

EE Podcast #60 First EE Sites

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Lea Alcantara: This is the ExpressionEngine Podcast Episode #60. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my co-host, Emily Lewis. This episode is sponsored by Environments for Humans. Environments for Humans provides quality conferences for your attending pleasure. Focus on actionable information that goes beyond Google searches, Environments for Humans puts on daylong deep dives on topics like CSS, jQuery, and of course, ExpressionEngine. For EE Podcast listeners, get 50% off the recordings of the most recent Engine Summit by using discount code EEPodcast@EngineSummit.com. Pretty sweet deal!

Emily Lewis: The ExpressionEngine Podcast would also like to thank Pixel & Tonic for being our major sponsor of the year. [Music ends] So happy new year, Lea.

Lea Alcantara: Happy new year, Emily.

Emily Lewis: Did you have a nice break?

Lea Alcantara: Yes, but it needed to go longer.

Emily Lewis: Too short?

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: I think everyone can attest to that, I'm sure.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I think having the holidays on weekends, that week in between just flew by and I felt like I can't believe it. I can't believe it's already 2012.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, to catch myself the other day when I was explaining something and I had to say 2012 instead of 2011.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Yeah. Oh, I realized when I sent my Christmas letters, my newsletters that I sent to my family and friends back East, I listed the wrong year. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Oh, wow! [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Weird. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Oh, so I'm really excited about kicking off our year this year. You were mentioning that we are starting off with a nice, round number, Episode 60.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And we are going to be talking about our first ExpressionEngine sites.

Lea Alcantara: Yes, our first ExpressionEngine websites, and we also asked everyone in the community via Twitter and also EE Insider plugged us for their first EE website stories.

Emily Lewis: And it was great. We've got a lot of responses, and it once again reminds me how great and open and supportive our EE community is.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely. And if anything, it was great for a laugh. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Yeah. Well, it's so great to realize that. I mean, we've got stories from people who have been using EE for a long time as well as some new folks, but we all share some of the same sort of common challenges when learning a new system.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. It was nice to see what was really similar and what was really different, and a lot of that was depended on what background people were.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: What was the general common background of our respondents?

Emily Lewis: Overwhelmingly, everyone considered themselves to be like a front end developer or designer, and not really a PHP developer or back end developer. We also got a lot of stories for people who have been using EE for several years.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: We did get stories from a couple new folks, but most of all, it was people who felt like they knew their front end development and wanted to increase their skill sets to be doing something else. Almost everyone had used some other CSM tools beforehand, at least according to what they shared with us.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] So before we dive into our listener's responses, let's talk about our first ExpressionEngine experiences.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Emily, what was your first ExpressionEngine site, and how was it?

Emily Lewis: Okay, so the first thing I have to say, my first site was my blog, A Blog Not Limited.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Emily Lewis: And I went back because I have a tendency to blog about everything.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: And my first post about ExpressionEngine is titled, *Not A Big Fan of ExpressionEngine Right Now*. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Awesome.

Emily Lewis: And the first sentence say, "I'm frustrated." The third sentence says, "Right now, I hate it." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] That's so great. That is awesome. I think that's amazing.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I know I had no desire to create a blog, but I was working for Pitney Bowes at that time and we had just convinced upper management to use ExpressionEngine internally, and by we, my boss.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And he decided I needed to learn how to use it and so he said, "Go and make a blog. Just figure out how it works and go do it."

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Emily Lewis: So that's what I did. My blog was my very first site.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, that's pretty cool, and I think that's a pretty common thing for most people, especially when they are trying out a new CMS, it's usually a personal site or a blog to just get used to the interface and the system and the little tags and quirks.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And it's funny when you are coming from a different system, if you were used to some other system, how you really kind of have to have a mind shift sometimes when you use something like ExpressionEngine.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I know for me, when I first started ExpressionEngine, my first EE website was actually a collaboration with my friend, James Buckley, who runs Bright Rocket, and he and I both kind of wanted to learn ExpressionEngine so we had actually a client site that was really, really low paid. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And that gave us sort of the comfort and freedom to play around with it. Because it was kind of a low budget, then we could pitch and work off of whatever system we wanted and do what we want, and before ExpressionEngine, I just used blogging tools because this was way back in 2005.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And I was from the movable type movement.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So I was using that and a little smattering of WordPress, but I hated WordPress. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And then when ExpressionEngine came out, it just seemed more powerful, just a lot more professional. If I was going to use it for a client site, that was my main motivation to start playing around with EE because back then, to me, WordPress was always, and to me still, is always a blogging platform.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And it was a movable type at the time. So I was thinking, "ExpressionEngine is billing itself as a content management system and that seems a lot more robust."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So that's why I first decided, "Yeah, let's use ExpressionEngine for this site."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] Yeah, I think a lot of people do that, doing the personal site to get up to speed. I was very surprised though. We had several people write in stories that they learned Expression on a client site with a deadline. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah. But with mine, it's asterisk... because this was one of those things where it was so low budget and my friend was actually getting services in kind as well.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So it made it a little bit more comfortable for us to work with it.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, yeah, I know. Personally, I think if I had to pick up something new, I really hate doing it when I'm under a deadline because I'm always, you know.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Like I said I was looking back at the blog post I wrote about it when I was first working on ExpressionEngine. I mean, I've literally written down, I was like, "I wasted four hours on this, and I wasted four hours on this because I didn't understand what I was doing."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I would hate to be in that situation for a client, but maybe that's the kind of like motivation to learn to just get it done.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. And in terms of that, that leads to really common mistakes I find, especially reading all the comments here from our audience.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] Before we talk about some specifics, what kind of mistakes did you see? Or did you like look back at the site and sort of see what you would have done differently with that first EE site of yours?

Lea Alcantara: Well, I only have the static pages that I worked with from there, but I do remember what I did.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: One of the major common ones was trying to put everything in one template group, like everything. Like it wasn't actually a dynamic site, it was a static site in one template group with like ten different static or twenty different static template.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And then there were no includes and the only really dynamic part of it was a blog and it was just repeatable in different templates even though you know now these days I understand that I didn't need to repeat so much codes.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So I think the biggest thing was there were just so much repetition that was completely unnecessary.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And it was still a nightmare to update because of that repetition. There were no includes, there were no variables, nothing.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I didn't quite understand what variables even work at that time, and I understood that there was something called embed templates, but I was scared to even try them because I thought you needed to know PHP for some reason.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I don't know, but at that time, because I am primarily front end developer and designer, when I first started using ExpressionEngine, those types of terminology maybe because the way it was just initially presented to me, I thought that it was a lot more complicated than it actually was.

Emily Lewis: I agree. I definitely think things have improved a lot, and we have so many more resources for learning ExpressionEngine.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But I do remember at that time, I was really intimidated by it. Well, even just getting index.php out of my URLs, that was horrific for me.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I was like, "Htaccess, what? What? I don't do that. I don't."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah.

Emily Lewis: So it was intimidating.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I have to agree with the same thing. I think even the first site when we did an ExpressionEngine. I didn't remove index.php. It was like, "I'm not touching that." [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Yeah, right. Well, that thing you were describing about not really optimizing your template structure, that was one of the more common challenges or mistakes or however you want to call it. I think it's hard to call it a mistake when with ExpressionEngine, you can use it any which way your imagination can come with. So it's sort of just looking back and seeing that you could things better.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But that using templates was something a lot of people struggle with. In fact, Michael Boyink, who everyone has – I don't want to say everyone – but it seems like everyone has turned to his online tutorials and books from instructions. He even wrote in with his story with his first EE site. He commented, "I didn't understand how template groups affected URL structures and made templates more organized." In his first EE site, he told us that everything was lumped into one template group, everything.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah, that was pretty common.

Emily Lewis: And...

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] I think until you get your head around how that stuff works, and really the only way to do that is with experience. That's a really common approach to come to. I mean, even Ryan Irelan, he posted on EE Insider this week his first EE website.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: He also commented that he can see now that it would have been better to use an embed template, and that his templates were far from the dry "do not repeat yourself" concept.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: He even added that the way his templates were constructed was kind of driven off of how he built his channels and custom fields.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And he commented it all snowballed into one giant mass of implementation. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, I think one of the major things, too, was the fact that if you are coming from a different system, a lot of things are lumped into one giant bucket, right?

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: And in terms of that one giant bucket, for example, in templates, for other systems that's I think what made people decide to put everything in one template group, or put everything in one field group, or that kind of stuff because in previous CSMs that they've used, that's how it used to work.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And that's how it worked, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And we didn't understand that you can segment things much more organized.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] I mean, that even comes down to channels.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: And this, I particularly remember was very, very, very difficult for me. This was when they were called weblogs.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Which that alone confused me.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I was like blog, weblog. I don't understand why it's being called that.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: But using channels, I looked back in my blog and I still am embarrassed by not having updated it since I created it. Everything is in one channel, which is okay for a blog, but I've definitely like hacked around it to get around that since I haven't had time to go back.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But apparently that it was common according to some of the stories we received.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Anna Brown, she also talked about how using channels was a challenged for her. She said, "I only use one channel for all of the different content types. This meant that all the different content fields were on the same edit form." She said, "It hasn't been a big problem because the client doesn't add a ton of content, but she can look back now and says it was absolutely the wrong way to build the site.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. And this was back, I believe, in the EE 1, so you couldn't show and hide certain things.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] The change in the published form.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly. So even something simple as in, "Okay, we can default and keep these certain things closed, so that the main fields that are being used are always open, but then if they needed to open a different field, then they can." I mean, that's what's possible in EE 2, but in the first iteration of EE, the least I used it.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I think mine was 1.5. They didn't have those options, so if you had 20 channel fields, then you had all 20 open and I just can imagine how that would have been like for a client.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, probably not that great, but then again, how many years ago was this? I mean, things have changed.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: People's expectations were not what they are today in terms of content management systems.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: But one of the things that did occur to me as we were reading these stories and thinking about what people struggled with, I'm really pleased that some of the things that I know I struggled with and what other people said they had challenges, a lot of them have been resolved in their own ways with the new versions of ExpressionEngine like index.php in the URL structure.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And even I know one of my big frustrations that I had because I'm so over attentive about my markup, I've never been really frustrated with the default comment form that I couldn't change the markup that it generated because they have like a mix of single and double quotes around attribute values which drove me insane.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, oh, that's right, yeah, yeah.

Emily Lewis: And like there was an extra <div> in there that I didn't want there, and not being able to get around some of the generated markup was really frustrating.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But pagination is another example at that time.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: But they've improved that and it's gotten better, so I think that's really kind of cool that some of these issues, they are just like memories, distant memories. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs] Which leads us to let's talk about our audience's stories from where they started.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Where do you want to get started?

Emily Lewis: A lot of people wrote really long stories. In fact, if some of you guys are listening, you should really think about making blog posts because you guys put together some really good stories. I think everyone would love to read the full content of it. But Nate Doyle wrote in a nice, long story. He came to EE after trying both WordPress and Drupal for a site, and this was before a client with a project that some timeline on it.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And so he was definitely a bit under the gun. He explained that the reason why he was looking for something, he is just not a PHP dev.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And he wanted the solution so he could deliver this site to the client. So what he commented on, he said, “I gave up after two weeks of getting nowhere with WordPress and decided I would try looking for another CSM.” He gave Drupal a go and wrote, “It broke me down to the point I wanted to give up altogether on the whole project.” He adds, “I’m sure Drupal can be amazing in the right hands. I just didn’t have enough PHP experience to use it effectively and I was running out of time to come up with a solution.” And so that’s when he turned to ExpressionEngine, and because it’s such a front end friendly system that he was able to utilize his own skills that he already had without having to bring anything new to the table of getting familiar with ExpressionEngine.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, and that’s seems to be common thread in terms of front end friendly and in terms of just getting something to a client, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So I’m reading here that Ryan Battles’ first EE site came about when he realized that clients want something more than just static websites, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And that’s very similar to my own story because one of my other first clients when I first started Lealea Design initially could have been mostly static pages but then they asked me, “Lea, can I have a private login so I could just get some files up there for my team?” And I remember being really nervous because at that time, I wasn’t really quite familiar with ExpressionEngine and I didn’t know it existed at that time. But then once I got that first ExpressionEngine site done, I knew that EE was the right solution for them. So with Ryan, he wrote, “Before building the site, I had only built sites with HTML and CSS, doing some major find and replace action, which is kind of funny, and I knew in order to take my skills to the next level, I had to master a CMS.”

Emily Lewis: I think that’s something that if you are a front end developer and you haven’t come to that conclusion yet, you are going to soon.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Especially if you are freelancing or doing projects on the side, really I don’t think these days static site has a place anymore.

Lea Alcantara: No, no, absolutely, because even small sites need a minor way to be able to update it, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Clients all want to be able to change their phone number without having to phone me.

Emily Lewis: Right. They want control of their content without having to know HTML and CSS.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: So it makes sense.

Lea Alcantara: So what are other people's first forays into EE?

Emily Lewis: Well, I thought this was interesting, Ted Geving, he's a guy that I know here in town. I met him recently. His agency that he works for is a CodeIgniter agency.

Lea Alcantara: Cool.

Emily Lewis: And they recently started getting into EE for their custom CMS work. He wrote me saying, "EE was an appealing solution for the developers because we all know the framework it's based on. Having a CMS with a solid framework, good support for third-party plugins, and is easily skinnable is really important." He also added, "And especially because everyone was familiar with the CodeIgniter that it made it easier for clients and account executives to use it."

Lea Alcantara: Oh, very cool. Very cool.

Emily Lewis: I thought that was interesting. He did add that his agency does work with other CMS solutions, but I did think it was interesting that the way they got to ExpressionEngine was from CodeIgniter as opposed to "We need something other than WordPress" kind of thing.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It was a sort of just a slightly different angle of how they approached it.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. That's interesting. I think like during some chats at EEI, there were a couple more people who found ExpressionEngine through CodeIgniter when they first started.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I don't have a story in front of me, but I remember a conversation saying that they first started with CodeIgniter and then they wanted to build their own CMS and everything like that, and then when they found out this was a little slow going and this client needed something better or whatever, they found that, "Oh, wait a minute, there is thing called ExpressionEngine that's built on CodeIgniter. Might as well use this."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: We had another gentleman write in, and forgive me in advance if I mess up your name, Jérôme Coupé. He had written another one of the reasons that he got hooked on EE. I mean, he loved that it was flexible, robust and secure. He commented that it's easy for a front end dev to use, but he really liked that there was the 24/7 support on the forums.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah, and I think he also mentioned that it was quite affordable for clients.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I know that that comes up sometimes with people talking about the cost of the license.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: I've never had a problem with it and I've never heard of someone who has a solid, successful freelance business or their own studio having a major problem getting a client to utilize ExpressionEngine because of the license fees.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: We did get a couple of comments. I did want to make sure that this wasn't a completely "EE is the best thing ever" episode. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: It isn't for everyone.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: Not everyone sees it the way that like me as a front end developer sees it, for example.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: So I reached out to one of my friends. His name is Mark Casias, and he's a PHP developer. I've known him for years, he's probably touched every kind of CMS solutions out there, including ExpressionEngine. But I know that ExpressionEngine is not his CMS of choice, so I reached out to him and asked him kind of why, and this is what he told me. He said, "The couple of times I've used it, they weren't fun experiences and I eventually converted the project to Drupal or CodeIgniter." He said, "I love CodeIgniter, but I didn't find a good place with ExpressionEngine because it's just enough program to get in trouble but not enough to do some quality damage." And he meant that in a way of as a developer sort of like going in there and sort of attacking it and customizing it.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: He also commented, and I thought this was interesting, he said, "The fact that it's not open source really turned me off." He said, "I know you get support with it, but I like being the support."

Lea Alcantara: Interesting. I know that this is something that has come up in the community sometimes, but I don't know if I agree with them.

Emily Lewis: I mean, I'm not a PHP developer so I don't know what it's like to sort of like be the support from like SQL database programming standpoint. So I don't relate to that feeling, and so I'm guessing maybe it's something that's a lot more common with people who work with Drupal and work exclusively with PHP or whatever.

Lea Alcantara: But ExpressionEngine, I would like to remind people, just released an EE reactor team, which is essentially people from our community who is looking into the ExpressionEngine core group and providing solutions to the system. So I think it's more like...

Emily Lewis: It's sort of contributing in an open source fashion in a way.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, it is but it's just more of a vetted group as opposed to just anyone can show up.

Emily Lewis: I couldn't agree more. I know that I have picked up a Drupal project that was put together and hacked and meshed together to the point that it couldn't be updated without rebuilding the whole thing. And that can happen really easily, not exclusively for open source, but it has a tendency to happen in open source because it is such a huge, huge community of people contributing.

Lea Alcantara: And just to backtrack a little bit, when we mentioned, so this is why it's always contentious. So Jérôme Coupé, I think that's what it is.

Emily Lewis: Okay.

Lea Alcantara: Sorry Jérôme, if we are pronouncing it incorrectly, but you mentioned that it was very affordable for your company. However, Ted Geving just mentioned that his feedback was WordPress wins because it's open source and it works for a small budget because price is a problem for some clients.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] I think this could be regional. Ted is from Albuquerque. I mean, New Mexico is one of the poorest states in the county.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Budgets are tight for everyone, but I do know things have always been tight in this area.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And I wonder if that's a bigger deal in smaller markets.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] Yeah.

Emily Lewis: You know?

Lea Alcantara: I mean, there is a price point for everything and there is something. You could use any system for anything. I know I've got a lot of non-profit clients and it wasn't too much of an issue.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. Like I said, it's never been an issue for me, but maybe it is for some people.

Lea Alcantara: Cool.

Emily Lewis: Oh, another thing that was really common amongst all of the stories, and this just makes me feel so warm in my heart.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: But almost to a tee, no one was like, "Yeah, I went on the EE site and went through their documentation and that's how I learned."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It was, “I turned to the community and the resources that the community had put together to teach myself how to use ExpressionEngine.”

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely. I think we have to really thank Ryan Irelan and Mike Boyink for spearheading. I would say that both of them spearheaded the community education movement because it sounds like for the majority of the feedback for the first EE sites, that’s where they started.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, yeah. In fact, I reached out to a colleague of mine who only recently started learning EE because I wanted to get a sort of a newbie perspective.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: My friend, Kevin Dees, he wrote, “I just decided to skip the hardship I would go through trying to teach myself and bought Ryan Irelan’s Mijingo screencasts. I would say if there were any challenges, Ryan helped me bypass them.”

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: So I mean, even people who are new to ExpressionEngine and I will say I do think the official documentation has improved over the years.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: But I still think people are reaching out to those great resources that Ryan and Mike Boyink have put out for the community.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, and I want to also emphasize that both Ryan and Mike have free resources as well.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because I mean, that’s where it all started. It all started where people just started sharing information, and Mike just really, for example, wrote a lot of detailed posts about his experience, and I think one of the common ones was a series called *Building a Small Business Site*, and it was free, right?

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: So that’s where it all started and I know Ryan gives out a couple of free screencasts as well, and it gets your feet wet enough to get running and started with ExpressionEngine.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. Almost to sort of reduce the intimidation factor.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Just to make you a little bit more comfortable. I certainly know that when I was learning ExpressionEngine after many hours spent banging my head against the brick wall, I, too, turned to Michael Boyink’s online tutorials. If I recall, the ones I was looking at was on building a church website.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But I remember them as that was when things started making sense to me because it was putting it in real world terms, and I think that's one of the great things about the products that are available is that sometimes to understand ExpressionEngine and get used to it if you are coming to it for the first time, you really do have to have a real world scenario. I mean, I suppose you could, but I think it would be in a vacuum to be like, "I'm just going to make a site," and just follow the documentation exclusively, takes you outside of the concept of building an entire system.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] And I know way back when 2005 when I first started, these resources weren't really vast, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So I did trudge through the forums and the documentation as best I could and I remember with my first website, that's part of the reason why it was such a mess. But within a couple of months, it happened really quickly once there was momentum with people starting to use ExpressionEngine, these blog posts started to come out with how they change their template structure or this is what I use for embed templates and et cetera and so forth, and this is what a variable is, and very quickly the next EE site that I created was heads and tails above what I started with.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And when I start to think about it, it was actually a short amount of time from where we had really nothing to a lot of people really contributing and adapting ExpressionEngine and then sharing their experiences.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: But even with all these new resources, if you are still a beginner to ExpressionEngine, it's still hard to get started.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I mean, I think that's true with anything.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But in fact, kind of looking back on my own experience and have all the frustrations I had, I think it's because I thought I would just sit down, and boom, it would be done.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I think we all need to sort of get a little bit more patience, even a great system or great tool takes time to learn, and it's even harder if you are learning and developing at the same time.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Sean Smith wrote in about his experience with his first EE site, and what he was doing is he was learning new stuff and implementing them at the same time alongside his older, what he called, "less efficient code."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: He said that, "What that ended up leading to was a big of a challenge." He wrote, "Due to the site being regularly updated and new features being added and/or removed, the site ended up turning into quite of a beast that was

increasingly difficult to upgrade or even figure out how it was all connected because as he learned new approaches and techniques, they would go right alongside the older code.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: I think that's a really good point. I know that myself when I have developed, I kind of do a "let's get rid of what I did before and replace it."

Lea Alcantara: Yes, yes.

Emily Lewis: And maybe, I don't want to say for sure, but maybe considering Sean's experience that that is a better approach rather than sort of piling stuff on top.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: With the new one on top of old.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, that was basically the approach I've taken for some of my client sites and my own site. When I first revamped Lealea Design from its first iteration, I took that as a chance to totally revamp how it was structured in ExpressionEngine because it was not as good. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And I pretty much started from scratch. Like I didn't redo necessarily how the blogs or channels were. I revamped the templates and had it call the information a little bit better.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I also think that as you are learning ExpressionEngine, and this is where I think the resources that are available out there that give you a practical perspective of building with ExpressionEngine is keeping in mind that if this is for a client that you really kind of have to put yourself in the client's shoes in terms of how you are building the system.

Lea Alcantara: Yes, yes.

Emily Lewis: John Macpherson wrote in and said that one of his big mistakes from his first site was how they sort of crafted the content entry process for the client.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: He writes, "I remember the client had to enter the whole URL. Sometimes three segments all manually in the pages module, and minimally, this was error prone," and he said, "It was incredibly hard for them, to say the least."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And I think that's a common sort of thing, too. It's not necessarily with that specific scenario, but you are thinking about how you as the developer might put together the templates and the pieces of information that you want to

put everything together. If that's your perspective and it's hard to not let that be your perspective, then you could be creating a very unpleasant content entry experience for your client.

Lea Alcantara: Yes, absolutely. I think that's one of the main things, too, when you are thinking about custom fields as well. So for us, maybe it might be easier to lump everything in one giant field group for whatever reason if that's what you decide to do. But maybe it's not so much for the client.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So I think that's a definite beginner mistake for most ExpressionEngine newbies.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And I know I did that, too.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: But when you think about the client and how easy is this going to be to enter information, it definitely changes your work flow.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] So if anyone is listening and they are new to ExpressionEngine or they've been thinking about getting into ExpressionEngine and you are weary, one thing that almost every single person who wrote in a story, they talked about their challenges, they talked about their mistakes, but then they just said that they love ExpressionEngine, that it continues to be their CMS of choice and it's the solution that they feel best about.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. So what do you think we've all learned from our first experiences with ExpressionEngine?

Emily Lewis: I think for me it's two things which I have sort of touched on already. Just to learn that I was not patient when I was learning.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And I didn't realize that I was patient and I blamed the system.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I was like, "Oh, this doesn't work. This is crap."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And no, I just needed to take the time necessary to learn the system.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: You are not going to get it the first time. You might not even get it on your first site.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So one is to be a little bit more patient. Two is what I just mentioned, stop thinking about how I want the system to be and think about how the client would like the system to be.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely. I think I would agree with all of your points and I think also for me, my major lesson was how do I make this as efficient as possible as opposed to get this done, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I think whenever it's your first site, you just want it to work, right?

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Like you just want it to linger, and I think this is also even just the first step when we had our first HTML page. When the web standards movement first started, all I cared about was that it validated, right?

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Right.

Lea Alcantara: I didn't necessarily care at that time that my code actually made any sense as long as the tags were closed, it's all good.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Wow, web standards, I'm doing it right, right?

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So that was sort of the thing with ExpressionEngine for me. I was way too intent and, and I think, anxious about getting things to work, and I think that make sense because you just want to see how it works.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: But just making sure that there is an actual better way to do it and trying to find out what that is and reaching out to the community.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Yeah. To sort of kind of sum up for our story submitters, I pulled out some of their kind of concluding statements in their stories. It sort of talk about why they are still with EE. One of my favorites is from Jérôme Coupé. He wrote, "Thanks to ExpressionEngine, I'm not just a front end developer anymore. On my own, I'm now capable of creating and developing complex websites from start to finish including small web applications." I think that's a pretty strong statement, and it's probably one of the reasons I love ExpressionEngine the most, too.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, for sure, and I know that EllisLab used this quote from me years ago because I told them ExpressionEngine allows me to say yes to clients.

Emily Lewis: Exactly.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Another, Jean St. Amand, and I know I'm messing that up, sorry. It could be Jean. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: But he wrote in and commented, “My first EE site solidified my commitment to ExpressionEngine. I would certainly approach it differently if I were to tackle it today. I’m sure we all would handle our first site differently, but I would still be very happy with the result.”

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] That’s an interesting statement. I think that’s true for me, too, because even though I understand how bad my first EE implementation was, I still liked it enough to continue working with it, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, that’s almost kind of what Anna Brown wrote. This is great. She wrote, “A crappy first project isn’t the end of the world. It’s just the place to start.”

Lea Alcantara: Yes, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: And that’s true across the board for anything.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: We got to make our mistakes in order to figure out how to not make them in the future.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly, and I think that also leads us to being more sympathetic to new developers, and I think that’s part of the reason why our community is so open and sharing because we have these experiences. We just don’t want other people to have them anymore, so we have to share better ways to do it.

Emily Lewis: Exactly. Again, I just love our community. I think that it just lends itself with that sort of openness and sharing.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. And at the end of the day, for example, Rob Allen wrote to us and he said, “I’ve never looked back and I’ve worked on approaching 100 EE sites. EE never ceases to amaze me because you are literally only limited by your imagination.”

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] I mean, I’ve worked with WordPress. I’ve worked with Drupal.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I’ve looked at Plone and Joomla, but I love that sort of flexibility. Flexibility just seems like such a small word to describe how EE could be utilized.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Because it really is just your imagination. It’s not just flexible. I mean, you could do things with 20 different ways and come out with the same end result that’s rendered on the screen.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, but at the end of the day, ExpressionEngine is just an option from a plethora of options.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And one of our listeners wrote in, Kevin Dees said, "If I ever have made a mistake, it has been using one CMS when another should be used. Using one tool as the ultimate solution can lead to a lot of pain. So this applies to ExpressionEngine as well. ExpressionEngine is not always the best solution for your client or your site."

Emily Lewis: And even if ExpressionEngine is the right solution, maybe the way you did it for a previous site isn't the right solution for that client.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: So it's kind of putting blinders on and just keeping singularly focused is always going to get you in trouble.

Lea Alcantara: Absolutely, absolutely. So I've had a lot of fun reading through people's first ExpressionEngine website experiences and their learning outcomes.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] It definitely reminded me of those days when I was getting started.

[Music starts]

Lea Alcantara: So I think that's all the time we have for today. We would like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, Environments for Humans and Pixel & Tonic.

Emily Lewis: We would also like to thank our partners, EllisLab, EngineHosting and Devot:ee.

Lea Alcantara: And thanks to our listeners for tuning in and sending your stories.

Emily Lewis: Yes.

Lea Alcantara: If you want to know more about the podcast, make sure you follow us on Twitter @eepodcast or visit our website at ee-podcast.com.

Emily Lewis: And don't forget to tune in next time on Thursday, January 26th and we will have Adam Wiggall and Ian Pitts talking to us about Version Control. Be sure to check out our schedule on ee-podcast.com/schedule to see all of the great topics we have lined up for 2012.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara.

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis.

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for the ExpressionEngine Podcast. See you next time.

[Music stops]

Emily Lewis: Cheers.