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EE Podcast #81 Get to Know #eemcs: Kyle Cotter

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Emily Lewis: You are listening to the ExpressionEngine Podcast Episode #81. Today we are continuing our “Get to Know #eecms” series with special guest, Kyle Cotter. I’m your host, Emily Lewis. Unfortunately, my fab co-host, Lea Alcantara, lost her voice so she won’t be joining us today.

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Hi folks, so we don’t have Lea joining us today. Normally, we do kick off the show with a little news and a little banter. Since that’s probably going to be pretty boring with me just talking to myself, I’d like to introduce our guest, [Kyle Cotter](#), right away. Kyle is a designer and developer who owns [Cotter Interactive](#). When he’s not busy running his own interactive studio, he’s also contributing to EE Insider and the community in general. Welcome Kyle, thanks for joining me today.

Kyle Cotter: Thanks for having me on, Emily. How are you?

Emily Lewis: I’m doing well. How about you? Have you recovered from EECI?

Kyle Cotter: I have, and I’m more pumped than ever to start working on some cool ExpressionEngine stuff.



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Emily Lewis: So that does mean that you learned something new about EECI or about some tips?

Kyle Cotter: Mainly just being with the community for four days straight and just being around people who continually make amazing things that made me want to go home and do something awesome.

Emily Lewis: That's always how I feel any time I've attended EECI. So this one was a little different than previous ones. It was at a venue that was kind of – isolated is too strong of a word but it's sort of off on its own – and it kind of have all the amenities in one place. What did you think of the venue?

Kyle Cotter: The venue itself, I'd think it was the nicest EECI and everything was in one location, which was cool. Definitely, I didn't have the ability to go out and venture unless you had a car with you. But I still think the ability to have everyone in one location kind of forced you to talk with everybody. I think that was nice and different than previous years.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I think so too. I feel like I ran into folks in the restaurant area or the bar area a lot more than I probably would have had people ventured out to bars in the area or something like that.

Kyle Cotter: Definitely.

Emily Lewis: So did you have a key takeaway?

Kyle Cotter: I think Chris Imrie's demo of Site Manager kind of blew my mind, and definitely, Ryan Irelan's talk on just again promoting how awesome this community is and why it's so cool to be a part of something where everyone is so dedicated in what they do.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I agree. I missed Chris' presentation because I was on the other track, but I did catch Ryan's and I saw the showcase of our community. I also really liked myself, I liked Brad Parscale's presentation. As much as I love learning new tricks about EE and since I run my own business, I'm fascinated with how other people approach business, and I just love how Brad



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explained his model and he seems to be doing really well with this, so it's making me rethink how can I approach projects.

Kyle Cotter: Definitely yeah, and I liked Blake Walter's talk. He gave one on – I don't really do core add-on development as I'm getting more and more into add-on development for site-specific projects – and so his talk was kind of a primer for getting really into building your own add-on, and I think he did a really good job as setting the foundation in how to get started. So I took a lot from that.

Emily Lewis: So do you think you'll give it a try to write an add-on as some point?

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, I do. I've written a few, again, specific on projects that I've been able to get working, but Blake was kind of more how you can abstract that and maybe you can even sell it just for a few bucks. So just stuff like that was kind of useful to learn and take away.

Emily Lewis: So I have to ask, what did you think about the [live EE Podcast at EECl](#)?

Kyle Cotter: I thought it was really, really well done. It was really energetic, especially with Anna Brown on there.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: I think she won the quiz show.

Emily Lewis: Right, the Masters challenge.

Kyle Cotter: Yes, and I think the whole thing was really well and we were able to stream it live, which was really cool, and it was a nice way to end the conference.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, that was what we were aiming for. We want to give everyone a bit of a flavor of EECl that really make it fun and sort of close out the conference with a high-level of energy. So I'm glad it sounds like we achieved that, and for anyone who's listening who hasn't tuned in to that live podcast, I definitely suggest you give it a listen. Oh, another thing I want to mention that if you want to get a flavor of EECl, Kyle, you put together a video recap on EE Insider?



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Kyle Cotter: Yeah, so when I got that from Texas, I said, “Hey Ryan, I have this cool idea. I took a few pictures and recorded a few things so can I put together this video kind of recapping what happened?” He was like, “Yeah, sure, go ahead.” So I did that and I used to work at EllisLab, and I’m sure we’ll get into that in a bit, but I did some videos with them and that really perked my interest in doing videos. So I bought Final Cut and everything. I’ve been playing with that on the side. So doing that for EE Insider gave me a chance to kind of play around with that more and I think it turned out really nice and I gave a nice recap of the amazing things that happened at EECl.

Emily Lewis: I agree. I thought your production was really high quality. I was pleased to see a video post. I quite enjoyed it. I hope to see more of that kind of stuff on EE Insider.

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, me too.

Emily Lewis: Well, the last bit of news I want to cover before we get into getting to know you a little better, Kyle, is the Stack Exchange proposal. So basically, after last week’s EECl keynote, Pat Pohler, who was also speaking at EECl, he started an ExpressionEngine proposal on the community Q&A site for Stack Exchange. His goal is to create essential place or an alternative place for EE users to post questions and get answers from the community. The proposal moved from definition stage to commitment stage in less than a week, which is apparently pretty rapid, but he still needs some community support to move to beta. At present, we have over 225 people committed to the proposal, but at least a hundred of those people need to actively participate in other Stack Exchange community sites to gain “reputation points.” So Kyle, you and I are talking a little bit before we started recording. You were saying that you hadn’t really used Stack Exchange that much. Do you think that might change with this proposal?

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, I haven’t actually used any of these before. I mean, I read through it and I never actually signed up or clicked anything. But like I told you beforehand, if the community thinks that this is the best way to go and get support or to pose questions, then I definitely support it.



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Emily Lewis: Yeah, I personally have also not used Stack Exchange. I will say, not to be a negative Nelly about the whole thing, I'm a little confused as to why we are moving from the EE forums to this platform. I was reading though that Stack Exchange, the way the Q&A functions eliminates some issues with forums, but I wasn't quite clear on what those issues are. So I'm excited to see how it moves forward and how the community utilizes it, and then what the repercussions are on the EE forums.

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, it will be interesting to see how those all plays out or go.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Kyle Cotter: I'm a fan of getting and seeing the question and then having an answer uploaded. It kind of gives me more confidence that that's the correct answer.

Emily Lewis: Right, and I imagine that when you get to see sort of someone's reputation that can weigh their answer a little differently if you ask a question.

Kyle Cotter: Right, right.

Emily Lewis: So for those listeners interested in supporting the effort, I'll be sure to include links to the proposal in our show notes. That's all the news I have for today. Now, let's get to know Kyle a little better. So Kyle, as I mentioned in the beginning in your little bio, I mentioned that you are a designer and developer, and that's something I gleaned from your Cotter Interactive site. You offer design and development. But when you're discussing your work with maybe a prospect or maybe even answering your aunt's question at Christmas, what's your job title? What do you do? Do you consider yourself a designer or a developer, or do you consider yourself both?

Kyle Cotter: I definitely consider myself more of a designer front end developer type. The whole designing everything with Photoshop to converting it to HTML, CSS, JavaScript and then implementing it in ExpressionEngine or whatever other tool I think is the appropriate tool to use. As far as PHP and hardcore back end development, like I said, I'm not really much an add-on developer



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for ExpressionEngine and my PHP skills are something to be desired. Is that the proper phrasing? I was trying to subtly insult myself.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: My PHP skills are horrible is what I'm essentially saying. So I'm more of a front-end developer, but I'm good at ExpressionEngine and designing.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] Running your own agency, do you have a typical day or does your schedules change each day?

Kyle Cotter: This is actually all kind of new for me in a sense.

Emily Lewis: How long have you been running Cotter Interactive?

Kyle Cotter: I'll try and make the story short. I started Cotter Interactive and I put that in air quotes back in, I think it was 9th grade or 10th grade maybe. I was at 10th grade at the time. I just graduated high school this past June, so back in 10th grade I started Cotter Interactive where I was doing some a few client projects that the school had actually sent to me, and then I finally got it set up and recognized as an official business type thing, and then I had started working for EllisLab, so Cotter Interactive kind of took the back seat for a bit as that was kind of my primary focus. So I left EllisLab back in September. That's when I had decided, "You know what, let's just go do and freelance on my own. Take this Cotter Interactive brand and kick it up in a notch." So I've been doing the Cotter Interactive freelance for two months straight now, mixed in with the previous years of doing it not a 100%.

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Emily Lewis: You mentioned something about graduating from high school this year, just so our listeners are clear. Am I correct, you're 18?

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, I just 18 at the end of August.



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Emily Lewis: That seems really impressive for me that four years ago or I guess when you were in 9th grade or 10th grade that you started something and doing projects on the side and now that you've graduated, you're just sort of going to dive right in and see what you can do with it. Have you always been that way, just sort of taking on? That seems like a big challenge for someone so young.

Kyle Cotter: The weird thing is, well, I kind of find it weird, that I started doing web design back or I took a web design class in 7th grade and ever since then it's like, "Oh my God, this is really cool. I think I want to stick with that."

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Kyle Cotter: And I stuck with it all the way through up until now, and I don't see myself doing anything else, and I've had six or seven years to kind of learn and refine everything and learn from people. My teacher in high school had his own business on the side, Zac Gordon. So he was already up to date with HTML 5, CSS 3, which is really impressive for a school environment.

Emily Lewis: It is.

Kyle Cotter: So he was teaching me all these. He had his own business, he was teaching me business practices, and taking all that, it has definitely how I'm able to do what I do today.

Emily Lewis: It is impressive. So you're mostly self-taught then aside from a few classes here and there?

Kyle Cotter: Yeah. My teacher, Zac Gordon, did a great job in teaching the foundations and pointing me to other resources which have definitely helped me to know everything that I know today.

Emily Lewis: Wow! I'm impressed. I didn't even realize that high schools were offering these types of classes.

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, it was actually really cool. The high school I went to had a four-year web program.

Emily Lewis: Oh gosh, wow!



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Kyle Cotter: So you would take the web design class at your freshman year of high school where they tell you HTML, CSS and design principles, and then at your sophomore year, you took a development class which actually taught CodeIgniter, and then your junior and senior year, you actually worked for an internship. The school actually had a web program, a web business setup. So the school got clients from the community who needed simple websites and the school would have you build them and then you got paid.

Emily Lewis: If they had that kind of program when I went to high school, I would have shown up a whole lot more often. [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: [Laughs] Yes. So yeah, definitely be the foundation and getting that experience early helped.

Emily Lewis: That is really fantastic. That kind of gives me hope for budding web designers and developers that this is being introduced in schools at that early of a stage.

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, I definitely am thankful for everything that I was able to learn.

Emily Lewis: So given that you've already had sort of four years of training and you've had a lot of real life experience working on projects and working with EllisLab, I'm sure just exposed you to a lot. Do you think you will pursue higher education, getting on Computer Science degree or something like that, or do you feel like you can continue growing on your own and work through the community?

Kyle Cotter: I think Mitchell is going to smack me when he hears my answer.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: This was tossed out definitely a lot when I was senior high school. Everyone kind of knew that I did web and knew I was good at it. They asked me if I was going to college, but I told them and I had work to show for what I'd already done so they were more accepting with the fact that I hadn't actually planned on doing anything.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]



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Kyle Cotter: That's not to say maybe in a year or so, I'll take some business classes just to get caught up on the business side, but I don't see me doing any four-year degree university type thing. I know I like the web industry and I'm going to stick with it, so that's why I use things like conferences, EEI and An Event Apart and something like that to keep up on current trends and what I need to go and learn and that type of thing. I think that's more beneficial and more practical as opposed to going to a college where you don't use half the stuff you learn.

Emily Lewis: I couldn't agree with you more. I also think that the fact that you've been such an active contributor in the community probably reinforces the knowledge that you've gleaned at conferences and from other people. I know myself whenever I have to write about something, it really kind of solidifies it in my mind what it is that I'm communicating.

Kyle Cotter: Right.

Emily Lewis: So you've been doing web design and development since early high school. How long have you been working with EE?

Kyle Cotter: Going back to my teacher, Zac Gordon, in 9th grade, he had a teaching website where we would go to for the class assignments and everything, and I noticed that he was able to add information to his website without editing HTML.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Kyle Cotter: So I was like, "Hey, what are you doing there? What is that?" He said, "Oh, this is ExpressionEngine." I think it was version 1.6.4 at the time.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Kyle Cotter: And I was like, "Oh, that's really cool." And I went to the EE website. I saw they had a core free version and I downloaded it, got it set up, and just started playing around with it, and I had him there to answer any of my questions. So at the same time I started getting really into the whole web things when I picked EE.



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Emily Lewis: So has that been the primary CMS you've worked with, or have you worked with others?

Kyle Cotter: And that is my primary CMS at the moment, though things like Statamic or Statam, I knew I was going to butcher that one.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: Whatever Jack McDade built.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: Between that for a smaller type brochure sites, I'm definitely looking forward to trying that out for something where EE isn't the primary tool.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Kyle Cotter: As well as what Brandon Kelly came up with, I'm really, really, really looking forward to that.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, yeah. I think it's nice that we are starting to see more options in the CMS realm that EE just isn't always the right fit.

Kyle Cotter: Right.

Emily Lewis: Sometimes it's almost too much for a project, and I worked with MojoMotor in the past. I've been pretty happy with it, but I also got a chance to take a peek at, you mentioned Brandon Kelly's Blocks CMS, and I think that might be what I might turn to more frequently when EE is just more than a project needs. I haven't had a chance to mess with Statamic yet, but Ian Pitts we had on the show sometime last year to talk about version control, he's been rebuilding his personal site and he raves about it. So I'm definitely looking forward to giving it a shot. I also like just the cheaper price points.



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Kyle Cotter: Yeah, that's really nice too. A lot of the work I do is EE, but I also do a lot of front-end development, PSD conversions and PSD design, which also is a different call for CMS.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Kyle Cotter: With that also, I really enjoy doing front-end development. That's actually what I really, really like. So between that and ExpressionEngine and these other tools for backup, I think my toolbox is pretty full.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I also love front end. It's hands down my favorite, even more than EE. As much as I like EE, I get very happy writing HTML and CSS. [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: Yes.

Emily Lewis: So when you do work on those sort of strictly front end projects, are you just called in as a resource or to do it and likely involved with the process of the design?

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, a lot of that is just subcontracting work. I'll get the PSD to slice and send back and honestly they like that. I don't have to deal with the client. I just deal with my point of reference and get that, and often I get paid, which makes me happy.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Now, with regard to ExpressionEngine, do you consider yourself to have a strength in it?

Kyle Cotter: It's just the whole flexibility of it and how I can do something so fast in it. The fact that EE conforms to me and not me conforming to it, I think that's really, really nice. So definitely the whole structuring things out and breaking down what different channels I need and the whole planning phase, really I enjoy planning everything up. That way I can just go straight into building it really easily and making sure everything is set up correctly. My strength really is just having this problem and then using EE to find the solution when EE is going to be proper tool.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] When you are working with EE, you do encounter a challenge, what's your go-to resource?



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Kyle Cotter: Google. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Google. [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: So it depends. Depending on what kind of issue, I'll definitely exhaust my resources in trying to find the answer before I ask someone.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Kyle Cotter: And if it resorts me asking someone, let's say for an add-on, I'll try and use their support if it's something add-on specific. But if it's more of a general inquiry, Twitter is actually really, really good for getting started in finding your answer, and 140 characters isn't a ton obviously, but it's enough where the questions I have encountered I've been able to ask them there and they've pointed me in the right direction and I was able to figure it out. So definitely utilizing the community is nice.

Emily Lewis: You mentioned what you liked about EE, how it allows you to solve problems. Is there anything that you don't like about EE, or it's something that you just are constantly hitting a brick wall in?

Kyle Cotter: The control panel isn't my favorite, which is why I wrote Sassy-CP, shameless plug right there, and to kind of tweak and clean up the control panel and to remove the kink. Actually, I built that in Sassy, so you can easily switch out the primary code and it will replace everything.

Emily Lewis: Oh nice.

Kyle Cotter: And so that's been on a site that I've been working on that I'm really happy with. But more, not really an issue with EE, just more an issue with me. When I have my template and then I go to test it in the output profiler, it shows that something in parse right, so in stupid parse order, and I go and look a bit. I go and look at Low's PDF and figure out what I did wrong, and it's not really an issue, it's just tedious and it makes me slap myself when I realize I did something stupid.

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Emily Lewis: [Laughs] I know I've yet to completely have parse order memorized or something that I can just pull from my brain without having to look at Low's PDF.

Kyle Cotter: Right, and then for Stash then it makes it really, really...

Emily Lewis: Yeah. I've been using Stash recently and I love what I've been able to do with it, but I know it's just the tip of the iceberg.

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, definitely. It's the same here.

Emily Lewis: We mentioned a little bit about your time with EllisLab. I'm just curious. Was that an internship, or was it a paid job?

Kyle Cotter: It was June of 2011 I started interning for them, and then EECI 2011 in New York was that October and November, and then after that, it started as a part time job up until...

Emily Lewis: Oh cool. So do you feel like it was one of those things that got you familiar with "real job"?

Kyle Cotter: Yes, definitely getting to see how a group of – it was 14 or so at the time – how a group of those people worked together, it definitely got me more into the forums and interacting with the community there because the community there isn't the same on Twitter necessarily.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Kyle Cotter: It kind of just got me exposed to – you're right – more of the real world workforce and it's definitely a lot different than running your own shop.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Kyle Cotter: So I definitely think there were some good things to take away from that experience. It was my first internship and first real job so I'm definitely glad I did it and had a lot of fun.



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Emily Lewis: [Agrees] Good. Now that you are two months into kind of fully committing to Cotter Interactive, do you have a plan or a strategy for getting new work, or are you lucky enough to rely on word of mouth?

Kyle Cotter: So my plan, actually right before EECI, I completely revamped the business site, CotterInteractive.com, and I just finished my new personal site which is really simple. But I think just giving that facelift, for me, it kind of “marked” the new beginning and gave me the jumpstart I needed. I really like how it turned out. It’s all HTML 5, CSS 3, SVG and all of that good stuff. It really gave me a chance to push what I was doing. But a lot of the work I get has been word of mouth, and that’s why these conferences and Twitter and everything is good for the networking because if you know people who say the project they are looking for are different than the ones you’re looking for. If they get projects that they don’t want, they’ll pass them your way which is really, really nice. So knowing people is definitely a huge plus.

Emily Lewis: Do you do any local networking? You’re in Silver Spring, Maryland, right?

Kyle Cotter: Yes, that’s about 20 minutes outside of DC, so there are a lot of DC events for the web. I don’t know if you’re familiar with nclud. They actually were just acquired by Twitter not too long ago, but they have a coworking space downtown where they have hosted a lot of events every month. I go down there a lot and they really a great people to know and they have a lot of community events, be it from design to development to all sorts of different web-related stuff, so that’s really cool. Actually, we hosted a DC ExpressionEngine event, me and Jessica D’Amico, back in...

Emily Lewis: The DCEers?

Kyle Cotter: Yeah, the DCEers, they are just...

Emily Lewis: I heard it’s a great success.

Kyle Cotter: Yes. It turned out really, really nice. Jessica and I, we hosted that actually down at the nclud coworking space and we got like 60 people to come out and that was really, really fun with



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really nice venue, really nice day with a lot of good speakers. So definitely getting involved in a local community is also really nice.

Emily Lewis: Now, I have to ask this question because I'm thinking of myself at age 18 and I wasn't very confident, I wasn't very articulate. So do you find it challenging to go to these network events and perhaps even being maybe the youngest person in the room? Are you shy? Are you introverted, or have you chosen an outgoing kind of person and it's easy for you?

Kyle Cotter: You considering me an outgoing person makes me laugh because I'm not.

Emily Lewis: Well, you were really friendly at EECl. [Laughs]

Kyle Cotter: That's because I know all of you people. Now, seriously, I'm more of an introvert. So if you put me in a room with a bunch of people I don't know, I'll be the guy in the corner being quiet. But having again developed these relationships online, knowing that you all like the same stuff I do, that kind of gave me the confidence to come out of my shell a bit, and like I said, the people in the local community I've known them for a few years now so when I go to these events, it's kind of the same people so I got to form a course with them and get to know them a bit more. So yes, I guess you can say I'm a friendly guy, but once you get to know. Once I get to know you and you know who I am, but by definition, I think I'm an introvert.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. All right, so that's all the time we have for our standard interview questions. Before we conclude, we, Lea and I got a cue from Inside the Actors Studio and created our own version of the famous Ten Questions.

Kyle Cotter: Oh boy.

Emily Lewis: So I'm going to shoot these at you a little rapid style, Kyle, and are you ready?

Kyle Cotter: Yes, let's do this.

Emily Lewis: All right, Mac OS or Windows?

Kyle Cotter: Mac.



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Emily Lewis: What is your favorite mobile app?

Kyle Cotter: Oh, Tweetbot.

Emily Lewis: What's your least favorite thing about social media?

Kyle Cotter: How much time it eats up.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. [Laughs] What profession other than yours would you like to attend?

Kyle Cotter: Cooking.

Emily Lewis: What profession would you not like to do?

Kyle Cotter: Garbage man.

Emily Lewis: Who is the web professional you admire the most?

Kyle Cotter: Carl Smith of nGen Works.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees] What music do you like to code to?

Kyle Cotter: Oh, Passion Pit is my current obsession, although Two Door Cinema Club is my all time favorite.

Emily Lewis: And do you have a secret talent?

Kyle Cotter: Secret talent, secret talent. I can arrange the Buckyballs EngineHosting gave me back into the cube they came in.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Oh, I've been trying to do that since I got them.

Kyle Cotter: I consider that a talent because it took me like a day to figure it out.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] What's the most recent book you read?

Kyle Cotter: I think it was actually *Responsive Design* from A Book Apart by... who wrote that?

Emily Lewis: Oh, Ethan. It's Ethan Marcotte, the *Responsive Web Design*?



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Kyle Cotter: Yes, he wrote that. I knew he was one of the big guys. Yes, but that was my latest read which was a few months ago, so you can tell how much I read.

Emily Lewis: And lastly, Star Wars or Star Trek?

Kyle Cotter: Star Wars all the way.

Emily Lewis: Nice. All right, so that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for joining me, Kyle. Thank you.

Kyle Cotter: Well, thank you for having me.

Emily Lewis: Oh, it's been a pleasure. In case our listeners want to follow up with you, where they can find you online?

Kyle Cotter: You can find me on Twitter [@kylecotter](https://twitter.com/kylecotter) as well as kylecotter.com and cotterinteractive.com.

Emily Lewis: Thanks again, Kyle.

Kyle Cotter: Thank you.

[Music]

Emily Lewis: Now, I'd like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, [EE Garage](#) and [Pixel & Tonic](#). I'd also like to thank our partners, [EngineHosting](#) and [Devot:ee](#).

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Don't forget to tune in to our next episode when we will be talking to Paul Burton about contracts and business practices. This is Emily Lewis signing off for the ExpressionEngine Podcast. Cheers.

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