



CTRL+CLICK CAST #14 Organizing Conferences with Environments for Humans

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Lea Alcantara: You are listening to CTRL+CLICK CAST. We inspect the web for you! Today we're talking about organizing web industry conferences and events with Ari Stiles and Christopher Schmitt of Environment for Humans. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host:

Emily Lewis: Emily Lewis.

Lea Alcantara: This episode is sponsored by [Squarespace](#), the all-in-one platform that makes it fast and easy to create your own professional website or online portfolio. For a free trial and 10% off your first purchase, go to squarespace.com/click and use offer code CLICK.

Emily Lewis: CTRL+CLICK would also like to thank [Pixel & Tonic](#) for being our major sponsor of the year. [Music ends] Hi Lea, I'm not even going to ask you how you're doing.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Because I think you're amazing since you're leaving tomorrow for an Ecuadorian vacation.

Lea Alcantara: Yes. I am so excited. Well, actually, to be honest, I'm like half anxious, half excited because it's kind of going to be an adventure vacation.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: One of our plans is to go to The Swing at The End of the World.

Emily Lewis: Oooh.



Lea Alcantara: And I think that's one of those like things that people ride in travel magazines, things to do before you die.

Emily Lewis: Oh, right.

Lea Alcantara: Although I feel like I might actually die.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I was going to say don't die.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. Just google Swing at the End of the World, and you'll see why I'm half excited, half anxious about that.

Emily Lewis: Well, I'm sure it will be awesome. I went skydiving once.

Lea Alcantara: Oh wow!

Emily Lewis: And it was one of those where I was petrified, but I was like, "I have to do it." My best friend from college, she's an avid skydiver and BASE jumper. She's got like – I don't know – I think it's like 500 jumps under her belt.

Lea Alcantara: Holy!

Emily Lewis: And she spent ten years trying to convince me to do it, and I finally broke down and did it, and here was how I got through it. I didn't think about it. I accepted I was going to do it, and I refused to think at all about it. I just went through the motions of getting my gear in place and doing all the lessons, and then I just did it. I didn't think about it. So don't think about it.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



Emily Lewis: Just do it.

Lea Alcantara: Well, I think I might sit on the swing, but I don't know if I'll actually swing.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Because...

Emily Lewis: Oh, come on!

Lea Alcantara: There is this swing at the End of the World. Well, it's a tourist thing, but it's really not a tourist thing because there's no safety harness.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: There's no safety. It's literally ropes, plank of wood on a tree that's perched at the end of a cliff. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Okay, well, do everything you can to come home. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yes, I will try. I think I will. I think I will.

Emily Lewis: We've got a ton of information to cover today and a bunch of news, so let's go ahead and dive into some news about content management systems. Since our last episode, Statamic has been super busy. They're releasing updates to their commercial search add-on Bloodhound, creating a new default theme called Acadia and adding new screencast. We'll have links in the show notes.

Lea Alcantara: In Craft CMS news, there's a cool new site called Craft Cookbook, and we'll have the link in the show notes. It essentially allows you to browse "recipes."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]



Lea Alcantara: Something very specific like a quick solution to some sort of functionality like future event listings, or like adding a file extension to a Craft URL. So specific things that aren't really in the main documentation because that's more for how the content management system works, which is more high level. So this site is more easy to bookmark than, say, the Google Plus group which might have the like tiny how-tos, but now here it is all in one site, and it's actually quite a nice looking site too.

Emily Lewis: Oh cool. In Perch news, they're working on a new version of blog, and new things include post being completely template driven and adding sections as another way to organize and filter posts. If you want to get in on the 4.0 beta, you should email drew at hello@grabaperch.com.

Lea Alcantara: And there's a lot of EE news this week.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: The biggest, of course, is that EE 2.8 is now out.

Emily Lewis: Awesome.

Lea Alcantara: So we'll have a link to the show notes where it explains exactly what that means.

Emily Lewis: Cool.

Lea Alcantara: And John Macpherson of Media Surgery is gathering data on ExpressionEngine pricing, and we'll have a link to that survey. So if you're an EE dev, consider taking a few minutes to complete this online survey and we'll have link to the show notes.

Emily Lewis: And more EE news, there are a few conferences coming up that have started to make the rounds in social media. The ExpressionEngine Conference issued a call for speakers, so if you have an interesting topic you'd like to discuss, contact Brad Parscale ASAP. No date has been set



for the conference yet, but while you're waiting for that, there is a new EE conference in Leiden in June called GeeUp. It's being run by community add-on superstar Low. We'll have links in the show notes.

Lea Alcantara: And again, with our theme of conferences for this episode, we have some exciting news regarding Peers Conference. CTRL+CLICK CAST will be giving away one conference ticket to a lucky listener!

Emily Lewis: Woohoo!

Lea Alcantara: So if you want to qualify, please follow us on Twitter [@ctrlclickcast](#), and the conference Twitter account [@peersconf](#), and we'll have more details in the coming weeks.

Emily Lewis: And as always, if we overlooked news about a CMS you favor or are interested in, let us know and we'll get it on our radar for future episodes.

Today we're talking about putting together conferences and events with the masterminds behind Environments for Humans, Ari Stiles and Christopher Schmitt. Environments for Humans hosts the annual In Control Web Workshop Conference as well as a series of online summits year round, which brings some of the best and brightest minds together to create unique event experiences. Welcome to the show, Ari and Christopher. Thanks for joining us.

Christopher Schmitt: Cool, thank you very much.

Ari Stiles: It's great.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, it's awesome.

Ari Stiles: It's good to be here.



Lea Alcantara: So while Emily gave a brief bio of about Environments for Humans, can you tell our listeners a little bit more about you guys as individuals. So why don't we start with Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: I'm 6-foot 7 ... I like long walks on the beach ...

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And it's taking everything in my power to keep him from getting out of the chair and running to Ecuador.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: We looked at the pictures of The Swing while you were talking about it.

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs] Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Holy moly...

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, it's pretty sweet.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: So I don't know. Besides, well, I've been a web developer since 1993. I was a designer, but I follow sports. I guess I'm a sports dude, but I get tired of dudes talking about sports.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, he's not that guy about sports.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Ari Stiles: But he likes sports.

Christopher Schmitt: I just like watching the game and then not talking about them for 24 hours.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: And then I like avoiding the gym. I find new ways to not go to the gym.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: That's my thing.

Ari Stiles: We're both pretty creative about that.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and then we travel. We've traveled a lot since we've known each other. So I travel and find weird and new things to do, and so the last year it was like basically taking Ari to new places that I actually I had been before, so it was really fun.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So how about you, Ari?

Ari Stiles: Well, let's see, currently, obviously, I'm doing and working on conferences the majority of my time, but when I'm not doing that, I very much like yoga and meditation. And actually South By Southwest (SXSW) is coming up, and that's one of my favorite times of the year because I get to introduce yoga and meditation to a lot of new people because we schedule classes as part of SXSW. It's something that I started when I actually used to work for SXSW, so that's always fun for me because we get a lot of new people that show up and maybe have not tried it before. And I work



pretty hard at making it accessible to folks who maybe haven't done it before and also make the practice accessible to you no matter where you are. So rather than thinking about like special equipment or special places that you might be, I like to make it a little bit easier to attain. So let's see, and then I'm at home a lot. I work from a home office. I'm taking care of kids a lot of the time too.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: So I'm staying pretty busy.

Christopher Schmitt: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Awesome. So we mentioned earlier some of the conference you guys organize, and Ari sort of mentioned it that you work with SXSW. So how did you both get into the event organizing business in the first place?

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, I've doing web design for a long time, and then I've been speaking at conferences for a while. So I would go to conferences and see how things were run. You go to some conferences where you just show up, open your laptop and then speak, and then you're done. Then some conferences, they will just go all out and have a nice experience. And so I was like just making mental notes as to which ones did a great job in terms of helping the speakers, but also helping curate the content a little better towards the attendees and what they're doing.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And I actually made a bucket list to put on a conference.

Lea Alcantara: Oh cool.

Emily Lewis: Oh.



Christopher Schmitt: And then I just said, “I’m just going to do it. I don’t care if it fails or whatnot.” I was a board member... I was a board member for AIGA Cincinnati, which I don’t know if you will know what AIGA is, but it’s a professional association for designers, and it doesn’t have to be any specific type of designer, it could be web graphic or print designer. And so it took me a year to convince them to do a web design conference in Cincinnati, and then I got the go ahead to do it, which was really cool. But then I had six months to pull it together.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Christopher Schmitt: By that time, I met Ari, and so Ari is a big help in putting that together, and so we got a big list of names like Mark Trammell, Stephanie Rewis.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, I was just looking for the pictures the other day on that first one.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah. Yeah, like we had a lot of cool people there, and awesome people speaking there. And we filled this room that we’re told could fit a 100 people, and when they were sitting down, we could only fit 60 people.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: It’s a lie. It’s a lie.

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: It’s not the first time I’ve been lied to about how many people they could fit.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah. So it was like a concrete art school building or a school for art, or it’s for an art school.

Ari Stiles: Yes.



Christopher Schmitt: And so...

Ari Stiles: Everything about the room was hard.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: It was concrete floors with cinder block walls.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and since Cindy Li was with us.

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Ari Stiles: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: She flew in from San Francisco to help us out. And by the end of Day 2, it was like just a sweatbox, I just remember.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: It was like all human heat coming there. But we did a survey afterwards.

Ari Stiles: Pure brain power.

Christopher Schmitt: We said we're going to do surveys, how you did, and everyone loved it.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: It was like it was just the greatest. I've never seen like people just loved it, everything about it. And we made sure that people have had a good time. Food was there. We really handpicked the speakers to get the best that we could, and after that it was pretty good, but then



around the time we're planning this conference, which is called the In Control Cincinnati, I saw a conference and all the conferences put on by Aral Balkan. What's the conference?

Ari Stiles: <head>.

Christopher Schmitt: I was at the <head> conference with like those angle brackets on the left and right side.

Ari Stiles: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: They called it <head>, so it was geeky.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And he was crazy.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Because he did two days, two tracks.

Ari Stiles: He'll tell you he was crazy.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, it was crazy, and yeah, with a lot of helpers, but he was just running around doing like 24 hours I don't know what, but it was crazy, but he asked me to speak.

Ari Stiles: They did a full weekend all day long for two days.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: So essentially like 48 hours with three tracks online.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Christopher Schmitt: Right, right.



Ari Stiles: It's insane.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and so I volunteered to speak, and I spoke and I spoke in my apartment to like my presentation I usually give to a crowd, and it was running great. I was looking at the chat room and all that. And once I was done, I had to fight this urge to go to my room, pack up my stuff and head to the airport.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Because what you do, like you go to the flight.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Or you go to different places and you pack up and you go, "I did my speech."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: It's time to pack it. So I actually leave my apartment and go on to lunch.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Because I had to like wrap up this. I do my routine, right?

Ari Stiles: In some in some way.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, so I thought this is so powerful that we have to continue this in some way. And so as we were doing In Control Cincinnati, which was a logistical nightmare to do the first time. I told Ari, I was like, "Hey, we should do an online conference for CSS nerds."

Ari Stiles: Yeah, because we immediately had that comparison right away of online versus onsite.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.



Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: Because he was like, “Hey, I just did this <head> thing, and it was so quick.”

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: You know?

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and so I knew lots of CSS people because I’m a big CSS nerd. I wrote the *CSS Cookbook* for O’Reilly. If you write *CSS Cookbook*, if you write anything cookbook for O’Reilly, you’re a big nerd about that topic.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: At the end of it, you’re like, “I’m a CSS nerd.”

Ari Stiles: It’s your confession.

Christopher Schmitt: Right, yeah.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: So I asked all these friends to help me out. So we experimented to see how it goes, and we went to actually to University of Cincinnati hosted...

Ari Stiles: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: Hosted us and actually, it’s not a really great technical term, but afterwards, I had a bunch of “warm and fuzzies” about it.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: I was like, "It was so great that people..."

Emily Lewis: That's how I felt after my first online summit with you guys.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Because it was one of those experiences where, I mean, I did it from my condo. I was in my pajamas.

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I don't have to stand up in front of a bunch of people, which always freaks me out. It was, but I felt connected from the chat room. So keeping with that idea, this online conference, Ari, what are some of the special needs for an online conference?

Ari Stiles: Something that we've found is that we definitely do still have that feeling of community. Because it's still a relatively new concept for a lot of people, occasionally we get people kind of pooh-poohing it like, "Oh, you can't sit around and have a beer together afterward, or that sort of thing," and to that I say, "Rubbish." [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Ari Stiles: I think part of what works well for us is that we're doing one subject at a time, and so I think part of the "warm fuzzies" that come from that is that the people that are coming are obviously very interested in that topic if they're willing and interested to sit through six to eight hours of talks on that one subject. You know they're really into it.

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And so because of that, a lot of times the attendees are thrilled to find each other. So obviously, the attendees need a great connection. They're going to have a better experience as long as they have lovely bandwidth. If they participate in social media, they're going to have a better experience throughout. I mean, we go on and on about the back-channel as conference organizers, and there are plenty of people who have a problem with it, but I don't. I think it's a great way for our people to connect with each other, and a lot of what conferences are about are the attendees finding each other. I think that's, for the attendees, what makes the conference experience great, whether you're onsite or online.

Then for the speakers, we need a little bit more. We go through and do a tech check with each of our speakers, and we have developed some bandwidth requirements over the years like we've noticed that this works better with XYZ because we have a document where we've just kind of listed all of that information. Especially when someone is brand new to it, I sit with them for about a half an hour going through, "Here are all the features of Adobe Connect, and these are the things that might make your presentation go a little bit easier," that sort of thing. We find that speakers, especially when they've never done it before, have a lot of trepidation about it.

Christopher Schmitt: Well, that's when we tell them you can speak in your pajamas.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Ari Stiles: That's right. Pants are optional, and for some people that puts them at ease, I don't know. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: But we find that once we go through that and just kind of help them enough with the technology so that the technology gets out of the way of their performance and they can focus on what they need to talk about. A lot of the speakers end up finding out that it's a very satisfying experience for them afterwards, even if they had some nerves about it or were nervous about how they might come across online.

Lea Alcantara: I would have to say as someone who spoke at one of your online summits. As a speaker, especially if you're just starting out new and if you're not familiar with it, one of the things that I really liked about speaking in an online conference was the fact that no one can see that I have my notes up.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: When you're preparing to speak in person, you kind of have to semi-memorize and do all those kind of preparations for speaking, but when you're doing an online conference, you can have your notes right in front of you so you don't miss a point.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: The likelihood of missing a point when you're in person because you're not reading out your notes is much higher than when you're literally semi-reading your notes.



Ari Stiles: Right.

Lea Alcantara: Because they can't tell. [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Right. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Well, just in general too, I think that speaks to the comfort of it.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: And I think that it's interesting because we've had a handful of speakers that have maybe given the same talk to live audience, maybe at one of our conferences, and online. And I can tell you that there's something about the online talk that's always a little bit more low key, maybe you're in your own environment like you said, you'd be able to look at your notes, and there's something to be said from just being in that comfortable place, and I think it plays into the whole being with a ... being with a group of people that are really into the topic too, I think is relaxing for everyone there because one of the things that always gets me whenever I see someone talk is they get up and they kind of like apologize for what they're into, you know? [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And a lot of times people do it to just break the tension, and I mean, even here, we're like, "Hey, I'm totally a nerd about conferences, and I apologize but not really." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Ari Stiles: So I think that's something that people tend to do to break the ice, but when you end up with it, when you're with a group of people, either onsite or online, that are really into that particular topic, that there's less of that feeling of "Is this okay that I'm really into this" because everyone there is.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Emily Lewis: Now, I'm just curious, really quickly you mentioned Adobe Connect. That's the main tool you guys use right now. Was that what you've used from the beginning, or have you tried others?

Christopher Schmitt: Oh, no, no.

Ari Stiles: Oh, good Lord.

Christopher Schmitt: No, we went with another software, which was called Dim Dim.

Ari Stiles: And when Lea spoke for us that first time, we were using Dim Dim.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: That's what made me think about it.

Christopher Schmitt: Oh yeah, and the running joke was that it Dumb Dumb.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: It was bought by...

Ari Stiles: We can see that now since it doesn't exist anymore.



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Christopher Schmitt: It was bought by Salesforce.com, was it?

Ari Stiles: I can't remember who bought it, but it's gone.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, they bought it, and I have no idea why they bought it. But that was so weird, like the features would change from one reason to another.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: It was a bad user interface.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, and I had a customer service call with them once in which I explained all the problems we've had in a particular event.

Ari Stiles: Chris was listening, speaking of times that people curse. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Chris was listening, and the gentleman on the other end of the line spent 20 minutes trying to convince me that I hadn't actually had the problems that were documented by me and by the attendees.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: I was amazed. That was one of the more interesting customer...

Christopher Schmitt: Good times.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, customer service calls.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, so we did three conferences with Dim Dim... online summits. We call our online conferences "summits", just so people would know like when they hear the word "summit," they know it is an online conference. I think that's just the way we rolled at the beginning. But we did



three online summits. One for CSS, one was general DIY for web developers and another one was a jQuery like official jQuery online summit, and so after that, I think we started researching.

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Ari Stiles: Well, I think jQuery was the nail on the coffin for it.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: We can't use this software anymore.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: It was awful.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and so we did some research. We looked at everything that was on the market at that time, and we went with Adobe Connect. There are a lot of solutions that a lot of one thing very well.

Ari Stiles: They would do one feature fabulously.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, so there's one app they have like full-feature video. You have like ten video streams going on at once, but everything else was terrible, like you couldn't chat. They didn't have anything for files or anything. So it was really great for video conferencing, but it wasn't really great for a conference that the way that we do conferences, and so Adobe Connect was kind of like this happy medium like it compromise for everything.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And so we've grown with it. They've grown up along the ways that we use them. And so kind of a short story back, but I remember the first time we actually did an online conference. We were traveling to our location with the CSS Summit, the first time we did a CSS



Summit, and I was making a speech in my head, “I’m going to apologize to everyone for failure.”

[Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Which is like, this is not going to work.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: He had the worst-case scenario going on into his head.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and it’s been great ever since. I don’t think we’ve never not had a conference online work. We’ve had some issues where things happen with me or a speaker or something like that.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: But it’s always been working, so yeah.

Ari Stiles: And people really hang in there too, I will say, that we’ve had the occasional strange thing happen, and people really hang in, and I think because of the convenience of it, and also because they’re again so happy to kind of be with their tribe.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: Because occasionally like just the speaker’s audio will drop out or something crazy happens in their neighborhood and their connection goes down or something like that, and so there’s this level of camaraderie in the chat room and on social media about it. People hang in there and we just always find a way to kind of make it up. I think in the five years of doing this, twice we’ve had to rerecord just one talk out of like a day’s full of talks.



Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: So little things come along and we've had to roll with it, but it's pretty rare.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, as a speaker too as well, I guess, as a business owner too, I think when you go on speak on a stage, you get the nerves and you try to speak.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: The tip I got from Molly Holzschlag like a long time ago, and I always carry it with me when I go on stage, is that remember that you're there to help people learn.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And I feel the same way when we work on a conference like we really want people to learn, and we're really helping them, and if people feel that from you, so they want you to win. They want you to do a great job with your presentation and helping do your job.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And so as long as you're earnest about what you're trying to do, the respect will be there both ways.

Emily Lewis: So let's compare the online challenges and considerations with an onsite event. What's unique about, especially compared to online, an onsite event?

Christopher Schmitt: The logistical nightmare of the onsite. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



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Ari Stiles: [Laughs] “Challenges” not “nightmare”!

Christopher Schmitt: Oh yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: “Challenges”, yeah.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: There are so many logistics that you have to do. You actually have to go to a venue. You actually have to put it on. You have to deal with more people. Because you see, when we do online events, we actually handle all the production ourselves.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, so just the two of us can do an online event.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: When we start to get into onsite events, we pull in other people to help us out.

Christopher Schmitt: Right, right, and so there are a lot of logistics, and mostly with online events, we have to deal with time zone issues. And with onsite conferences, we have fly speakers in, make sure their arrangements are there. I mean, we do CSS Dev Conference. The last time we did it, we did it The Stanley Hotel which is the inspiration for Stephen King’s *The Shining*.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: Which is a beautiful venue which happens to be a mile high...

Ari Stiles: A mile and a half.

Christopher Schmitt: A mile and a half up from sea level, and I found out that I have altitude sickness. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Christopher Schmitt: And so that was pretty fun for no one. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: So Ari was the one who got to do like 99% of the work, and I will be in this room and I'll try not to die.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Yeah, and so we just stationed him in one of the biggest of the track rooms.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: And just brought him things when we could, and you exceeded that room, and I just ran around ... The hotel itself is kind of set up like a campus. It had several buildings, and so I just running in between each.

Christopher Schmitt: Yes, so I was going to write a horror story because I was like, "I have altitude sickness. I can't do anything, but I'm trapped in this room that is haunted."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: That is known to be haunted, and everyone is going out to lunch, and I can't move or do anything. So that was my story.



Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: But not every place in there is haunted.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: Okay, so there were a lot more logistics we have to deal with and a lot more planning involved, and so it's a lot more work than I think an online version.

Ari Stiles: Well, yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: But an online summit though is the day of there are just so many plates you're spinning.

Ari Stiles: Right.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, and well, what's interesting about an onsite event is that, and I mean this in a good way because I'm fine and pleased to be responsible for a lot of things. It's kind of like everything is up to you. So if there's something wrong with the food, it's on you. Or if there's something wrong with the room, it's on you.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And it like kind of seeps into the social media channel and all that sort of thing.

Emily Lewis: Is that what you mean about bringing people on to help you, so it's not just you?

Ari Stiles: Right, right. Obviously, the venue has a lot of responsibility, and so...

Christopher Schmitt: And vendors also.



Ari Stiles: Right, and all the vendors have a lot of responsibility, and so this is where you're not going to do anything... We've decided a couple of years ago, we're not going to do anything site unseen anymore after being burned on a couple of small details, and so we go now when we do site visits just to make sure that little things from like there's nothing like walking through the actual space just to make sure that the things you have in mind are going to work, plus it gives you new ideas.

Christopher Schmitt: Right. The reason that you do an onsite visit is, one thing we're both concerned about is way finding, and how an attendee will get to the hotel or venue or whatever, what they would do next? Like what steps do they need to take to go to the registration booth? What steps they needed to take to go? What do they're going to do next after that?

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: During the conference itself, where they're going to be for lunch, or where do we want them to go? Is there space for it? I mean, we did In Control of Hawaii with AIGA Honolulu, which is not too bad.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And we had to solve the problem of we have all these people coming, we have nowhere to put them for lunch.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: So we had to like figure out where in this venue we're going to put like all of the people.

Ari Stiles: Right, and then the solution that they had for us, I mean, it was beautiful once you've got there, but it was this long and winding pathway with stairs and all of the stuff, you know?



Christopher Schmitt: Right, right.

Ari Stiles: And so I was like, “Hey, what if I have somebody who shows up in a wheelchair, what are you going to do then?” You know?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And we also always have volunteers when we are on site as well. And as a side note, we just kind of used that as a way for students who may not otherwise be able to attend, and as long as they’re able to help out a little bit with the conference, then they can attend the rest for free. But I had to assign a couple of volunteers, and usually we don’t have to do this, to walk people to lunch.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Ari Stiles: Because it was kind of a long and winding way to get there.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: Once they got there, they were thrilled because it was a gorgeous view of the beach while they ate their lunch, you know?

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: But little considerations like that pop up pretty regularly when you do onsite.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, with onsite, we really take a lot ... we take a lot of consideration into the experience of the person, the weather ... and so we’re trying to make sure we utilize the city location, the weather there.

Ari Stiles: Yes.



Christopher Schmitt: So CSS Dev Conference and The Stanley Hotel, we made sure it was a haunted hotel, but we made sure to like get a ghost tour of the hotel. And also, really good camping there, so we had s'mores.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: If you know the history of *The Shining*, there's a scene where a kid goes on tricycle or that Big Wheel bike and goes through. So we actually had an adult Big Wheel race around the hotel.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Which is like the first time they ever did it. We're like "no one has ever asked this?"

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: We are either huge nerds or we...

Ari Stiles: Right.

Christopher Schmitt: And so...

Ari Stiles: Well, that's my other thing is I really love horror movies, and just movies in general, but I'm kind of a horror buff, and so I know *The Shining* a little too well.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Ari Stiles: And so that was one of the things we asked on our site visit. And we thought, again, it's one of those things where it's like, "Hey, I'm kind of into this, but could we have a Big Wheel or tricycle race or whatever." And the women who were there that were taking us around the hotel just kind of looked at each other, and we thought, "Oh great, we're completely crazy." And she said, "No, actually we have some big wheels for adults in storage that we've been trying to figure out what to do with them because everybody is getting tired of stepping over them."

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And so it's weird. It turned into like we did it for the first time in as an event and they came out in photographed it and came up with an official track to use, and now they offer it as a regular event at The Stanley Hotel if you decide to take a group there.

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: So before we go on, we'd like to take a moment again to thank our sponsor [Squarespace](#). In the last episode, I mentioned that [Squarespace](#) is hiring for about 30 open positions and they're trying to sweeten the pot with also flying in a spouse or partner for a long weekend in New York if you're one of the chosen applicants to be interviewed. So if you're a dev engineer, try to get your application in ASAP since it looks like they're closing interviews on March 15. In the meantime, if you want to try the service out, they're giving our listeners a free trial and 10% off the first purchase. Just go to squarespace.com/click and use offer code CLICK. Now, back to the topic at hand.

Timestamp: 00:30:09



Emily Lewis: So regardless of whether it's online or in person, how do you decide, I guess, specifically for the summit since you say they are on a single topic.

Christopher Schmitt: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But how do you decide on those topics? Is this something where you're keeping tabs on industry interest or areas where you both feel personally are important and that drives the decision, or even feedback from past attendees?

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, so actually, one of the things if you ever attended the summit is that we do a survey follow up. And one of the things we really ask our attendees is that what topics do they want for us to look into doing another summit for. And the first year or two that we did it, accessibility came up from our own attendees, and so with Glenda Sims' help who is a big accessibility advocate, we put together the accessibility summit, and we've been doing that for about four years now.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And someone else mentioned, they recommended web performance.

Ari Stiles: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: And so we did that, and so it's kind of like we do 10 to 20% new summits every year.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And this year, we're actually, and this is news...

Ari Stiles: [Makes trumpet sound]

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, why don't you do it?



Ari Stiles: You're getting a scoop.

Christopher Schmitt: You get the scoop. We're actually doing a Craft CMS Summit earlier this year!

Lea Alcantara: Oooh.

Emily Lewis: Oh, nice.

Christopher Schmitt: So we'll probably announce that or we'll probably publish that later today, but yeah, so we're doing that, and that would be awesome.

We kind of put it in our schedule to make sure we have new ideas and new topics in to it each year. And some are just so great that we keep them each year. So CSS Summit is going to be its 6th year this year. JavaScript which kind of grew out of jQuery because jQuery is so ubiquitous now, but JavaScript now with the summit would be in its 6th year, and so we're doing WordPress Summit. We're doing whole bunch of cool things...

Ari Stiles: But there's also plenty of paying attention to trends as well.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: We go to a lot of conferences just because we're interested.

Christopher Schmitt: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: I mean, it's not just we do them, we also really like them after all these years too. And so it's fun to go to conferences. I can tell you that it's really fun to go to one, and not be responsible.

[Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And just enjoy.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: But we tend to, if we go to something, just have a game plan and deliberately go and see different talks. And at the end of the day, just kind of like talk out loud about it like, “Hey, you know, I saw this new topic or new speaker that I thought was really interesting.” And so it’s kind of like ... I will say that Chris is focused a lot more on the content of what we’re doing, and so he tends to choose the lineups and we both kind of roll out and float the idea for a new topic, I’ll say, and then I have a really, really like an elephant’s memory seriously.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And so if he’s stuck like, “Hey, I’ve got one or two more slots that I need to fill or whatever,” I can usually, just my mental Rolodex will spit out, “Hey, I saw so and so talk about this topic. She did a wonderful job, or that’s sort of a thing.”

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: And so it’s really fun to do. Kathy Sierra used to give this talk, and pardon my language, but the words she used is that you help your users kick ass, and so if we are helping people kick ass every day with the content that we’re bringing to them, bravo. That’s exactly what I’d like to do.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah. Yeah, for our summits, definitely, we are probably your boss’ favorite friend, I guess, because we really want to put content out there for the summits, because we have so much for a whole team could buy a ticket and just get caught up on what’s going on that year, all the



changes that's happened or learn new techniques. And so the best thing and the one thing that we knew we were on the right track was the jQuery Summit the first year, and we got feedback saying, "My whole team saw jQuery Summit and they were able to solve the problem the next day."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And so that's like five people times eight hours' worth of work for each of them just to solve a problem, and they were able to just nail it. So that's like 40 hours worth of work that they saved pretty much. And so that's what makes it so much worthwhile for us to do it.

And as for picking speakers, I do a lot of research. I'm out there just looking through a whole bunch of notes, articles, blogs and trying to find out what's interesting and what's not. Like Nicole Sullivan, I never heard of Nicole Sullivan until I offered her CSS Summit, and she talked about object-oriented CSS.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And everyone, we have all chat room going on while we do our summits, which is usually kind of like happy, people talk, there's a good stream. That was the first time ever I've seen the chat room go dead quiet.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And we were there monitoring. We were like, "Is something broken?"

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, everyone, and everyone was quiet because they were so interested in what Nicole had to say about her topic, and she ran long and no one cared.



Ari Stiles: Yeah, we didn't stop her, and that we were like maybe it's a good thing. We crossed our fingers and then when she was finished, it just exploded in the chat room and on Twitter. It was just like, "Wow, Nicole Sullivan just blew my mind." You know?

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: And so that's exactly the type of content, the type of feeling we want people to have.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: And how awesome is it to send that to somebody's desktop, that's great, and now, on mobile devices too apparently.

Christopher Schmitt: Yes.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: So I'm curious now, so you've chosen the topic. You've figured out what kind of speakers in general you may want to have. Let's talk promotion, how do you start promoting these events and these topics?

Christopher Schmitt: Well, let me go back one second... Our CSS Dev Conference is actually a community-voted-on talks, so we actually do double-blind voting for CSS Dev Conf. So people will submit proposals for that. So we're actually putting on a party and we don't know who's coming.

Ari Stiles: Yes.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



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Christopher Schmitt: So people submit proposals and we make it double-blind that we strip out their name and who they work for, and we just put the vote on the content alone. And so that way we get content people really want to see.

Ari Stiles: But yeah, that's an excellent segueway from content to promotion too, Lea.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: The content for that one obviously the community votes on it, but because the community votes on it, they talk about it publicly, and so that's one of the things that we like about it. I mean, the one thing for me that was missing after leaving SXSW was that I liked being able to work on smaller conferences. For me personally, it was much easier for me to guarantee good experience for everyone that was coming.

But one of the things about it was that all of the conferences and summits online stuff and onsite stuff that we could set up, it wasn't anyone's first speaking gig. Everyone that we were getting, and it's good and it's still the same way, was a very experienced speaker. And now with CSS Dev Conf, because it's community voted, occasionally, we do get somebody who is new. As long as they have a great idea and interest enough people, then they tend to rise high in the voting, and so that for me kind of filled in a niche as far as getting newer speakers.

But again, that one, it's interesting because we work to choose a good location and crow about that as much as we can in our promotions, but the people who submit and vote, because they're speaking about it publicly, that's a form of promotion as well.

Christopher Schmitt: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: But you should probably talk about the general channels that we use too.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, so we talk to anyone who will listen to us. [Laughs]



Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: And so we do social media. We do email news blasts, and blogs, we talk to industry publications like *Smashing Mag*, and O'Reilly, and so on, and so we talk to a whole bunch of people to help us spread the word. And really, as long as you put out a good product, based on the feedback, people will come back again, and so we've had people who have been with us for five years, and that says a lot about I think what we do and the quality of the product that we put out.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. Along the same lines of promotion, do you consider the promotion that you do for each event branded for that event? Do you have like an identity, or is it more like an Environments for Humans' identity that you push through everything?

Christopher Schmitt: Good question. Summits are a kind of milk toast I guess in branding because it's really hard to invest a lot into brands. I think when we do...

Ari Stiles: Yeah, that's more of an overarching, you know.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Summit series brand.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah. So we do what's called summit series, and so every year, it's a new thing. So our summits aren't really branded to the event itself because we let the technology or the practice speaks for itself. So if you have CSS, if you're interested in CSS, great, you're probably interested in it. If you're not interested in CSS, you probably will not like CSS Summit. Whereas our onsite events, we kind of brand it each individually.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.



Christopher Schmitt: And so CSS Dev Conference has its own kind of way, personality if you will. In Control has its own unique personality. And then now we've worked with Jennifer Robbins to do Artifact Conference, which has its own kind of unique personality, and actually I think CSS Dev Conference is quirky, and I think Artifact is a cool event.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, yeah. Artifact is cool.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Is that branding stuff you guys do on your own, or do you hire like an external firm to help you out with that?

Christopher Schmitt: We actually do it on our own, and I wish we had clones of ourselves.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: That would be great to be able to do that. Actually, artifactconf.com, we're working with Sparkbox to come up with a new website and make it more responsive.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: Because we did two conferences last year, and we have a whole bunch of content that we need to put out there like review the recordings and all of those history when you put it up there. So it actually worked with us, and so we're actually hoping to launch this week as well. So that's news there. [Makes drum beats]



Timestamp: 00:40:06

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: We have a new site for Artifact Conference.

Ari Stiles: Scoop number 2. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, as well as Craft CMS Summit, so that's coming out. So that's actually the first time we actually reached out for that. We're actually working on a new redesign for ourselves for e4h, and so we're actually working out with a company hopefully to do that, and it's actually built on Craft.

Emily Lewis: Oh nice.

Christopher Schmitt: So yeah.

Ari Stiles: Scoop number 3.

Christopher Schmitt: [Makes drum beats]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Yeah, yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: Man, you knew all these scoops here.

Lea Alcantara: We need to have like sound effects or something.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]



Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Even if it's just a little Law & Order thing or whatever. [Makes drum beats]

Lea Alcantara: So marketing kind of leads towards ticket sales obviously. I want to talk a bit more about the dollars and cents of running a conference. Well, anecdotally, we understand it's an expensive endeavor to creating a conference, especially since the budget, the majority of it, should probably come from the ticket sales. So I would have to ask, how would you know what and how to budget, especially when you need to book venues and such ahead of time before tickets are even purchased? Like do you try to hit a minimum number of ticket sales? Is there always like a magic number in mind?

Ari Stiles: Well, we have, when we got started, like Christopher was saying, the first one was through AIGA...

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And so since AIGA is a nonprofit, they're used to doing a lot of like space donations and things like that, and so we actually lucked out in our first space, the one that we were talking about being so concrete-ish before...

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: It was donated, and so we lucked out there and really just needed a little bit of money to be able to feed everyone and get people on planes to fly there ... speakers.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.



Ari Stiles: And then our first few summits, we just paid for out of our own pockets essentially because all we needed to do was have the account with Dim Dim at the time.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Ari Stiles: And...

Christopher Schmitt: Well, I will say, speaking of money issue, if it wasn't for MailChimp sponsoring us, we wouldn't be here.

Ari Stiles: Oh yeah.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: Because MailChimp took a risk on us, I guess.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: And they sponsor a lot of great things.

Ari Stiles: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: And they helped us finance the first three online summits.

Ari Stiles: Yes, yes.

Christopher Schmitt: So it's been really great for them, for them and their products really. But another thing is if you're looking to do an event, and I see this all on all other places, I would contact local businesses that have big space. Like I believe our JavaScript Meetup is at Frog Design here. They have offices here. We have Capital Factory which is where we have an office, but they have a plain meeting space and they actually want people in the tech industry to come and meet there.



Ari Stiles: Right, so if you find a space that wants to align with the brand like yours or what you're doing, then that's, you know.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: And just in general, when people are getting started, I tell them to start small.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Because if you went for a small space and you completely sold it out and filled it up, then you have ammunition to do it larger the next time.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: Right, and check out like co-working spaces too.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: I mean, because some of them will be free at night, and for just like for one meet up for like one or two presentations because our Refresh Austin is pretty popular and they meet up at night.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, and every company is going to set its own standards, but just for our list that we check off is that we always feed everyone lunch because we'd like to keep them together rather than having that whole lunch dash where everybody runs off and does their own thing. But that's actually a way to save money if you don't want to feed everybody, that's actually a huge chunk out of your budget, you know.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.



Ari Stiles: And so if that's not imperative to you, then that's a huge way to save money. Swag is a big thing. And swag is the stuff we all get turned and a lot of people throw around. I don't want to align it with the swaggers. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: But our swag is swagger. Their head will swagger.

Ari Stiles: But our swag, it usually has swagger.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: So we are unapologetic t-shirt nerds, but even we have in our brain set, "Okay, we're not going to buy t-shirts for this one unless we sell X amount of tickets." Because that's a way to save money as well.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And so there are little things that we cut out of our budget to make ends meet.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, we're also annoying to sponsors.

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Because we want to make sure that our swag is practical.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]



Ari Stiles: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: And so for In Control, what we do for In Control is so I publish a lot of books. I've written a lot of books; I'm not a publisher. I've *written* a lot of books. I know a lot of publishers, and so they were able to donate books, and so for In Control, we give out a book to each person who signs up who shows up, and so we get and we choose a lot of good books from the publishers, and so they're not like really bad books, I don't think so.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Another practice that actually helps a lot with budget is something that we don't do, but if it works out well for your conference or whatever it is that you're trying to put together. Some companies, if they can speak, are glad to spend a lot as a sponsorship as well.

And so we don't do that simply because that's kind of the model that we put ourselves into because in the past, we've been to other conferences and seen that occasionally. That can be kind of a hit or miss thing, because sometimes it's like, "This is great. I'm going to show you this really cool tool, and that's really going to help you." And other times it's a sales pitch.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And a lot of people don't want to sit through that.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, like the energy level can really be bashed pretty fast.

Ari Stiles: Right, right, and so we don't do it just because of the unpredictability of it, but if it's something that if you're getting started out and you know that there's a particular tool that would be glad to sponsor you if only they could have anywhere from five minutes to a full hour on stage, and



you're comfortable with that, that is a great way actually to cover costs for people who are interested in that.

Christopher Schmitt: Right.

Emily Lewis: Now, a few minutes ago, Chris, you mentioned that you're building a new site. It's going to run on Craft. Now, I'm curious, each of your events, it's like its own website. Is it like a subdomain? Are you using a CMS to manage each of those events? Is that what you're like revamping right now, or is it an existing system you're just going to continue running with?

Christopher Schmitt: Well, my existing system was "duct tape CMS."

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: This is amazing database.

Christopher Schmitt: Yes. It is a "seat of my pants duct taped together" CMS that is just really embarrassing.

Ari Stiles: But it gets the job done.

Christopher Schmitt: So Craft is actually will be helping us a lot.

Ari Stiles: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: Actually, my goal for this week is to enter all of the values into the CMS... into the database for Craft is my goal. It's our partners', the people we're working out with, Tycho, they really don't want to do it.



Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs] Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: But yes, so our new website's going to be more database-run.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: Going to be a lot smoother for us. Also, we had a lot of pain points. I'd just be opening the kimono if I may with just that.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: That we had a lot of pain points in terms of new users who register and don't really know what to do when they come to the summit for the first day, so it's kind of like kind of a weird thing. So we're actually having like user profiles. We'll have an archive of recordings that they signed up for, and so they could just log in and go to the session of the day of the event now instead of having to wait for an email or wait for us to do it.

Emily Lewis: Nice.

Christopher Schmitt: It's actually going to be, once we get that done, I think we'll eliminate most of the stress points, a lot of big complaints that we have from our attendees from that.

Emily Lewis: Do you anticipate the CMS to ever handle your actual event registration?

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, well, actually, we will. It will. We were talking to...

Ari Stiles: It's further down the road, but yeah.



Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, we're doing a lot of back end stuff. They have some great programmers there helping with a lot of API issues back and forth, so we're dealing with Adobe Connect's API. We're dealing with EventBrite API. The EventBrite API is well documented and really great. Adobe Connect, a little bit documented.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: And so we're doing a lot of like blackbox magic. It's why I am not really bothered.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: But it's so much. But Craft is there to handle everything and do much more stuff.

Ari Stiles: So I think that is, I don't have the phases in front of me. We have kind of rolled out phases, and I think that's in Phase 3.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, okay. So we're hoping that we'll build and grow with Craft.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I'm sure something like that is going to always be better than something you maybe hand-rolled years ago and you've just duct taped together. [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Oh man, you have no idea what it just like is. [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: It is embarrassing.



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Emily Lewis: I mean, so would that be something you'd recommend to someone that if this is something they're going into, they're going to be managing multiple events that it's something that they should invest in?

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah. Well, I think like the technologies that are out there now are just amazing from like Handlebars.js to Grunt to doing along the lines of that, like it's just amazing what's out there. And one of the things I love about working with Sparkbox, they are so smart, and with like Tycho, it's that you get to see what's going on with everything, with the latest technologies. But there are so many, like I'm just a big fan of Grunt and Handlebars.js and templating.

Ari Stiles: Right.

Christopher Schmitt: Just everything you do to all make stuff is within the last year and a half, we're just seeing that the web industry grow. It amazes me after being in this industry for 20-plus years to see what happens just in a year and a half, you know?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: It's just blows my mind.

Timestamp: 00:49:45

Ari Stiles: Well, also I think that really a lot of the motivation behind the clean start for ARTIFACT and working with Sparkbox is that we're just getting started with ARTIFACT. I mean, it's been a year, and we're sitting on some content there, and we feel like it has a potential to be a very long running conference and go for several years, and so it's kind of like we're starting it well, and cleaning house from the beginning because for us, just the two of us running Environments for Humans, and we're sitting now on five years of content that we're trying to shift into something new, and it's just huge.



And so I think that doing it right this early on when you're first beginning is one of the things to think about because you generate so much content when you do something like this. Even if you aren't recording sessions, you still have slides from speakers that I usually keep those, at least an archive of if you're not sharing and all those sort of things need to thought out as well.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and also, when we did our first onsite event, we just looked at everything. We templated everything and we just used to roll the dice and see what happens and just see what kind of event happens. You just don't know the personality of events and attendees will bring their personalities to it, and each one is unique.

We just did In Control Orlando, the 5th year we did In Control Orlando, and that was probably the most fun I've ever had at In Control. And some of the In Controls have been kind of different like personality-wise like some of them have been roller coaster rides in terms of gut checks like Leslie Inman does like a great talk about schools and educations and education systems, and it was just like she brings so much into it and you just feel the weight of emotion, of energy on it.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And with ARTIFACT Conference, the first year we did it, was at the Alamo Ritz which is a theater and which is a great kind of Austin tradition, and the first session was with I think Dan Mall. He was doing a roundtable. Was he doing the Q&A ...?

Ari Stiles: Well, after Jen's talk.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, after just the intro talk, and the Q&A from the audience, from attendees was so intelligent and so with it as to what he was talking about, that it was the most amazing Q&A I've ever seen happen at a conference, and that happened so early in the conference. There were 2 days of conference, but it just blew my brain and it set the tone for the rest of the two days, and so it



was just a great event. And so you, you can plan as much as you want, but you just never know. It's I guess like having a baby, you just know who's going to show up, what the personality the baby is going to be until later.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: But speaking of that though, like even if there are so many personalities and so many things that you can try to plan for, it's still kind of unpredictable. Still though, I'm curious if you and Ari have any type of contingency plans in case like you just anticipate, okay, what if this weather-related issue happens, or what if this technical issue happens, like do you have a list saying, "Okay, if this whatever."

Christopher Schmitt: Oh yeah.

Lea Alcantara: And what are those?

Christopher Schmitt: In the beginning when we're on our way to do online summit, the CSS Summit for the first time, I was like making that speech about, "This could be a failure. We're very sorry guys. We apologize. Sorry it didn't work out."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: And after doing online summits, we've had things happen where the software will just quit on us and die, but Ari was just magical on that one, I don't know. She was able to like



work her magic on Adobe Connect and get everything straightened out, and so people didn't know what was happening, but we were like frantically doing some weird stuff in the background.

And there were some events where we had the speaker where he was supposed to be flying in, and he was calling me, and I was like, "You were supposed to be up in the air. What's going on?" He's like he had a medical emergency and he couldn't make it, and so we had to find someone to replace him at the last minute, and always it worked out, knock on wood.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: And this is something I kind of learned in grad school getting my project management certificate is that it doesn't matter too much about... You want to make sure you get all your dot your i's and cross your t's as much as you can, that still won't make a project successful. What will make it successful is you have the attitude as "I'm going to take on any issue and I'm going to meet it head on. I'm not going to dock or swerve away from it."

Emily Lewis: You take responsibility.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: So when a problem comes, you just have to just see if you could find a solution to it, so we've had speakers drop out a day before an event.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: Just like out of the blue.

Ari Stiles: And we've had them drop hours before.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, hours before an event, so that was always nice. [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]



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Christopher Schmitt: That's always like, "Would you like some caffeine, or would you like it when a speaker drop out?" I'll take the caffeine.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, I'm awake now.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and so you just have to roll with it, and I think the first two years we did this, I was like a worrywart. I was like a big ball of nerves. Now, I'm like, "Okay, it's going to happen. I don't know what's going to happen. We know what we can do to avoid, to negate issues, but something is going to happen. If it's going to happen, we're going to work with it."

Ari Stiles: Yeah, and actually I think this is a little bit of a step back, but I think that one of the best contingency plans is to really know your boundaries. I mean, and that's more about dealing with occasional conflicts that come up between people, or with a particular individual or that sort of thing is, obviously, for online events we're running a chat room, and for an onsite event, you've got a roomful of people that are going to be together for two to three days. And so you have a mental picture and/or set of boundaries about whether it's behavior, all of those conduct concerns, that sort of thing, and you have within you and it affects your behavior, and I think that also it's something that you exude as a conference in general.

But you choose speakers that kind of wouldn't necessarily have a problem with that sort of thing, and also on the rare occasion when something does come up, you know that this is not something that's going to work within the context of the environment that you've laid out, the atmosphere that you set up for the people in your group, and so you just kind of have to deal with it when it comes and be firm. So fortunately, it's been extremely rare, but we're very aware and pay attention to a lot of those like



personality conflicts and things that come up, with things like sexism within the industry and the way things are portrayed sometimes. Trade shows, for example, and so just being very careful about those sort of things and working with people who have a lot of the same values around that sort of thing.

Emily Lewis: Is that something that you felt a need to, I guess, mention to attendees and speakers before they make a commitment to attend an event?

Ari Stiles: Yeah, we keep it simple. I think when you throw down a whole bunch of rules, you're just inviting little bit of trolling behavior, whether it's in person or online, I think that that's true because you're always going to have that one person of the population or whatever that sees a rule and wants to break it.

But we just keep it simple. We have a very simple, just kind of like a few sentences about how this is an inclusive event, and if you for some reason, whether it's just simply feeling excluded or you're made uncomfortable by something, then we please want you to come to us, and we identify ourselves as early on in the process as possible.

I mean, with an online conference, that's easy because we're the people hosting at the beginning. But for an onsite conference, Christopher often emcees so people know who he is, but we go to a lot of trouble at the beginning to introduce, "These are our volunteers, and hey, this is Ari." And if we have anybody else onsite working, we introduce them as well so they can put a face with it, and if they need to talk to you privately about something, that they know who to go to.

Lea Alcantara: Man, I feel like we've talking so long.

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]



Lea Alcantara: And I mean, it's awesome. I feel like we can keep going on, but before we let you go, I do have two final questions. So what's the best advice you would give someone attending a conference to get the most out of their experience, and then secondly, what's the best advice would you give to a fellow event organizer?

Christopher Schmitt: For an attendee, I would just say show up. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: So we have lots of fine summits and onsite conferences.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: But go to the sessions. Go to all of them if you can. With a lot of people, I see this before I've even started on conference organizing, people just skip sessions, and I'm like, "You know, you just never know if that session is going to be mind blowing."

We just recently had a Scott McCloud who I think recently wrote *Understanding Comics*, which won an Eisner Award. They're like I guess the Oscars of the industry, and he also wrote *Zot!*, which won a Jack Kirby Award, which are like two awards named for two titans in the comics industry, but *Understanding Comics* relates to like any visual kind of medium that you have out there, and some people didn't show up for Scott McCloud. This is like the most mind blowing talk you're going to get these days. Not to offend everyone else we're speaking, I don't think, but like some people didn't show up at that talk, and I was on that list too.

Ari Stiles: Yeah. Well, there are different ways to show up as well.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.



Ari Stiles: Because frankly, I mean, it's very simple. I mean, everyone in on this and maybe who's listening to this has done it where you're going to a talk and maybe a few minutes in, you realize, "Hey, there is some message on my phone, or hey, I can't open my laptop and catch up on email or whatever." I think that a lot of showing up is deciding that you're really going to be present.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And so for some people, they completely ditch their laptop during a conference. I don't think that's necessarily a bad idea, you know?

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

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Ari Stiles: Or they've decided they're going to go old fashion and do handwritten notes. I mean I'm not a huge advocate of any particular approach, but I know that for me personally, when I'm going to see someone for the first time, and I really wanted to take it in, I'll put the phone away. I maybe have out paper and something to write with if something is going to strike me, and so I think that that's a very important way to show up as well.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, and there are of these things where you can put your feet too. So yes, you're there but you're not getting anything out of it, and that maybe change your desk or anything, and so that's what work is for. But also just trying anything like, the best SXSW experience I had was like before it got too crowded was that I bumped into a session and I know what was going on. I just need a place to sit down and recoup. It was about the Second Life, and the first time I had ever heard about Second Life, and it just blew my brain that there was something called Second Life.

Ari Stiles: Right.



Christopher Schmitt: And they're doing a lot of that, and actually SXSW asked me to write like my top five choices for South By Southwest this year, and I had purposely went out of a way to find non-web design and development talks and to find interesting things. There's a panel called tumor paint, and some scientist/doctor had found a way to help figure out drugs faster for cancer treatment that's faster than the last 22 years. There is a live mapping projection video workshop, there's about a cat one; a session on cat video memes. It's like there's a lot of cool stuff out there that's probably not related to your talk, to your industry and those are just as fine as...

Ari Stiles: If they inspire you, then that's worth the price of admission.

Christopher Schmitt: Right, right, and so definitely show up. And so what would be your tips for a conference organizer?

Ari Stiles: For a conference organizer, I think I spilled one already, and that was to start small, and just to see, and just to kind of dip your toe on the water and realize how much interest there really is, and that sort of thing, and that's also going to save you on expenses.

And I'm still kind of formulating this one from myself, but I will say that you have to give in to human nature a little bit and just kind of understand that it's okay if everything is not perfect. Again, if you have kind of an underlying motivation like for me, like I said before, it was the helping people kick ass sort of thing, then people will understand and they'll forgive the occasional slip up or the thing that didn't go quite right or the temperature in the room was too hot or the food tasted funny, or they'll let those things go as long as you are clear about your motivation, and that motivation helps you make your choices.

Lea Alcantara: Awesome. So before we let you guys go, we like to let our listeners know our guests a little bit better. So we took a cue from Inside the Actors Studio and created a list of ten questions.



Ari Stiles: Oh-oh.

Christopher Schmitt: Oh-oh.

Lea Alcantara: We'll ask each of you, and...

Ari Stiles: Do I get to curse?

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Just respond as quickly with the first thing that comes to your mind. So are you ready?

Ari Stiles: Are we taking turns?

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Okay.

Christopher Schmitt: You go first on top of that.

Ari Stiles: Okay.

Lea Alcantara: Okay. So Ari, Mac OS or Windows?

Ari Stiles: Mac.

Lea Alcantara: Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: Mac.

Emily Lewis: And Christopher, what is your favorite mobile app?



Christopher Schmitt: Oh, snap. Let me open my phone app gallery...

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Oh.

Emily Lewis: What about you, Ari, while Chris is looking?

Ari Stiles: I'm going to say FlightTrack.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: I love that thing.

Christopher Schmitt: Oh yeah. I'm really into Angry Birds Go right now.

Ari Stiles: Oh.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: So I'm trying to like not pay the money and try to like play every game, and get to the ending as fast as I can; not giving them a cent of my money. So when I'm not doing anything, I'm doing that.

Ari Stiles: Yeah, and I've have to say if we're going by the one most often open right now for me, it's Threes!.

Christopher Schmitt: The game Threes!?

Ari Stiles: Yeah.



Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, you're right, you're on that all the time.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: Okay.

Lea Alcantara: So Ari, what's your least favorite thing about social media?

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Misunderstanding.

Lea Alcantara: Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: The thing I don't like is that the mantra has been pushed around forever is the one that be nice to other people, and I just say like, "You know when in social media, it' your first try out, they're talking about, "You have to be nice to your customers and your consumers, and engage them in a friendly way." I'm like, "That is the most boneheaded common sense thing."

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Like, of course, you're going to do that, but how can you help me be that, so whenever you see social media with stuff like, "You should XYZ," like anything about social media that is skin deep and doesn't tell me anything in detail I guess, it really drives me up the wall.

Ari Stiles: Listicles, yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, listicles really just drive me up the wall, especially if they're about social media, so really I'm more interested in the technical stuff of how social media works than I am about stuff. Because we actually, not to get sidetracked too much, but we actually tried to do a social media summit, and I just can't pull it off. I was just like I couldn't find the right speakers to justify a full day



with them with that content. That doesn't mean that they're not out there, it just means that they're not in my wheelhouse.

Emily Lewis: Ari, what profession other than yours would you like to attempt?

Ari Stiles: Oh boy. Whatever career there would be in comparative religion. I don't think that I could necessarily be Joseph Campbell, but if I could study all the stuff that he did, I find that interesting.

Christopher Schmitt: So a university professor?

Ari Stiles: Oh good Lord, no. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] And how about you, Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: Well, when I was eight, it will be a helicopter pilot, fireman.

Ari Stiles: They mean now.

Christopher Schmitt: Oh man, okay. I like Harrison Ford. He makes me so jealous when he said, and there's a quote where he said like, "It's a great job because I don't have to go into an office and work." I'm like, "Damn it. I don't want to work at the office." I'd love to work in the movies and just be on set and doing cool stuff like that.

Lea Alcantara: Cool, so the opposite, Ari, what profession would you not ever try?

Ari Stiles: I'm very frustrated by the law, so I don't think that I could do that as a profession.

Lea Alcantara: Chris?

Christopher Schmitt: I can't be a doctor.



Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: I cannot be a doctor, whatsoever.

Ari Stiles: Because...

Christopher Schmitt: Oh, I just faint on the floor.

Ari Stiles: Okay.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: I'm just like, "Oh here." I fainted at the subject about inner ear at middle school.

Lea Alcantara: Oh no.

Christopher Schmitt: The teacher was like, "Hey, we're talking about inner ear." I was like, "Okay, I'm going to pass out now."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Yeah, I used to say one of the first times that Christopher and I hung out, we went to see that body's exhibit.

Lea Alcantara: Oh no.

Ari Stiles: Where they have the cutaways and everything?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.



Ari Stiles: And he only told me right before that he has this problem. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And I was like, "Wait a minute, if you faint, I don't think I could catch you." And so the whole thing was like, "Are you okay? Are you okay? Are you okay?" through the entire exhibit.

Christopher Schmitt: They only had two benches whole that time too.

Ari Stiles: [Agrees]

Christopher Schmitt: I was scoping out benches so I could sit down.

Emily Lewis: Christopher, who's the web professional you admire the most?

Christopher Schmitt: Everyone, including you the listener. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Wah wah

Ari Stiles: Absolutely no pondering going on there.

Christopher Schmitt: Oh, there are just so many great web professionals out there. There's Molly. Molly Holzschlag is probably the one that I feel like epitomizes the nature of the web. She is like selfless in giving of her knowledge and time, and she's just like a great writer. She wrote many



books. She wrote like 40-plus books for design development, and so she was very instrumental in helping me with my first start writing book, and helping become a better speaker and just everything. So we're really lucky to have her in this industry.

Emily Lewis: And you, Ari?

Ari Stiles: I'm kind of wracking my brain a little bit, and I'm going to go off the farm a little bit and say ... Well, I think a lot about what Kathy Sierra says a lot.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And I think it drives a lot of my motivation, but frankly, I'm going out on a limb a little bit and choose Hugh Forrest because I learned a lot about what I do from working with Hugh at SXSW.

Christopher Schmitt: What does he do at SXSW?

Ari Stiles: Hugh is the Director of Interactive at SXSW, and I used to be a staff there, and then before that, I was a contract designer, and I just worked directly with him. I think just from my time working with Hugh, I have zero problem thinking about the best way to do something and not really compromising about that at all.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And they are, for example, very comfortable with deliberately going out and working to create really diverse lineups there at SXSW, and because of that, a lot of the mumble about the difficulty in creating a diverse lineup at a temp conference just completely flies over my head because I've worked with people who have just no qualms about that and talk about it openly and work to create really diverse experiences.



So when I look at a lineup, for example, that it looks like the same guy over and over again sort of a thing, and not to disparage or whatever, I just kind of like, “Wow, I just see someone who’s having a hard time really kind of paying attention to what’s going on in the industry because there are plenty of different types of people giving different types of talks and it’s not really that hard to find and create a diverse lineup.”

Lea Alcantara: So Ari, what music do you like to work to?

Ari Stiles: Oh Lordy. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Whatever cool kids listen to these days.

Ari Stiles: Oh yeah, and I have a joke. My kids listen to the wob-wob-wob, you know, stuff.

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: The dubstep?

Ari Stiles: And I don’t necessarily turn it off.

Lea Alcantara: The dubstep.

Ari Stiles: But that’s usually when I’m driving, but the fast stuff like I have a work list here, it’s got like a lot of Sleater-Kinney on it, and stuff and PJ Harvey too where it’s like very driving, getting stuff done kind of music.

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Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: How about you, Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: So is this getting work done music?



Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: Well, I feel very close so Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in that he could only write well when he was in a party.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: And it's kind of funny. So I have ambient a noise generator that does like parties... happy hour type atmosphere, and I just get lost like in my own zone out there. Sometimes though I'm a big U2 fan so I have U2 mixed. I just listen to it all the time, and this last night we saw *True Detective*, the HBO series, and so we're probably be spinning tracks from the soundtrack from that. So with us, we just a Spotify playlist, that's the one we made of all the songs...

Ari Stiles: Of all the songs from *True Detective*.

Christopher Schmitt: From *True Detective*, so that's basically really great.

Emily Lewis: All right, Ari, do you have a secret talent? What is it?

Ari Stiles: A secret talent? Wow!

Christopher Schmitt: You're very patient with me. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: With me and everyone you know. You're very understanding of me.



Ari Stiles: I don't know if that's necessarily it. I'd have to think about what a talent would be, but yeah, I've been told that I'm an extremely patient person.

Christopher Schmitt: Oh man.

Ari Stiles: And that I was a mom before I was a mom.

Christopher Schmitt: So like between the two of us, she does text checks, which can be very infuriating.

Ari Stiles: For Christopher.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, for me, yeah, it's very true.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: But she does an amazing job of helping new speakers and all speakers who have never done online speaking before, she does a great job, and that's just a sample of what she does, but ever since I met her, she's been very great at it. She has a calming influence around people.

Ari Stiles: Okay, bearing that in mind, I'll say my secret talent is Beginner's Mind, which I forget what the Chinese word for it, but essentially it's that you can empathize a great deal with beginners.

Christopher Schmitt: That fits you.

Lea Alcantara: That's awesome.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah.



Emily Lewis: How about you, Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: Just rock hard abs. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: [Laughs] These are laughs of agreement.

Christopher Schmitt: So what's my talent? I helped you out, why don't you help me out?

Ari Stiles: Okay, Chris, especially when you work in the same office, comes to office kind of ADD, but he's actually ingesting a lot of information so I'm not sure exactly what the word for that would be. It's like omnivorous with information.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Ari Stiles: And he can remember and synthesize a lot of that, and so I think that's where a lot of good ideas for topics for events come from, but also just good ideas for a lot of what we're doing in general. And a lot of times when we sit down to talk about work, he'll have some really surprising suggestions that I think are like to most people would come off as really left field, but you get this feeling of like we should totally do that thing. So I don't know what the word for that is.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, I think that kind of least expect that I would be conference organizer or speaker, and you know what's happened. If you want to talk, you need to realize what people are doing six months from now to a year from now.

Ari Stiles: Yeah.



Christopher Schmitt: And have your talk based on that. So I'm looking for speakers, I need to...

Lea Alcantara: So you're a fortuneteller.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, so basically, I try to like divine the future.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: Anticipation.

Christopher Schmitt: And anticipate these things.

Lea Alcantara: Okay, so Ari, what's the most recent book you've read?

Ari Stiles: I just barely started the – oh shoot. Again, True Detective. The book with the short stories that they keep referring to with the Yellow King, and I'm spacing on what the name of it is. But anyway, it was cited as really influential for a lot of later writers, and I'll try to remember what it is while Chris is talking. [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Okay.

Lea Alcantara: So what is the most recent book you've read, Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: I read several books at once, so I just finished the *Zot!* which Scott McCloud's book series. It's in the collector form so that was really awesome. I'm also redoing his *Understanding Comics* after hearing him speak, and then I also have an email marketing book I'm looking at. Also, I have *Parent's Guide to Minecraft*.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Ari Stiles: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: Which is a...

Lea Alcantara: Random book.

Christopher Schmitt: Yeah, which is I just need to know what the heck Minecraft is about. I'm actually reading that book just to understand how to write a tutorial because I'm trying to write a book about GitHub right now and I'm just trying to find out.

GitHub is such a weird thing right now because if you get GitHub, it's really awesome, but from a beginner's mind, that was talked by Ari, it's a totally different world. So there's this big cutoff. Like you go off a cliff with like swing with GitHub that you get, and so once you get Git, then it's easy, but for people who have problems with it, I'm trying to hopefully with this, I'm trying to research and see with Minecraft's for parent's book, how they handle that.

Emily Lewis: All right, for our last question, Ari, Stars Wars or Star Trek?

Ari Stiles: *Star Trek.*

Emily Lewis: And Christopher?

Christopher Schmitt: I like both, but I'll probably go with *Star Trek.*

Lea Alcantara: Very cool.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And so that's all the time we have for today. Thanks for joining us guys!

Christopher Schmitt: Oh, thank you for having us!

Ari Stiles: Oh, it's great, yeah!



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Emily Lewis: In case our listeners want to follow up with you guys, where can they find you online?

Ari Stiles: Well, on Twitter, I am Arianne, but it's spelled [@ari4nne](#), because my name was taken.

Christopher Schmitt: [Laughs]

Ari Stiles: And then our website that will eventually be refreshed very soon, but currently is in its older form, [e4h.tv](#).

Christopher Schmitt: And then we're also [@e4h](#) on Twitter, but I'm also on Twitter [@teleject](#), which is a name I came up with years ago and I gotta stick with it.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Christopher Schmitt: My website is [christopherschmitt.com](#), but I update Twitter almost all the time.

Lea Alcantara: Perfect.

Emily Lewis: Awesome.

Lea Alcantara: [Music starts] So now, we'd like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, [Squarespace](#) and [Pixel & Tonic](#).

Emily Lewis: We also want to thank our partners, [Arcustech](#), [Devot:ee](#) and [EE Insider](#).

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<http://ctrlclickcast.com/episodes/organizing-conferences>

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara ...

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis.

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for CTRL+CLICK CAST. See you next time!

Emily Lewis: Cheers!

[Music stops]

Timestamp: *01:16:18*