traditional divide between journalist and audience.

Embracing new technology, trying to stay ahead or even keep up with the massively sort of erratic behavioral patterns of people who are coming online and jumping from platform to platform every few years. In general, in this era, content is very difficult and I really take off my hat to anybody who builds a big, great business around content regardless of the size.

[0:07:30.2] DT: You would definitely have now experienced also with subtraction, I guess too drastically different sizes, I would say, of content business, if you will. I guess the New York Times just a massive organization and subtraction being — is it just you or are there some other people working on the side as well?

[0:07:48.2] KV: I've got a staff of about 150 people — no, just joking.

[0:07:56.1] DT: Okay. I was like, "Wait a second, hold on."

[0:08:02.5] KV: it would be really amazing if I had a staff of any size. It's really just me and then some people who help me out on, technically every once in a while I'll call puppets to help me build something like on the back end to make the delivery simpler or incorporate some new technology or something like that. For the most part, it's me, every day and it's not really even a business. I mean, it's generated a lot of income for me over the years but first and foremost for me, it's a place to write and to work out my ideas and to engage with the readers who come there and also just kind of indulge my passions and blow off steam sometimes.

[0:08:45.1] DT: Cool. I think we can definitely relate to that.

[0:08:48.7] SS: Yeah, I think that, just to give a bit of background for anyone who doesn't know subtraction.com. You write there every once in a couple of days, sometimes even day after day. You're right there very often. It's really — we really respect that, that you can take the time with being, right now, principle design at Adobe, which is such a demanding job and also I think the time to taking the time to write and to express your thoughts and to contribute to the community.

So that's something that we really appreciate and I mean, that's why we really want to pick your rant about this because if you're looking back at your career up to now, do you have the things that you can see clearly that is, you know, writing has helped you as a designer?

[0:09:40.6] KV: Yeah, absolutely. First, thanks so much for the kind words about, the stuff I write there. It means a lot to get such warm feedback. Yeah, looking over my career, the act of writing has definitely helped me in many ways. With the blog, it's helped with my visibility, it's helped me form friendships and relationships with all kinds of people I wouldn't have otherwise. It's created opportunities for me, it's helped me as I transitioned from one stage to another in my career. Writing on the blog has actually helped me move from doing services, to doing media to doing startups, to doing design tooling.

All of this would have been much harder to pull off without the blog. Just writing in general has served me really well as a designer, being able to articulate my ideas and defend them and be

persuasive and help people that I work with, whether they're clients or people in other parts of business helping them understand what I try to do what designers, working with me and designers in general try to do. Writing has been invaluable.

[0:10:55.3] SS: that's amazing. Would you say that every designer that is now, let's say even newbies or even experienced designers should write? Is it something that is like crucial for designers these days?

[0:11:08.3] KV: I really think it is. First, I think you should not worry about writing publicly or writing extremely well. What you should just worry about is that you are writing and that you're doing so regularly and that you're continuing to challenge yourself with new ideas and also with refining your expression. I think all of that stuff is really important and will serve you very well.

As our industry evolves and as more and more people enter the work force, the competition for design jobs or design opportunities becomes greater and greater, writing is a really substantial edge that you can hold over other people who are gaming for the same job or if you're entrepreneurial, competing for the same market opportunity.

[0:12:05.4] SS: yeah, the one thing that I always tend to think is that designers, they're not really investing time in a building their portfolios on Dribble and you know Behance and stuff. But at the end of the day, people are looking for thoughts and opinions and to know that those, besides having talent, you need to also kind of have your own opinions and so are you looking for people right now or are you recruiting for Adobe right now?

[0:12:33.2] KV: I don't have any openings on my team, but at Adobe we're always looking to work with new designers. We have a job board and I would encourage people to go to our website and look for a job opening to see if there's anything that strikes our fancy and reach out.

[0:12:50.8] SS: Yeah, okay. I just wanted to ask you guys, when I was interviewing back in my previous role as design director at a startup called Similar Web, I was looking for people who have side project or that are writing out there and just like expressing their thoughts and those portfolios that displayed case studies with — you know, that was the kind of thing that really got me more than just like a beautiful portfolio, you know what I'm saying?

[0:13:18.3] KV: Yeah.

[0:13:20.8] SS: Right now, you have…

[0:13:22.8] KV: I was just going to say, as a designer, any time that you can help tell a story around what you do, especially if the story reveals the ideas at work in the portfolio pieces, that's a real opportunity to stand out from the rest of the pack.

[0:13:40.4] SS: Yeah, totally. So people understand that writing is important. I think some designers and some people that I talk to. But then there's the question of, when can we have the time to write? We have our full-time day jobs, we have a family, we have stuff we want to do, when can we write?

[0:13:59.5] KV: That's a great question. I find that I spend a lot of time drafting these blog posts in my head, whether I'm sitting on the train or I'm walking between meetings or I just have a few minutes of down time here and there. But to get a blog post done or to write any substantial length, you really need to carve out an hour, I find, or more to focus and to concentrate. That's a bare minimum.

So the reality is that I'll do it, if I can't squeeze it in during the middle of my day, my lunch hour or something — which is very difficult given my schedule — then I'll do it early on the morning or I'll do it late at night. That's not an easy answer, but if you're motivated to express your ideas to get better and better at it, it's sometimes the only practical solution.

[0:14:54.7] DT: It makes total sense though. I think it's something that I think a lot of us, we want to hear an easy answer, like there's a secret to this. We want to hear you say like, "Oh, of course, I do it every time like this, all you have to do is follow that and then you'll be able to do it too." What you said is kind of — it totally makes sense and we hear that pattern a lot. You have to be motivated and you have to really believe that what you're doing is important and helpful to you and helpful to other people and just find the time. Just make the time for it even though it's not easy.

[0:15:21.0] KV: Yeah, it's not easy but ideally, if you have a passion for it, it makes it a lot easier because you're motivated to want to do it.

[0:15:30.3] DT: Did you always have a passion for blogging, or how did that start for you?

[0:15:34.3] KV: I've always had a passion for writing and when I started blogging, it started to make — it really made a lot of sense to me because here's an opportunity to write really quickly and then to get it out there and get it read and get feedback on it, right away. So posting my writing online is — like I'm so happy, I'm alive anytime when that was invented.

At the same time, I'm really keenly aware of that blogging is a former fighting but it's not really the best example of writing best practices. I can be very lazy in my blogging, I can — and that doesn't necessarily mean like writing quickly or writing briefly. Sometimes I'll write long pieces that I know just aren't properly researched or properly edited or just the thoughts aren't crystalized the way I would truly like them to be if I were able to invest a lot more time.

So there are different kinds of blogging. I wouldn't say that — different kinds of writing, I should say and I think it's true that just so long as you're doing some kind of writing, you'll benefit from it.

[0:16:42.1] DT: So can you give us a comparison kind of? Because you've also written books, which I assume are pretty much the opposite extreme from blogging, from that kind of like getting it out there, maybe not doing the full research. Where as in the book I imagined it was pretty much the opposite extreme. Can you give us a little bit of a comparison of what that process was like for you, writing a book?

[0:17:01.5] KV: Yeah, writing books, that's a very difficult process. I found it to be much more difficult and much less comfortable. When you're writing a book, you're really writing something that people are one, going to spend money on and two, are going to expect to remain relevant for years or many decades. That's a much heavier lift than a blog post, which the life expectancy of a blog post is a few days at most or months.

Very few of my blog posts people will remember or refer back to beyond the day that it was posted. So it's much more light weight, it's much more casual. In some ways it's more conversational. So those are just some of the differences. I enjoy blogging much more than I enjoy writing books.

[0:17:57.0] DT: That's awesome. I want to follow up with that but just before I do that, I want us to take a quick break and give a shout out to our sponsors for this episode.

[SPONSOR BREAK]

[0:18:05.0] DT: Hey guys, I want to tell you about our sponsors, An Event Apart, because they have some of the best conferences for both designers and front end developers, if you haven't attended one yet, you're really missing out. The events are extremely professional and always cover the most cutting edge technology and latest developments. They bring in the best speakers and biggest names in the industry every single time.

I'm talking legends like Eric Myer, Jeffrey Zeldman, Rachel Andrew. Brad Frost, Dan Mall, you get the picture. But it's just about the talks, they do an incredible job of making the conference social and encouraging people to meet and network. If you've been to this kind of conferences before you know that designers and developers aren't always the most social crowd. But at Events Apart, they take special care to make sure it's fun, inviting and that there's never a boring moment.

They host seven or so events per year in cities all across the US, so you can find the one that's most convenient for you. The tickets are also affordable for two or three day event like this and we can make it even better. You'll vet $100 off any events if you use the code "AEAhacking" at checkout. Got to eventsapart.com/hui and use the code AEAhacking.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:19:07.8] DT: What would you say are the benefits of writing a book? You mentioned making money off it, but I imagine there's a ton of other benefits that come from having a published book with your bylaw on it.

[0:19:16.5] KV: Yeah, having a book is a real legitimizing credential. People pay attention to you, they see the book as something that you invested lots of time and energy into and put out into the world as a representation of yourself and it's got a beginning and an end and they can assess it and they can attribute its' ideas to you and attribute a certain amount of credibility to you. So it's really a whole other level from more casual writing.

I wouldn't trade in my experience of writing these books for anything but they are difficult. My second book, my first book was about grids and basically kind of like a theory and a how to book about design. My second book, *How They Got There,* is just a series of interviews with successful designers about their careers and they're a lot easier to write but still required so much time, and care, and editing, the books were much more difficult than I expected them.

[0:20:20.4] DT: I just wanted to quickly mention to our listeners, you told us that before we started that for How They Got There, which I think is super relevant for everyone especially who listen to this Scaling a Design Team Series that we did that you're going to offer a discount card for that, right?

[0:20:32.4] KV: Yeah, that's right. So actually, the book is on sale right now. It's available in digital form. You can download it for Kindle or iBooks or you can get a digital plus hard cover bundle and it's half off right now at howtheygothere.com all one word, "howtheygotthere". And that's until December 11th, but for Hacking UI listeners, I'll put up a coupon on December 12th, which we'll give you $15 off if you use the code "hackingUI".

[0:21:07.4] DT: Awesome, thank you, we appreciate that.

[0:21:09.2] SS: Thanks so much. I just wanted to ask about the book because *How They Got There* is very interesting in terms of what you did there with interviewing so many successful people and what we're doing also on this podcast is getting people like you and that we appreciate and admire, and also we want to learn from them. So I bet you learned a lot from the process of writing this book and from the interviews. Can I just ask you, Khoi, what are your two or three main insights from this book?

[0:21:41.3] KV: Yeah, so first the book is a series of interviews about how these designers, some of whom I've known previously, some of whom were friends, some of whom I knew very little. How they built their careers, how they got their first big breaks, their trials and tribulations, when they knew that they were doing the right kind of work for them and how they eventually built lasting careers out of them.

For me, it was the kind of a book that I really wanted to read because that's the part of every profile of a designer that interests me the most. It's just literally how they got there, or how they managed to find themselves in that particular situation and how did they manage to build that body of work?

One of the things that I learned is that there's really no straight path, that everybody in the book started out thinking they wanted to do something else and then through one twist of fate or another ended up becoming a designer, a product designer or agency designer, working in the digital space. So that was something that I kind of knew when I went into it, but sort of seeing it repeated again and again was really fascinating for me. If I were just starting out my career right now, I would find that to be very reassuring because I remember in my first decade, having no idea how to get from point A to point B.

[0:23:08.2] SS: Yeah, that certainly connects also with what Steve Jobs back then said in a Commencement speech in Stanford back in — I don't remember what year it was, but he said "connecting the dots". Like you make all kinds of decisions and at the end you get somewhere and you can connect the dots and see how they led you to where you're at. It's interesting. Anything else that you adopted for your career maybe? Any insights that you had from those interviews, stuff that you implemented in your day-to-day work?

[0:23:37.1] KV: Yeah, I think one of the things that I heard from my interview subjects was how effective it can be juts to think of these heroes of yours as real people and that they're reachable, whether by email or phone, and that you can, if you're polite and a bit persistent, you can get time with them and to learn a little bit of something about like how they've managed to accomplish the things that you're so in awe of.

I think I have always been maybe a little bit too reverent of the people that I look up to but hearing that story, I've really tried to put it into practice a lot and think about people that I look up to as being more approachable than you would assume.

[0:24:27.6] SS: Nice, it's a very good take away. It's the kind of thing that you never know what you're going to get until you ask for it, and if you want to reach out to someone and even if he's like a thought leader in the industry that you're working in, just reach out because you're probably one of the 3% out of the 97% who hasn't reached out. I mean, we tend to think that the people out there get so many other people like asking them and reaching out to them and it's not that true. Everybody's afraid just like you are. Yeah, it's a great take away.

So, I want to go back, and I'm sorry we're going back and forth. I want to go back to the writing for a second and subtraction.com, and afterwards we can go and move on and talk a bit about your work at Adobe. You said you write in the early morning or at the night time in order to get your block, your one hour chunk to be concentrated and get your posts out. Do you have any other times in the week? Or do you have any other tips for anyone right now asking themselves, "Where can I find the time and how?"2

[0:25:37.6] KV: That's great. A great question and if I had a secret method of extracting an extra 10 hours out of the week, I probably would have written a book about that right now and gotten really rich. I think maybe the best answer I can come up with is it doesn't necessarily relate to writing but it just relates to being organized in general I think.

I tend to be very organized and try to really maximize my time and you can — there's an endless number of books that will help you do this from like *Getting Things Done* or The Pomodoro Method or whatever. Wut we can look at all these systems that help you do it, it doesn't really matter which one that you choose, but adopting some sort of framework to maximize your time I think is really essential.

I use an app called Todoist, which I'm a huge fan of. I've been using it for a long time and virtually everything that I want to do during the day, I will put it immediately into Todoist and I then turn to Todoist on my phone, on my iPad, on my desktop, countless times a day looking at what's there and checking things off. It helps me get a lot of stuff done, including the writing. I'll

often say, "Okay, today I'm going to write about this or I'm going to create a task to do that." As well as all my other side projects as well as my work at Adobe. I find that to be invaluable for creating more pockets of time during the day.

[0:27:15.1] DT: Khoi, I want to ask you, we see you're kind of — it's almost like you have, let's say like double lives in the career, if you will. You're working on your side projects and you're writing and publishing books and you're also working throughout your entire career very high profile jobs, at The New York Times and now at Adobe.

I want to ask, do you think that you could have got into this like a high profile positions without the side projects and without the writing? Just being like a great designer, a great manager, is that enough, or is it something that you had to have in order to get to where you are today?

[0:27:53.3] KV: Well I've seen plenty of people do really well without having a public blog and without having tons of side projects. For me, I think having these extra-curricular pursuits was really essential to creating the opportunities and at the career path that I have. So I don't know if there is a universal answer there but I would say yes with the caveat that I don't think the same set of rules applies to everybody.

[0:28:22.1] DT: So can you tell us more about your role at Adobe today, and we touched in the beginning exactly what you're working on and what it looks like today?

[0:28:28.7] KV: Yeah so at Adobe, I think it's a really, really interesting time right now. There are a lot of new initiatives. There's a lot of new thinking about how we could help creatives, we could help designers, photographers, motion designers, how we can help this whole industry solve their problems and get their work done better and create more interesting, more satisfying, more successful expressions of their ideas.

So I think that the first really concrete example of that is our new app, Adobe XD, which is out now in beta on Mac and on Windows and it's our end to end UXUI design tool and when I say "end to end" I mean you can design a website or an app, all of the screens inside the XD and it's incredibly performant and smooth and really a pleasure to work with. Then without having to

leave the app, you can also wire it up and turn into an interactive prototype and then publish it out to the web for your coworkers and clients and other stakeholders to interact with right away.

So it's different from what's come before and that it's a brand new code base. It was written from scratch and you can really feel it when you use the app because it feels buttery smooth and lighting fast and also, there's lots of new ideas behind it. New ways of helping designers solve the problems that they encounter every day and we have a wonderful feature called "repeat grids" where it allows you to almost effortlessly create a whole table view or a whole view of a photo gallery or something like that, which is one of the things that product designers do a lot every single day.

And we're thinking about this in a truly cross platform, cross multi-device way. Right now you can use it one Mac and Windows, as I said. But we're thinking about phone, we are thinking about tablet, we're thinking about the web, and we're thinking about leveraging the power of the Cloud so that you will be able to access what you do in XD in any of these devices. So you can create wherever you are or whatever Cloud base that you have. It's pretty exciting and I think it's the start of something really great at Adobe that really builds upon our legacy.

[0:31:15.2] DT: And you guys are working on for this a long time. I mean before it was XD it was Project Comet, right? So how long was this in the works?

[0:31:22.1] KV: So I'll be working on this for just the past six months or so and the team has been working on it much longer. I don't remember the exact timeline but I would say a few years or so. I mean it's been a massive undertaking to build this major new system that's out of the box. It's really performance and it's easy to use, but also provides a foundation for lots of new innovation coming down the pipe and we have new features in the road map that I can't talk about, but that are really going to blow your socks off. We're really taking the time to build things in the right way so that we can add those later and also add things that we haven't yet thought about or anticipated.

[0:32:11.4] SS: Awesome. As a designer, I am waiting for that. I am waiting to see what you come up with it because I think it's very interesting for me to see. To see they'll be evolved like that and now you'll take care of the UI designers' needs, which is something that for a long while

it was just lacking in a way, it was not the main focus. So now that it is in focus and cool thing is Adobe XD are coming out and new features are being built. So it's exciting times to see where it's going and with all of the — there is competition out there so the competition makes it even more exciting.

[0:32:53.2] KV: Yeah, there's lots of great competition that has really energized us and motivated us to bring our best like our best game and what you said about the lack of focus on the product designer, UXUI designer in the past, I think that's criticism that Adobe has heard and listened to very carefully all up and down the ladder. But I also think it's really important to note that the company, in moving to the Cloud several years ago, that was really the first step in making this possible and making all the chains that people will start to see within the next few years, possible.

Because in the past, we were aligned around our big franchises like Photoshop and Illustrator and so to solve a problem. We wanted to solve it through those apps, to add capabilities through those apps, to address every used cased that might arise in the market. Otherwise we would be building apps that would compete with our cash cows so to speak. But now that we have moved to the Cloud and Creative Cloud as a subscription, we're motivated not just to continue improving Photoshop and Illustrator, but to build new apps and experiences that can really be very responsive to the market.

To really embrace the change in the market so that people remain committed to the Creative Cloud subscription and not necessarily getting people to buy the next upgrade of Photoshop or Illustrator. So that realignment of the business and the way we think about delivering value to our customer is really, really key and I think sets the stage for us to do something pretty interesting stuff.

[0:34:51.2] DT: That's really interesting to hear. I never thought about the business kind of repurposing the goals like that and what I mean for the end user. That's really interesting to hear and I think that's exciting for listeners to hear too, of what might become now that I guess the business goals are realigned.

[0:35:08.1] KV: Yeah, and that is part of the reason I came here is because when I saw Adobe moved to Creative Cloud, at first I was resistance because I thought, "Well, I already owned Photoshop. Why do I need to rent it?" But then I came to understand that this was aligning around my own interests because you can stop a subscription whatever you want and you basically on a monthly basis say, "Yes Adobe I like what you are doing," and if you don't like it then you stop your subscription.

So Adobe is now motivated to make the subscription continually valuable to you. Just so as long as the things that we do are adding value to that subscription. It doesn't matter if they're in our flagship apps or our new apps or on mobile or whatever. We are responding to who the way that customers want to work.

[0:36:00.6] SS: It makes a lot of sense and it sounds like Adobe is playing it smart. So I guess we can't talk about new features but…

[0:36:09.0] KV: Yeah, well we have a new button that will do your entire design for you with just a single click.

[0:36:14.2] DT: Yeah and we're both like, "Oh man, tell us, tell us, tell us."

[0:36:17.2] SS: And coffee.

[0:36:18.4] KV: Yeah and make coffee.

[0:36:21.4] SS: Yeah.

[0:36:22.7] DT: Premium subscribers only. So I'm interested to hear more about, specifically what this set up is as far as the teams that are working on it and who you're leading, who you're working with. Can you tell us a little bit about the team structure you have, especially the team that is working on Adobe XD?

[0:36:42.5] KV: Yeah, so there are a number of product managers who own various aspects of the app experience whether it's the tooling part of the collaboration or the prototyping part.

There's one design team that is focused on the tooling and the overall XD experience. I run a team that works with that design team on the collaboration stuff, like how do people work together in XD? How can we make it easy for you to hand off work to other designers and to developers and share work with clients?

At the same time I'm also thinking about addressing those challenges for a bunch of new apps that we have that are younger still that XD or earlier still than XD at the developer stage. So one of them we announced that our annual Max Conference a few weeks ago. It's called Project Felix, which is a whole new take on creating 3D renderings that's much more squarely focused on how would a designer want to be able to use 3D, rather than how would a 3D artist want to use 3D software.

So this is a really interesting new approach where we're trying to make 3D understandable to the people who design packages or design posters even. Or even people who just want to visualize their products using all the powers of 3D technology. So there is a number of new things coming down the pipe that are I think similarly disruptive like that.

[0:38:27.2] DT: Wow that's amazing new technology. It's a really exciting stuff. So what I'm curious is, if I'm working at Adobe, if I am a designer there and let's say I'm on the XD team and Project Felix is coming out or something like this, are designers able to work on the side projects or test out this new stuff? Or how do people within Adobe get to work on new features and new products you're building?

[0:38:50.3] KV: Yeah, I know a number of people at Adobe have side projects but Adobe is pretty good about having lots of interesting stuff going on at any given time and circulating those ideas amongst the staff and it's not difficult at all to get introductions to other teams who are doing cool stuff and finding opportunities to join them if they're doing something that sparks your passion. So I think Adobe is secretly create place for designers because there is so much here that is directly relevant to the things that designers are interested in. It's a little bit like being a kid in the candy store.

[0:39:33.6] SS: Yeah, it sounds like it. You are working on a cool features that you're going to use for your own work.

[0:39:41.8] DT: But very cool culture too. Also I think like one of the things that I find so cool is that you're, as a principle designer at Adobe, you have your own side projects and that you said Adobe allows other people to do them and I think that something Sagi and I are super interested in is just kind of, how side projects can be beneficial within your job in order to make you better at your job?

And as I am hearing all these new projects and new features that Adobe is working on, I'm thinking, "Man this would be so cool to build, to do something in 3D with Project Felix. Or to do something," — and I'm sure people are saying the same thing before XD was out publicly. So I think something that you have very cool that is built in your culture like that.

[0:40:20.6] KV: Yeah, I think Adobe is a really terrific culture. I think it's my favorite place that I've worked in my career because there are so many like-minded people. There are so many people who bring a really rich depth of knowledge and things that I know nothing about. Yet at the end of the day it's all about making life better for creative people everywhere.

[0:40:43.9] SS: Awesome. We are coming near to the end and I have something that I'm curious about, and I would like to end this with a few quick questions about you going back to the writing. Because again, working at Adobe is amazing, all your high profile jobs are really amazing, but again, the writing is just kind of like a mystery, "How can you do it so well?" And that is something that we really want to learn from you. So I have a question about, first of all, do you automate anything in your process?

[0:41:19.0] KV: Do I automate? I don't use Automater or Workflow or anything like that though I've tried to set that kind of thing up in the past, I just haven't gotten very far. I do use TextExpander extensive though. I use TextExpander quite a lot and I guess that is a very, very…

[0:41:39.6] DT: Oh wow.

[0:41:40.0] SS: How do you use it?

[0:41:41.3] KV: It's a very simple kind of atomization.

[0:41:42.3] DT: Yeah, I think Sagi is the biggest proponent of TextExpander there ever was.

[0:41:47.1] KV: Yeah, Text Expander is awesome. I've got tons of snippets in there. I've got that in certain emails. I basically write the same email over and over again and I have the whole body of an email in snippets so that when I get a response. I hit reply, I can just hit a certain key stroke and essentially dump in that form letter and then quickly edit it and send it off.

I have various forms of writing out dates that are relevant to certain context. Like saving assets for blog posts and certain date formats so I would use that. So yeah, I am a big fan. It's also one of those little things that help me carve out just a little bit more time each day.

[0:42:35.4] SS: Yeah totally. In terms of social, you have 347,000 followers on Twitter, and that's a lot. How did you get there and what tips can you give for anyone trying to grow their Twitter following?

[0:42:54.1] KV: Yeah I'm very lucky to have that following. I mean, to be honest, the secret was that for a long time I was in the recommended list of people to follow when you join Twitter and you get an enormous boost from that. So yes, I guess my advice would be if you can get Twitter to like you, that's a huge help.

[0:43:16.0] SS: Nice.

[0:43:17.0] DT: That's really interesting to hear. Did you know that right away or it took some time and then one day somebody told you, "By the way, I signed up for Twitter and I saw that you're…"

[0:43:27.0] KV: Well I saw my numbers growing and I didn't really understand why, and I joined Twitter very early. I think my user number was 90,000 or something. I can't remember exactly but at the time, I just assumed everybody's Twitter following were growing like that so yeah.

[0:43:47.4] DT: That's really funny. Yeah and on the subject of social media, something else I wanted to ask you and also a personal brand is I noticed you share a lot of pictures that you

send your audience to your Instagram and you shared a lot of pictures of your kids and also like the picture that you have on your newsletter email it also has a picture with your kids. I was wondering, is this something that you think about when you're growing like your personal brand talking about your family and your kids and not just the professional you but putting your kids out there as well?

[0:44:16.0] KV: I don't know if I think about it that strategically. I mean sometimes, it just might be the picture that I like. In general, I try to be as human as I can about my public profile and get people to understand the full context of who I am. I don't post everything that my kids do. I mean, that would be even more boring than what I post already. So it's just once in a while if it seems to make sense and the moment that I'll do it.

[0:44:45.7] SS: Yeah, nice. I could really relate. I actually get some backlash from my parents sometimes. Like, "You are publishing pictures of your kids online and you're Facebook and stuff," and I'm like, "Yeah, why not? Everybody is doing that thing. I want my friends to see how my children are doing sometimes," and also yeah, like you were saying, it's being human. That's you, that's Khoi and you want your audience to be also people like you I guess and that want tot relate to you because you just want people to follow you, to be the people that you like to meet sometime.

[0:45:30.0] KV: Right. Yeah, exactly, yeah I don't have an overarching public relation strategy for my kids or anything.

[0:45:39.5] SS: Yeah.

[0:45:40.2] DT: But I think not so much about your kids but I think it's a pattern that we hear from a lot of influencers and stuff that they're just being human online and they're just being genuine and being authentic and it's not really something you can fake so much and I guess, like you said, you brush it off a little casually like, "I don't think about it so much." But I imagine it is just you being authentic and people are drawn to that and I imagine that that is a lot of what people love about your writing.

[0:46:10.2] KV: Well one thing that I have learned is making a career, earning a living, working for a company or working with clients or whatever, there are always reasons that you should be careful about what you say and it's wise to be thoughtful about what you put out there. But people do respond very well when you are honest and you're human and you are forth coming and so you're within the limits of somebody works for a publicly traded company and somebody who has had lots of various complicating business entanglements in the past, I still always try to be as forthcoming as I can and honest. Because I think that makes the whole experience more worthwhile for me because people respond better.

[0:47:02.0] DT: Awesome. I think that's a really important takeaway for our listeners here and I think we're just about an hour now. I think we will wrap it up at that, but that is really a super important takeaway that I think everyone can get.

So, Khoi, thank you so much for your time. We were so inspired by everything that you do, living like this.

[0:47:22.2] SS: Thanks so much man.

[0:47:23.1] DT: Yeah.

[0:47:24.2] KV: Thank you so much. Yeah, I really enjoyed it and congrats to you guys for everything that you're with Hacking UI and all the success you had so far and I hope you have lots more.

[0:47:34.7] DT: Man thank you, I appreciate it.

[0:47:36.0] SS: Thanks so much man, thanks a lot. All right, so everybody just remember we will also share Khoi's book in the show notes and you will have a special coupon code after the sale ends on December 11th, and December 12th with the code "Hacking UI" you would be able to get it for $15 off. It's howtheygotthere.com. All right, thanks a lot Khoi.

[0:47:57.9] KV: Thanks guys.

[0:47:58.6] SS: Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:48:11.3] DT: This week's episode is brought to you by WooCommerce. WooCommerce is the most popular e-commerce platform in the world, powering more than 30% of all online stores. It's completely free to set up and has no monthly fees. All basic functionality is free and certainly more than enough to get you started. As you grow or need customizations, you can buy extensions and plugins and the community is huge.

It's built on WordPress so getting started is as simple as it can be, and what I love most about WooCommerce is that it's open source and fully customizable. You can make your store as unique as you'd like with virtually no limitations. WooCommerce is also perfect for side projects and is one of the tools that we're recommending now to students in the Side Project Accelerator.

When I start a project at the beginning, I don't want to waste time. I just want to get something out there quickly and then as it grows, I can customize and scale it. WooCommerce is perfect because it fits for every stage at the project and I don't have to waste time changing to another platform later. It's also nice that it integrates with all the major payment gateways — Stripe, PayPal, Amazon — and tons of smaller regional services and you own your data forever.

If you ever decide to leave, there's no risk of losing data or not being able to transfer over your sales information. If you have an online store or thinking about starting one, check out WooCommerce. Like I said, it's completely free to get started and easy to set up. You have nothing to lose and if you'd like to purchase any extensions, themes or plugins for your store, enter the code "hackingui" and check out. You'll get 30% off all your purchases.

Again, you don't need to buy anything to get started. It's completely free. But if you want to customize or need some of the events functionality, you have a ton of extensions and plugins to choose from. You will get 30% off everything with the code "hackingui" at checkout.

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