

EE Podcast #70 Conferences and Presentations

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Lea Alcantara: You are listening to the ExpressionEngine Podcast Episode #70 where we talk presentations. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host, Emily Lewis. This episode is sponsored by EngineSummit. CSS 3, Sass, Compass, responsive web design, the world of CSS has exploded. It's an exciting but sometimes confusing world. To help keep you on top of it all, the fourth annual online and live CSS conference, [CSS Summit](#), brings the experts to your desktop like Chris Coyier, Lea Verou, Jonathan Snook, Jina Bolton, and many more. So go beyond simple Google searches and out of date online tutorials and learn from the best about the hottest topics in web design. And if you get your tickets this week, you can get 20% off any or all days of the conference when you use the discount code EEPODCAST at [CSSSummit.com](#).

Emily Lewis: The ExpressionEngine Podcast would also like to thank [Pixel & Tonic](#) for being our major sponsor of the year. [Music ends] Hi Lea, how are you?

Lea Alcantara: Not bad. Good weather here in town so I did some landscaping stuff this weekend. So that's a nice break from sitting indoors all day.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: How about you, how was your weekend?

Emily Lewis: Oh, I was mostly sitting indoors all day.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, okay. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Getting ready for my EngineSummit presentation.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: It seems no matter how I try and plan I ended up working on my deck and script just a day or two before our presentation, but I guess that's timely since it's part of our topic today.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] Yeah, we were going to talk with Nevin Lyne about hosting, but travel delays put a wrench on those plans. We will definitely be rescheduling very soon, but for today we thought we'll talk about presentations. Seeing as we're both presenting for EngineSummit this week, we thought we would share some of our tips and experiences.

Emily Lewis: But before we dive into it, Lea, I do want to talk about our survey which we launched two weeks ago.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: I spent some time this weekend looking at some of our responses, it's been incredible.

Lea Alcantara: I know. Actually, it's pretty crazy. As of this recording, we've had 161 respondents.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]. I didn't have any idea we would get that many.

Lea Alcantara: I know.

Emily Lewis: It's just says so much about our community, I think.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, agreed. I agree.

Emily Lewis: And I'm really glad that we are getting so many, and I'm really looking forward to how we are going to analyze all of it, but I'm glad we are getting such a broad range of feedback.

Lea Alcantara: Absolutely, absolutely, and listeners, the survey is still open at bit.ly/eepodcastsurvey. If you haven't given us feedback on the podcast, there is still time. The survey closes at midnight Mountain Time tonight. That's midnight, May 31st. Don't forget all interested respondents will be entered in a giveaway for an exclusive ee-podcast tee shirt.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Okay, so let's go ahead and dive right into today's topic.

Lea Alcantara: All right.

Emily Lewis: Presentations, I guess one of the things we should start with is I'm curious because I think I met you at a conference that you spoke at. What was your very first speaking experience?

Lea Alcantara: Actually, you might be a little shocked to hear this because that was actually my second speaking experience.

Emily Lewis: Really?

Lea Alcantara: Yes. What Emily is referring to, the conference that we met at, I spoke at South By Southwest in 2007 about Art of Self-Branding, and that was my second speaking experience ever. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Wow!

Lea Alcantara: Professionally, at least. My very first one also was pretty big. It was for Future of Web Design in New York.

Emily Lewis: Holy crap!

Lea Alcantara: I know.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So talk about throwing the baby in the deep end of the swimming pool and seeing what happens.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So those were my very first speaking experiences, and let's just say I've learned a lot since then.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I have to ask since those were both such big events, did you know how big they were at the time like, or what were you a little bit clueless since they were first goes for you?

Lea Alcantara: Uhm...

Emily Lewis: Like were you intimidated by the pressure?

Lea Alcantara: Yes, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: I mean, I knew they were like big deals, especially South By Southwest.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: With everybody, South By Southwest has been going on for so long. Future of Web Design was sort of new-ish when it started so I had a little bit less idea of how big that was going to be, but I knew it was going to be a big deal. But even if it wasn't, it was my first speaking experience.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So no matter what, it was going to be a big deal for me at any rate, right?

Emily Lewis: Yeah, my first speaking experience was September of 2008, I believe it was, and it was for a local BarCamp here in Albuquerque.

Lea Alcantara: Very cool.

Emily Lewis: And it was, I guess, about three months or so after I had attended a conference in Atlanta, and really the speakers were good, but I walked away from it thinking, "I bet I could do that."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And so when the BarCamp came up, I just said, "I'm going to go ahead and make the commitment and sign up to present there."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And so that was my very first one, so it's sort of the opposite of you. It was not throwing me into the deep end, but it was throwing me into the warm welcoming arms of my fellow colleagues here in Albuquerque.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So...

Lea Alcantara: And the audience.

Emily Lewis: It wasn't too intimidating.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, and the audience there were like it was probably more intimate venue, I would think, right?

Emily Lewis: Yes, yes. Much closer.

Lea Alcantara: So yeah, it's a totally, totally different experience. I think your experience is pretty, I would say, it's more typical I think of those that want to get into the speaking circuit. They start locally and they start building their name and getting more experience and then they start to aggressively going after the bigger jaunts. I think with me, what I think probably helped me in particular was the subject matter. It was a really...

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: It was a really hot topic before all these social media gurus and everything like that came to the fore.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: I wrote the Art of Self-Branding in 2005 and it recounted how I branded myself and I just shared that with the world, and it resonated with enough people in our industry that people wanted me to actually talk about it in greater detail.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And so because of the strength of the subject matter, I think I was actually approached to do it, and then with South By Southwest, it was a little bit different, like everyone you have to apply for the speaking thing and then you get voted on. But because of the subject matter again, it was popular enough that it got enough votes that they shoved me into a time slot [laughs] for South By Southwest.

Emily Lewis: But I think that points out to something that I think is critical to anyone who wants to pursue public speaking or presenting. At least in our industry, you really do have to have a topic.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And not just, "Oh hey, I know CSS 3."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Everybody knows CSS 3. What do you know that's interesting or unique or different, or, and this is why I think probably your self-branding topic is so popular, it's not technical.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It's business related.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I think people in our industry are hungry and thirsty for that sort of information because we do get so much on the technical side of doing what we do.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, for sure, and I'm speaking from the perspective as one of you guys as a design and developer.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because I don't know about you or our listeners if they've ever gone to a non-technical conference.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And marketers know branding like the back of their hand and they do these presentations and everything, but they don't know our industry. They don't know our specific needs and thoughts and fears and issues, and I think that part of the reason why this also resonated why people invited me is because they wanted to have that perspective.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And not just any other marketer who doesn't know anything about the Web or anything about design or anything. They wanted someone like them to talk about the process.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, yeah, the topic is critical, and the topic is not only critical in terms of someone inviting you to speak, but even more so if you are trying to propose a talk to a conference.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Because I can honestly say that it sounds like you've had a somewhat similar experience with the exception of like the local things I've signed up for like BarCamps and Ignite.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: I've been lucky that almost every other presentation I've done, it's been an invite.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So I haven't had to go through the proposal process in the sense that they already wanted the topic that I was going to speak about.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And so I had to had to submit something that they would print in the website or whatever.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: But this year I'm trying to get a presentation for the Southwest conference on disability in the fall.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Emily Lewis: And I do need to go through the proposal process and it can be detailed. They can want a lot of information and you have to have a proposal that not only has an interesting topic, but that you can convey your ability to share that information in a presentation format.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: They don't want some long typed out deep, deep outline. They want to know that you know how to reach the salient points of your topic.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So that their audience members are going to get the best thing for their buck and aren't going to get bored.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, so yeah. I agree. I agree, and what's interesting in your statement there is you started to mention about writing the summary of your presentation even if you were already invited.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So you didn't have to propose, but you still have to write the summary and explain what you're doing.

Emily Lewis: Yes.

Lea Alcantara: People don't know how important that little paragraph actually is, at least based on my experience. If you say something in that paragraph, people expects you to actually say it.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And it's funny for me to actually explain it that way, but I'm sure you have gone to conferences where they say, "I'm going to present on this one thing," and you kind of latch on to his specific word or phrase and then they don't actually talk about it.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And you leave really disappointed, even if the presentation was actually well done. If you're not careful over what topics you actually mentioned or phrases that you spell out in your summary, people will get disappointed if you don't mention them.

Emily Lewis: Speaking as an attendee, I can just say that for me that sort of sums up South By Southwest the couple of years for me.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: That those descriptions you get really excited and you're like, "This is going to be a really interesting topic," and it ends up not being covered in the way that the summary suggested.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I was just pissed off. I mean, that's really what it comes down to.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, cool.

Emily Lewis: You only have so much time as an attendee. You're spending so much money on a badge.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely. I totally agree, and I think more speakers need to take the time with the copywriting of that so it actually conveys what you want to say.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And that's something I definitely learned over the years so that if I'm going to say something I need to make, I need to always refer back to the summary to make sure, "Oh, did I miss something that I wrote in that summary?"

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I mean, that doesn't necessarily mean you have to follow the summary like exactly into the T, especially because most presentations, if you've been approached to do it or whatever, they ask you for the summary and the outline, and you don't finish your presentation until it's closer to the actual date.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: So you're still flushing out the particulars, so of course, the summary needs to be specific enough so people get interested in a specific topic, but it needs to be broad enough so you've got flexibility to actually flush out your presentation.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] Well, speaking of that flushing out our presentations, what is your process? How do you prepare? How do you put things together?

Lea Alcantara: In terms of preparation, I kind of open up a text document and then it's not a very organized way of doing it, I guess, but I kind of write a stream of consciousness.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: It's like having a conversation with myself.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And then I sort of take that giant blob of me just writing over what I think I need to be talking about then I start rearranging the thoughts in a certain order, and then once I write and rearrange it in a certain order then I distill it into point form.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So I actually start almost backwards from a lot of people who do like point form and then they expand it and then whatever. I start like really verbose and I try to cut it down.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And I rearrange it when it's verbose.

Emily Lewis: And as you are sort of rearranging and organizing your thoughts and narrowing them down, aside from your topic, what are the things you're thinking about as you're sort of crafting your message?

Lea Alcantara: Well, I'm always thinking about the audience, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Who is the audience? What is the platform? When I'm saying the platform, you see, we are talking at EngineSummit tomorrow. We are recording this on Monday, and so that's a totally different type of preparation and presentation style than if you were trying to have this presentation for 30 people at a college or a BarCamp versus 500 to a 1,000 people at South By Southwest's giant stage, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Even if it's the exact same topic, you have to approach it completely differently. I think that when I'm prepping, I'm always thinking about the audience, first and foremost, the size and the venue while I'm doing all of this.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, and I think in addition to the audience size, another point that's quite important regarding audience especially if you take into account like the EngineSummit versus South By Southwest.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: EngineSummit, it's almost exclusively people who know EE or want to know EE.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: Whereas South By Southwest, you're going to get a much broader range of people.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And so if I was presenting something about EE at South By Southwest, I'd have to get more general.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: I really would. I couldn't be specific as I might be tomorrow for my presentation.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So the audience type, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: What is the technical knowledge of these people, and what resonates with them?

Emily Lewis: And I think it's worth mentioning that this is what you should ask your event organizer.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: Because they know this.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: They are putting on the event for this audience.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So they are going to know the audience and what their expectations are going to be. I've learned because I didn't do this for my first couple presentations that I did professionally. I neglected to ask about, yeah, the technical level and exactly what the audience's goals were.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But I've since learned that I can give a better presentation when I know what they need, what they're looking for, and also you make a better impression on a conference organizer if you've done your due diligence instead of saying, "Yeah, sure, I'll present."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And that's all they hear from you except the day you show up.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But if you ask about the room, if you ask about the audience, if you ask about if the conference organizer has any of their own goals that you can factor in.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely, and that's a really good point about the goals of the audience. There are also goals as a speaker too.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: So you're thinking about your audience, you're thinking about the venue, you're thinking about their knowledge, et cetera, well, you can take a topic and change the direction of how you're going to speak about that topic if your goal is to sell.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Or if you're there to teach, or you're there to entertain, or you're there to provoke something, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I mean, you can argue that most people try to do all at once, right?

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: But there is generally a specific behavior or presentation style that you do depending on what the primary goal is.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: For example, in South By Southwest, because it is so varied, you could tell some people are just there to have fun.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Like the presentation style is purely entertainment and it's not there to sell anything. They are not selling themselves. They're just there because they want to have an audience, even though it's a tech audience, right?

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: When I'm teaching MacEwan, it's totally different. I've done the Art of Self-Branding to my 25 student class before.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And that's a totally different thing than when I was talking to a thousand people at South By Southwest, you know?

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: I get people to do more interaction with me.

Emily Lewis: Oh, a good point.

Lea Alcantara: Right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: When it's a smaller group so you tend to ask questions a lot more than if you're doing a giant presentation because you can. I mean, you do when you should ask questions and things like that and get people to do activities in a bigger crowd, but it's a much, much harder when...

Emily Lewis: It's harder to engage.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Emily Lewis: Well, and the likelihood is if you have a larger crowd, it's possible that their interest are a lot broader than a smaller group and that makes it even harder to engage.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah, for sure, and then you mentioned about asking the conference organizer, well, what is the general knowledge, and even in a specific conference like, let's say, EECI or EngineSummit, the conference organizers can give you an idea of what the audience type is, but you can't please everyone.

Emily Lewis: Oh, absolutely.

Lea Alcantara: There is always going to be just like the listeners here of EE Podcast and reading the survey responses, it's really interesting. Some people are definitely ExpressionEngine beginners.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Even though they are all listening to our show, some of them are beginners and want more specific topics that cater to that. Others want really advanced things.

Emily Lewis: And then there are those who are project managers and/or business owners and they want business information.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Absolutely.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, you can't please everyone all the time, and that sort of comes to the thing about after you present if you get feedback.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: How to deal with the positive and the negative?

Lea Alcantara: Yes, I mean, this is something that all people, all presenters struggle with all the time because we are just human, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And to be honest, I think we all expect everyone to like us.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because we worked so hard, we did all this preparation, we did all this stuff to make sure they get what they came for, but it doesn't always turn out the way that you want it to.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Obviously, that's just life and there are different people and personalities and expectations, et cetera and so forth. I think one thing that people need to think about with the good feedback is why is it good.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, specifics. I mean...

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I know exactly what you mean. I really like hearing when someone appreciated an article I wrote or a presentation I gave.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And there is really nothing better than getting a compliment like that, especially you do a lot of work to do these things in the first place.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: But I really appreciate the sort of critical feedback.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: I don't like jerks.

Lea Alcantara: Of course.

Emily Lewis: But anyone who's got something to point out. Maybe something as simple as my pacing.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Maybe it is something as simple as the example I used, that it didn't really convey to them.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: That gives me a point of reference for me to improve.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: Just telling me I'm good or a suck is not going to help me to be any better. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely. Even if it was constructive criticism, it still sometimes, you know. Again, we are all human. It's hard to take. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Well, my biggest problem, and I think this is actually worth bringing up. As a presenter, this is something you encounter. I think you and I feel it to a degree as co-host of this podcast.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: I know I feel it as a presenter. I really cannot help it that I can get 20 great comments and the one bad comment is the one I think about and the one I focus on. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And the one I'm like, "Oh, how did I get it so wrong."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah.

Emily Lewis: I think that's really human nature, and I find it happens so much now that I'm doing things like presenting because you're now getting more feedback from a broader range of people.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely, and the audience matters too, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because sometimes I feel like I'm in this protective cocoon in the ExpressionEngine community because everyone in the community in general to me I think is fabulous.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And we all speak the same language. We can talk about EE and web stuff and design stuff and then everyone respects you and it's all good, and then you go to a business conference. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Oh yeah, you were telling me about it.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: Tell the listeners the story.

Lea Alcantara: So I went to an entrepreneur conference a few weeks ago, and I consider myself a very confident person and I think I can present very well in person and in general and speak to people, et cetera, but it's a totally different animal when people don't get, immediately get why you are an expert or you're the special one, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So going to business conferences or any conference that doesn't have a majority of technical knowledge is a real eye opener over how you present yourself and the type of feedback that you can get.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: To be frank, one of the people that I met actually told me, they didn't say you specifically, but they said in general, that web designers are a dime a dozen, right?

Emily Lewis: Oh, it makes me so angry.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] I know.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: I know, and I mean, my kneejerk reaction obviously was to be pretty upset. Obviously, I didn't say or do anything to this individual.

Emily Lewis: No thrown punch. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: No, no immediate violence. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: But my emotional reaction was violent.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: It took me awhile to just take a step back to quite understand that, to truly understand that this is a different audience, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So the approach needs to be completely different and based on their knowledge, yeah.

Emily Lewis: And you may have to prove yourself a little bit more than when you show up at EECl and half of the audience knows who you are.

Lea Alcantara: Yes, exactly, exactly, and another thing too, even if they don't know who you are, you can start up a conversation about variables.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: Have you tried this? And then, they'll say, "Oh."

Emily Lewis: You establish credibility easily.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly, and you establish like a common ground immediately.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: When you are in a different environment, you kind of struggle to find that common ground in the first place without coming off as... I don't know if shallow is the right word, because I don't know if you've ever listened to any networking presentation.

Emily Lewis: Oh yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Where you can do whatever there like, oh, you can talk about your common stuff like the movies and what's going on in the city, and to me I don't necessarily find that immediately enjoyable to engage people with personally.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And not that they are bad topics because I talk about those topics with my friends all the time, but when you're trying to broach such generalizations in a business setting it feels a lot more awkward than, let's say, broaching a general web topic or CSS topic or EE topic at a tech conference.

Emily Lewis: Right. Yeah, I think it's a completely different scenario depending on the industry, and, again, the audience.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. I want to kind of backtrack a little.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: So we were talking about preparing and things like that, has your preparation, like I spoke about mine, how was yours and has it evolved over time?

Emily Lewis: I think it has evolved a little bit in a couple of different ways. So first of all, technology. My very first presentation that I did for that BarCamp, I threw together a web-based slide deck using Eric Meyer's S5.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And in my thinking at the time was I thought it would look cool.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. Use the technology as you're talking about.

Emily Lewis: Exactly.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I'm talking about standards and all that other stuff, so it just made sense.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And in my mind I was like, "Okay, so if it's HTML based and it's got a robot-accessible URL, then that's also a great search engine content for people to come to my site." And so that was my thinking. Since then it's just such a pain in the butt to customize and make it look good.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I don't go too far with my decks in terms of visual pizzazz, but I mean, it was just a pain to deal with.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So I eventually moved to Keynote I found to be great for me.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It's got a lot of the same sort of features like PowerPoint does with like themes and master pages and stuff, so that's evolved. But the other thing that's evolved for me is sort of how I put my presentation and/or the deck together. I started much like how you finish with the small points and then expanding broader.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And that's how I will always do it, and in fact, I didn't even do it like in a text document and sort of write things out. I built it in the slides.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Emily Lewis: Because in my mind I wanted to visualize how each slide would be and I wanted to start training my mind to be triggered to say certain points when I saw those slides.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: And it worked for a while, the problem was that is I'd spent so much time getting the slide done, getting the points done that I never fully flushed out my script as much as I would have liked to.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And so what I do now is I literally write my script first. It's like exactly how I want to say it, including the fact that I say "you know" a lot.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: So I generally script the whole thing out and then from there I try and pick the key points that I make slides out of and then I find areas where I think I need an example or a screenshot or something like that and sort of drop them in and in that way the script is done. I have all of the notes that I may need to reference. I've already sort of set it in my head once, and the deck becomes just an accessory, whereas before the deck was like THE main thing in my mind, and now it's just an accessory for what I want to share.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting, because mine is opposite. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: It's because you're process, and actually I told you my current process. The old process that I did, and I remember clearly preparing for Future Of Web Design and South By Southwest, I wrote this entire giant script and it was so detailed and there was a lot of information, and I brought my notes into the presentation. It was like three pages full of notes of 12-point font and it worked fine because at least it helped me feel like really prepared and all that fun stuff, and I came up as super knowledgeable because I had so much to say, but over the years my notes have gone from the three pages and I write up the entire sentences to purely bullet points.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And specifically for the Art of Self-Branding, I don't need notes anymore. I mean, that's...

Emily Lewis: Right, you just know it.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly. That's the cool thing about presenting over and over and over again is that you become so knowledgeable about your topic that you can do it in your sleep.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And me personally, I think that's a good process to make you sound a little bit more natural because you don't have the script.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I mean, you have a script in your head and that's sort of the bullet points and the stuff that you have in your presentation. I mean, that is the script. It's just not as detailed as mine used to be, and I think in some ways too for me, when I had so many notes, especially when you're presenting in person, one of the things I love about presenting online is I can have...

Emily Lewis: You have your notes up. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yes, exactly. Giant notes and it could be as detailed as possible. When you have so many notes if you're presenting in person, then it becomes really cumbersome.

Emily Lewis: It can be distracting.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, that's right.

Lea Alcantara: And then you lose your spot and then you're like, "Oh my God," and then you just try to make it look natural that you completely lost your spot and you're scanning the page and then...

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: I mean, there are so many different ways you can decide to speak, so it's not like your process is any worse or better than mine. It's just what's good for your style with this audience and the goals of the presentation.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] And I think another takeaway is that ultimately no matter what your goals are or what your topic is or even the type of events you speak at, you will find your process will evolve.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It's going to because you're not going to really know what works best for you the first time.

Lea Alcantara: And the only way you can do that is try, try, try again, right?

Emily Lewis: Yeah, that brings up a good point. I mean, I personally still don't think I'm a great presenter and it's one of those things I'm constantly trying to get better at.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: I'm constantly trying to evaluate.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: How do you improve? How do you make yourself better with presenting?

Lea Alcantara: I just try to reflect back on what I did, and then I review the presenters that I do admire, you know?

Emily Lewis: Yes, that's a really good point.

Lea Alcantara: I mean, reviewing what I liked about those presentations, but that doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to present like them because everyone has got their own different style and personality, but it's like what was it about that presentation that I really loved?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Was it because they asked questions? Like in that business conference I went to, all the presenters had different styles like absolutely themselves.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Some were really bombastic, but this particular one was just really gentle and how she transitioned from topic to topic is she asked a question, "May I blah, blah," and I thought that was a very interesting tactic, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And so it was basically she was asking permission from the audience if it was okay for her to say this and this and this, and so it was kind of an interesting tact even though she was talking to us and she was telling her story in this particular presentation. It wasn't really a chance for her particular topic to have interaction, but because of the way she transitioned between topic to topic, she added that.

Emily Lewis: You felt engaged.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly. She added that interactive element, and so it's those little things where you're like, "She's really good because she did this, or that guy was really great because he did this."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because no matter how much I try, I can never be a comedienne. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Right.

Lea Alcantara: Like I mean, I think in my mind I'm really funny.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: But...

Emily Lewis: I think you're funny too. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Thank you. But for me to force that in a presentation...

Emily Lewis: Right, it's not going to be genuine.

Lea Alcantara: It's not going to be genuine. Some people are just naturals at it like, "Hello, Kenny Meyers."

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: Like he's just hilarious, but that being said though, he prepares.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: He prepares too.

Emily Lewis: But you can't tell, he seems so at ease.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly, exactly, and I mean, those are the types of things to just kind of know to see like, is there anything in particular? It's not necessarily because of his personality per se because I mean that you can't change. You can't change your personality. But what was it about that presentation I liked and how can I take that and bringing into my own? Right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And then again, like trying to find different venues and different ways to say what you need to say and it doesn't matter what size the audience is as long as you have that audience.

Emily Lewis: Right, you have someone to talk to in front of.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly because I have to say I personally think the presentation, the Art of Self-Branding presentation that I do to my 25 MacEwan students is way better than what I did for Future Web Design and South By Southwest in spite the fact that was like "a bigger venue" with bigger deal or whatever because of all the times I've had to do it.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: And then seeing the reactions of people and seeing how to engage them more in like what activities I could add. So that's something else that changed to was seeing what activities the different presenters brought to help make things more interactive.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So I mentioned the questioning way to transition like were the actual activities that people did. Kathy Sierra, I remember at South By Southwest made people like stand up and do stuff and all these kinds of things so it was really interesting to see what people do and then figure out how you can integrate that. Like I know, for example, with EngineSummit, it's a struggle because you're actually talking to your computer.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: So it's like how do you engage people or give it a try.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I mean, do you even try in the way that you did before, or is it you just try to be more bombastic because it feels good.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I think it could go either way. I think it depends on the person.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: For these online conferences, this EngineSummit will be the fourth one I've done with the Environments for Humans.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And they are honestly my favorite format. I'm just a nervous wreck when I stand up in front of people for like ten minutes.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: There is something physiological that happens to my body that I can't mentally talk myself out of.

Lea Alcantara: That happens to me too.

Emily Lewis: It just happens.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I just have to wait for ten minutes, but when I'm here at home just being recorded, I don't feel that, which is nice and so I tend to be a little less nervous. But because it is an online venue, I pay a lot of attention, or I try to pay a lot of attention to the chat. I recognize how important it is for the people who are there to engage with me in some fashion, and if that means that I need to skip a couple of slides at the end of my presentation because I took some time in the chat room to read some questions in the middle of my presentation, I think it ultimately leads to a better presentation, but I wouldn't do the same thing necessarily at an in-person event.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, for sure.

Emily Lewis: Because some people's questions can get long and out of control, and some people don't really get to the point. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yes. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: So...

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah.

Emily Lewis: And you can't keep everyone hanging. Using the chat, you can select. You can be selective with those.

Lea Alcantara: Well, and also it's nice that you can actually read it, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because a lot of people are shy, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So people feel less shy when they are just typing things out on their computer to ask the question than they normally may not ask in person, or they've got a perception in their mind that they can't ask you for whatever reason.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: As a teacher, that's definitely true. It's funny whenever I ask, "Are there any questions," no hands come up and then when I go to everyone individually, ten questions come spilling out of their mouths, right?

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: A good question. You taught too like at your local college.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Do you think that's helped your speaking in person?

Emily Lewis: I think it does on two levels. One, what is it? Exposure therapy to fear.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Me standing in front of people, it's a classroom environment, I don't feel it at that stage. I mean, there is no other way to put it with stage fright.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And also because I'm the teacher and I see my role there as not presenting, but educating these people and getting them excited.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And so those two things are important because I'm getting exposure to being in front of people and just sort of getting used to that so my nervous system doesn't completely fall apart.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: But I'm also bringing that attitude of being the instructor or the educator to my presentations.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And so I become a little less worried about sort of the things you're talking about, about being entertaining or being funny. I'm funny, but most of the time it's because I've said something stupid. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Not because I'll have a clever sense of humor.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And so what I do think that teaching has helped me do and become a better presenter is that I'm really doing it almost every single time to try and get someone excited about something new with web design or EE.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And that's a lot in my mind, at least. It feels a lot less intimidating than I need to prove that this is the right way to do things.

Lea Alcantara: I think that's an interesting statement, the "prove" part.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Because when you're in an educational setting, you're an established expert like I don't see students ever think I don't know what I'm saying because there is an established idea that they paid to be here, they expect that the teachers know what they're saying, that's why they are here and that's why I'm testing them and that's why I challenge them with the stuff that I challenge them with.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: And I think that in the speaking situation, you are surrounded by your peers a lot of the time.

Emily Lewis: Colleagues.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, and a lot of them, I'm not ashamed to say, are far more expert than me in certain topics, right?

Emily Lewis: Yes.

Lea Alcantara: So there is, let's just say, a lot more to prove, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Like that's the same thing when you say, "Oh, you don't have to prove yourself in everything." I think in a conference setting, there is a lot more pressure to definitely bring the goods.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And even though, let's say, the topic is the same in a classroom setting and you still bring the goods, the pressure is lower because you understand and there is a more common knowledge base and you understand that...

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Well, you frankly understand they know a little bit less than you, right?

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: And so there is that kind of sentiment to be able to bring into the presentation and it's a totally different setting even if it's the same topic.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] One other thing that I think is important to talk about when it comes to getting involved in public speaking, or actually, it's two things. The first of sort of making the jump to do it.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I know that some people, you're never going to be interested and necessarily giving a presentation. It's just not your cup of tea.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And with that, I think I might have put myself into that bucket five years ago.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It changed over time.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: But I think the point is that you don't have to be like you're saying, the expert of everyone in the room.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So don't let the fact that maybe you don't know something or you don't consider yourself an expert will hold you back from contributing something to the community.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly.

Emily Lewis: I can think of so many people who are doing interesting work, and by interesting, I don't necessarily mean innovative. They are just doing solid good work.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Or they are running a business really well.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Or they've developed some great networking tool, or who knows, you know?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It's stuff that I think people, because they do it every day, they take it for granted that it's not interesting and you would be really surprised. There are a lot of opportunities to present, locally, nationally, and all of it is an opportunity to sort of make yourself better. Because tell me if I'm wrong, when you put a presentation together the first time, you know your content well. When you fine tune it, you know your content even more.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And then after you presented it, all the questions that you might get from attendees, they make you know your content even more.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly.

Emily Lewis: So you're getting educated in the process.

Lea Alcantara: And the more you present, the more questions you get and the more prepared you are when they come up again.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because all the times people ask the same questions.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And what's interesting about the "well, you don't have THE expert or the smartest one," you don't know who the smartest in the room is. We have no idea and what's interesting is that EECl, a lot of people were coming to that, they were just happy that it was confirmed that the way they were doing things was correct.

Emily Lewis: Right

Lea Alcantara: Right?

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: They didn't necessarily go to the conference.

Emily Lewis: To get blown away by some crazy thing.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly, although that's awesome.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Right.

Lea Alcantara: I mean, I think we always hope that what's going to happen, but I think it's also good to confirm that what you're doing is correct, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because, especially as web people, a lot of us are like work and do our work by ourselves in front of a computer.

Emily Lewis: And we'd pat ourselves.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly. Exactly, that's self-taught situation where you're like, "Well, it's working, but is it?"

Emily Lewis: Oh yeah.

Lea Alcantara: And then when you see someone that you admire or respect or perceive as an expert, say something that you're doing already.

Emily Lewis: That you're doing already.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly. You're like, "That is awesome."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I mean, again it depends on the person too, because I mean, a lot of people could also take the tack where it's like, "Well, he just said what I always do anyway, right?" But that's up to the individual to get what they want to get from a presentation, and I just want to impress on people that, again, you can't please everyone.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And that even though you'll never be able to a hundred percent always be happy with all criticisms, I think it's good to try to parse and get used to being okay with negative criticism, you know?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] I think that's a good point. I still have a bit of thin skin so I'm still struggling.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: It's getting easier.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: But yeah, the more you're exposed to it, the more you realize that it's not the end of the world and you still have friends. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Yeah, exactly, and I mean, before we wrap up, one thing that I should point out that speaking helps establish you as an expert, right?

Emily Lewis: Yes.

Lea Alcantara: So if you are someone who feels like they've got something to say, or again, like it doesn't have to be the most innovative thing in the world, but it might have a unique twist on something that most people think of, I would say try and speak about it because that's the way to establish yourself apart from everyone because most people don't speak.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Most people don't speak, most people don't present, and there is actually a lot of opportunities to do so.

Emily Lewis: Oh yeah, just as a local user group manager, we are always looking for someone who is willing to stand up for an hour and talk about something that they are doing.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And especially in your local community, the more you know what other people in your town are doing, the more resources you have either for hanging out and having a beer or for hiring someone to bring on to a project when you need help.

Lea Alcantara: For sure, for sure. I think speaking keeps you top of mind.

Emily Lewis: It absolutely does, and you sort of brought it up, this positions you as an expert, it is the marketing tool. There is no question that I've gotten inquiries from people who've seen a presentation I've given on content management systems or EE, and they either want to talk to me about a project or they want to talk to me about some training. Once you've done it, your name does get out and then if you take advantage of posting your deck online or something, it then has that sort of broader reach.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, for sure, for sure, and it gives you more assets to add onto your web presence, et cetera and so forth, like putting it on SlideShare or those other different presentation places to get your name out and more exposure, et cetera, et cetera and so forth.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: For sure. Okay, so I think that's all the time we have for today.

Emily Lewis: I must say, Lea, I'm so glad we pulled together this episode at the last minute. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yes, I agree. You see, this is a testament to us being speakers. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Okay, alright, so [music] we would like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, [EngineSummit](#) 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. If you want to know more about the podcast, make sure you follow us on Twitter [@eepodcast](#) or visit our website, ee-podcast.com. Visit our [schedule page](#) to find out when we will have Nevin on to talk hosting.



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Emily Lewis: And be sure to tune in to our next episode when depending on what happens with Nevin who we may be doing our first listener mail bag and sharing some of the results of our listener survey, speaking of, don't forget our survey closes tonight at midnight Mountain. That's midnight, May 31st, visit bit.ly/ee-podcast-survey to let us know what you think about the podcst.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara.

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis.

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

Emily Lewis: Cheers.

[Music stops]