



CTRL+CLICK CAST #21 Outsourcing to Agencies with Carl Crawley

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Lea Alcantara: You are listening to CTRL+CLICK CAST. We inspect the web for you! Today we're talking about outsourcing to agencies with Carl Crawley. 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 [Hover](#) who seem to be adding even more awesome top-level domains. I just found out that .kitchen exists. But besides the crazy amount of top-level domains to choose from, Hover also has an uncluttered interface that makes the process of registering your domain so easy. If all of that sounds good to you, Hover is giving all of our listeners 10% off their first purchase on hover.com when you use the promo code CTRLCLICK.

Emily Lewis: CTRL+CLICK would also like to thank [Pixel & Tonic](#) for being our major sponsor.

[Music ends] Hi Lea, how are you?

Lea Alcantara: Pretty good. I had a busy weekend doing, I guess, summer cleanup.

Emily Lewis: Ahh.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, and the major part of that was cleaning up my grill.

Emily Lewis: So is that to get it ready for summer grilling, or had you been grilling all winter and it just needed a good cleaning?

Lea Alcantara: Well, I didn't really clean or grill or do anything all winter. It was actually outdoors because Seattle weather is mild enough, I guess, for it to like I guess withstand the weather.



Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: But I tried to grill without cleaning it really, like except the scrape-y thing-y at the beginning. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And I almost had a grease fire.

Emily Lewis: Oh my god. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: It was so bad. It's like I lit it up and so it went fooom! And I'm like, "Oh god."

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] I shouldn't be laughing, but thank god you're okay. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. No, everything...

Emily Lewis: You still have your eyebrows? [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. No, it was all good, and then that made me think like, "Oh, I really better clean this." And I swear to god, I think it took maybe two hours straight.

Emily Lewis: Oh my god. It's icky.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, it was just so much grease, and there were so many parts. It's so oh. But now, I'm looking forward to grilling.

Emily Lewis: Well, good. Now, you have incentive to have some grilled food a lot. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, when the weather is nice in Seattle, you want to take advantage of it.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, Jason is the grill master of our house, so I might want to mention it to him. In fact, he's probably listening right now.



Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: So he should probably get cleaning the grill on his to-do list. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Beware of grease fire.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I don't think we've cleaned it since we bought it.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: And we've had it for about a year and a half. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, it's time, it's time. All right, so just a quick bit of news for our listeners. A few episodes back, we mentioned that John Macpherson was conducting a survey of ExpressionEngine rates. Well, he's finally compiled the results, which we'll link to in our show notes.

Emily Lewis: We also wanted to let our listeners know that the EE Help Chat, which we sponsor with Arcustech, is now on a monthly schedule. So you can join us the first Wednesday of every month at 4:30 p.m. Eastern. The permanent chat URL will be in our show notes.

Lea Alcantara: And in more news, our major sponsor, Pixel & Tonic, has come out with a massive update with Craft 2.1 that includes 90 new features and improvements with a specific emphasis on workflow. It's such an excellent update that I can't wait to play with, and if you're new to Craft and you want a community-based resource for support, Craft is also trying to start a StackExchange site.

So last I checked, it's already headed to private beta in what seems to be record five days from the initial proposal. So that's exciting stuff for the community, and really, I think it speaks of the passion around the software and the people behind it. So we'll have a link in the show notes to the initiative.

Emily Lewis: Awesome. Now, to today's episode! Carl Crawley returns to the show this time to talk about outsourcing to agencies. Carl is the managing director of [Made By Hippo](#), a digital design and



multimedia agency that outsources solutions to busy agencies and developers. Welcome, Carl, it's so nice to have you back on the show!

Carl Crawley: Thank you. Yes, it's an absolute pleasure to be back.

Lea Alcantara: Perfect. So Carl, for those that haven't heard you the first time around, can you tell our listeners a little bit more about yourself.

Carl Crawley: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I'm based in the UK on a little island off the south coast of the UK. I've been here for about 12 years and I live with my wife and three children and a dog.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: Yeah, like I've been here since 1999. I originally moved from Wales via Scotland and settled here really. And Hippo up in 2010 after various other business ventures and I kind of moved on really.

Emily Lewis: I remember when we had you on and I haven't looked at the calendar, but I think it's almost exactly a year since we had you on, and I think you were recovering from an injury. Are you still into martial arts?

Carl Crawley: Yeah. I don't actively do martial arts anymore. I stopped in a while ago. I have too many commitments and when my third, my son was born, I just really couldn't put the time and effort into keeping it running. But yeah, that was actually during a silly phase I went through where I went on a bit of a health kick and joined the local soccer team and decided actually that, yeah, my body isn't built for playing soccer at all.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Oh dear. Oh dear.

Carl Crawley: Yeah. So I don't do that again. I haven't had any injuries since so that's good.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] That's a good way of staying uninjured. [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: Yes, I just don't exercise. It's simple.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] So you mentioned that you kind of went through a journey of different businesses and stuff, so why don't we talk about specifically Made By Hippo. Before we dive deep into the workings of that, I want to know more about the name of the company.

Carl Crawley: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Why is it called Made By Hippo?

Carl Crawley: So it was purely because I've had many previous businesses over the years, and they were all "something technology," "something systems," "something HQ." And we have this running joke in the office at the time ... one of my friends there who's also in the industry, and I always said that the next business that I would launch would be either something totally abstract that couldn't be related to technology or it would be something so technology focused that you, again, wouldn't have any idea what we do.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: So it was either Hippo or it was going to be "WebComDevTech Systems." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Carl Crawley: And we never really considered the latter, but the idea was it that I got some really valuable advice when I first decided to start the business, and I wanted something that would stand out, totally stand out.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And because I don't do sales – I can do sales, but I choose not to – I needed just what I would consider to be a competitive edge.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: Because if I'm going to be pitching for work and I'm going to be pitching for products or projects, I needed something that would just give me a little bit of a competitive edge.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And if you have "A N Other Technologies" and "A N Other Web Solutions" and then a proposal from Made By Hippo, you would remember that one over the others just because it has a quirky name. And that was really great.

Emily Lewis: Lea, I think it's not the exact process we went through with the rebranding we're going through now renaming the company, but being able to stand out and in fact differentiate ourselves with a name was really important.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: I never knew it because I named my company Emily Lewis Design. There's really not a whole lot creative there. [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: [Laughs]



Emily Lewis: But it wasn't until we began this process that I realized how important what you name your company is, because like you said, Carl, I could do sales, but I would be miserable if I had to.

Carl Crawley: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: And so having to stand out with a name when you're one proposal amongst a dozen, that's a really, really good point.

Carl Crawley: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I can relate to that a lot.

Carl Crawley: And so that was it, that was the reason why I did it, and it kind of caught on very quickly, and I think the first person to ever reference it was in the early days of the EECI Conferences where Robert Earhart called me Mr. Hippo.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: At that point, it just stuck. And yeah, this is it because that is now, it's funny, it's an identity, and people recognize it.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And even now, when I log into your regular [EE] Help Chat, I log in as Mr. Hippo, and people always say...

Lea Alcantara: They know who you are.

Carl Crawley: Yeah, "Good evening, Carl."

Lea Alcantara: Yes.



Carl Crawley: So yeah, it's good. I have that kind of identity, which was the whole point of naming and branding the company like that.

Lea Alcantara: So let's talk a little bit more about how you got started with Made By Hippo. So once you had the name, what were the first steps you did with the company?

Carl Crawley: One of the first things I really wanted to do was kind of try and give the company focus because previous companies I've had, I've had relative success with them, but they all have the same thing in common, and that was that once we became successful, and success is a relative word, but from a point of view of what we define success to be, once I got to that point within my previous businesses, I found that I was no longer: A) in control of anything and B) doing what I enjoyed.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: I mean, one of the last, I suppose, successful businesses I had, we grew the business to a healthy turnover. We had great clients. It was brilliant work, but we had eight staff, three directors and all I was doing was project managing, chasing accounts, filing tax returns, doing salaries and doing administration.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

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Carl Crawley: Because actually, that kind of stuff is not the kind of stuff that just can get left, so then I found I was doing that an awful lot, and I wasn't doing hands-on work, and I think I had a period where I was doing some project management work for a project and I left the office for about two to three weeks to go and do some project work and when I came back, my fellow director and the head



of what I considered to be kind of at my office my number two in the technology had made a decision to change technology platforms.

Lea Alcantara: Oh.

Carl Crawley: And it was fine because actually when I understood the reasoning behind changing the technology platform, they made commercial sense, they made financial sense and everything. However, I was then left in a redundant position because I wasn't capable in that technology.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So I then had to adapt, and I love a challenge, and I did, I took that on. But that was really, really hard work considering I owned the company and I had to learn something just to be able to sustain my position in my own company. So when I started Hippo, I always said I would retain control, I wanted to retain the focus, and I would always, always delegate and outsource anything that I wasn't a 100% comfortable with, happy with doing, or didn't want to do basically.

Emily Lewis: Now, with Made By Hippo, did you have a client roster that sort of rolled over to that from previous engagements, or did you have to start finding new clients straight from scratch?

Carl Crawley: It was starting from scratch. I was in a previous employment which was a quite a high-level management position for a company, and part of the terms of my employment were I don't do freelance.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Carl Crawley: So I wasn't able to carry out any freelance work. However, prior to my signing that employment contract, I had two or three clients that I had been servicing requirements for seven or eight years and it wasn't a huge amount, but it was enough to just take over. So they had to honor



that, but the agreement was that at the point I sign the contract, I would not take anymore client work on.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So when I actually decided to leave and resign my position, it was a case I finished on Friday and I opened my laptop on Monday morning as Hippo.

Lea Alcantara: Oh wow.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: I was fortunate enough that I built up a bit of a reputation on Twitter anyway, and for the first, I would say, for the first nine months, I generated 100% of my revenues through Twitter leads, and that ranged from somebody in the community that wanted to try and do something but couldn't do it, so I would offer them some free advice and they still didn't get it, so I was like, "Okay, here's my rate card, I can do it for you if you like."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And I would get a lot of that, and it wasn't just ExpressionEngine stuff actually. I think my second project was for somebody on the community, Joris Heyndrickx. On the community, he goes by the name @moonbeetle. He literally just gave me a couple of hours work doing some jQuery work. But it was born through the community and through the Twitter feed, and it's something I still keep up now, and I'm quite all over Twitter really these days, but I understand the value of it, which is why. So yeah, so I had to build up from nothing basically, and I was very, very aggressive with that.



Emily Lewis: So you just mentioned the type of work that maybe some ... oh well, let me first step back and ask: in the beginning did you consider Made By Hippo a freelance business?

Carl Crawley: Yeah, it depends what your definition of a freelance business is, because yes, there was a time in Hippo in that it was only me, so you could say that it was a freelance business. However, from Day 1, Hippo has been incorporated and registered for tax and VAT, so it has been a corporate identity, not me trading as Hippo. So in that respect, it's a difficult one to answer, but yes and no, I suppose.

Emily Lewis: Well, I guess the reason I was asking you is because when I started, I definitely thought of myself as a freelancer, and I really had a very narrow concept of what kind of client I could have or I could get. And the kind of work you just described that you got just of helping other developers out on Twitter isn't something that I even considered, not that I wouldn't have been capable or willing, but I was just like, "Oh, I've got to go and find a client," which means it's a business that needs a website.

Carl Crawley: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So when you're thinking about a freelance or even when you're thinking in a bigger sense of like a digital agency like Made By Hippo, what kind of clients do these types of entities have?

Carl Crawley: I always made the point at the very, very beginning that I didn't want to own my own clients, purely because that would mean I would then have to employ a project manager or an account manager to deal with it.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]



Carl Crawley: I'd have to employ somebody who could handle billing and finance and all of those kinds of things that get associated with it. So I've purposely set Hippo up as an outsource agency. So all of the clients that I would go in for were design agencies, technology companies, marketing and sales companies, search engine marketing companies, anything like that.

Basically, any preexisting agency, or it could be a freelancer, that has a requirement for my skills, and that was always my requirements. I turned work away at the very beginning, or actually, I didn't turn work away. What I did very, very quickly, was I form partnerships. So I have a partnership with a design company who are just a design company. I have a partnership with an SEO company who just do SEO. I have a partnership with a hosting company who just do service in hosting.

If somebody walks through my office door or rings me up and says, "I'm Mrs. Jones from the local bakery and I want a website." "Great, speak to my design partners. They'll design it for you."

They'll deal with it all and they'll give me working HTML or a Photoshop .psd file, and I'll then build it and make it work because that's the arrangement I have with them. I won't take the client on myself because then I have to deal with weeks of getting the client requirements, scope creep, spec creep, billing, arguing over pricing and all that kind of stuff that I'm not being paid to do.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So that's why I wanted to make sure that actually I can offload that by forming these partnerships with these companies and various kind of scales from one-man band freelancers right up to having whole development teams, and it allows me to focus 100% on the technology and on the implementation.

Emily Lewis: And I'm going to guess based on what I'm hearing is that it's also been more profitable?



Carl Crawley: Yes, yeah, absolutely. Since the company has grown and is now no longer just me, we're able to take on bigger projects and more work, I never turn work away. I've never ever said no to a client. What I will do is I will resource a project based on its requirements, so it means that actually I can keep the company very lean. I have a core roster of people, but then I also have a vast database of freelancers and other agencies that I have reciprocal partnership deal with whereby if I need to outsource or I need to pull in additional resource in a project, I can.

Emily Lewis: Now, are these like business deals or they're just handshakes, good reputation, you get along with them, with these agencies? Or is there some sort of contract where, let's say, a woman comes in that has bakery down the street wants a website, you send them to the design firm. Is there anything that legally prevents them from sending the work to someone else if they don't give it to you when they've done their part?

Carl Crawley: Some of it. It depends on the client. Some clients I have contracts with that stipulate that they will give me the work, or if I don't want the work or I choose not to take the work on or they choose to give it elsewhere, that I then get a fixed fee, a finder's fee for the project.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: Some of my clients, and actually, I would say the formal clients I have contracts with are very, very minimum. I would only say probably two or three of them. All of the others are done, rightly or wrongly, through shake our hands, gentleman's agreement that is what we will do.

I don't just work for anyone. All of my clients I know on a personal level through many years of communicating on Twitter or in the EE forums or at various conferences, or I know them personally from some of the agencies that are local or agencies in the UK. I travel a lot and I spend some time



at their offices, so they get to see the kind of thing that I can do for them. So it does vary and it's also varies on what kind of relationship I have because there are lots of different relationships that I do for the agencies and each of those have kind of different set of rules, if you like.

Lea Alcantara: So it looks like there's a variety of people that you work with, and pounding the pavement with Twitter, conferences, in-person, that's how you find them. Did you have a specific agency or person in mind? Like when you go to these conferences or hang out on Twitter, do you think to yourself, "I really need to find a good designer"? And then as you are speaking to people, do you source them through that? Like what is your process really trying to find out who you want to work with/for?

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Carl Crawley: So I generally spend a lot of time on Twitter, like I said, looking at the hashtags and my own feed. Sometimes, I get requirement that or I have an idea for something for a client's project that I don't have a resource for, and I'll then just put a shout out on Twitter. I would then be fairly strict with who I follow on Twitter. I mean, there are some friends I follow that are just friends, but a lot of the time, the people that follow me and those that I follow on Twitter are a good kind of network and a good resource to tap into. So I think it was last week or the week before, I have an iOS guy who does mobile app development, but I had a potential requirement for some augmented reality work within a mobile app.

Lea Alcantara: Oh.

Carl Crawley: But he doesn't do augmented reality, he held his hand up, he couldn't do it. So I put a shout out and I got the names and numbers of two or three people that have been recommended to



me and I was able to kind of get in touch with them and get some idea of costs and project scope. So I do use that quite a lot. I would say I receive outsourced work more than I outsource.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Carl Crawley: So I have a lot of agencies and actually I do work on recurring revenue models with the agency, so the idea here is that they don't sign me up just to build them a website for one of their clients. What they do is they are tapping into my company as a resource of time so they can say, "Well, yeah, we have this project, but actually we also have this project coming up next month. Can we book some time ahead for you."

And actually, I even have non-hands-on roles. I have two agencies who I do work with on a regular basis, but actually they have an in-house development team, but both companies are literally just one-man development teams, and they pay me or they pay the company just to give them not hands-on, but eyes-on. So they build a website and they then give us the CP access and FTP access, we go in, we look at the code and the logic and where they used embeds and snippets and we then send them a little mini-report back saying, "Yeah, it's good to go. That's fine." Or "You should consider refactoring these embeds and/or you're using this template code wrong and et cetera."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And we just simply advise them. We don't actually do any of the hands-on stuff.

Emily Lewis: So are those like retainers with Made By Hippo?

Carl Crawley: Yes. Yeah, most of our clients are from retainers. I'd say 99% of our clients are from retainers.

Lea Alcantara: Oh wow! So let's take a little bit of a step back. When you have that shout out to see, "Oh, I need somebody for this," and then you get the names and stuff, what criteria or



characteristics do you look for in that person or that agency like, how do you know, “Right, this is the person that’s good for this”?

Emily Lewis: Right, like you can trust them?

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Carl Crawley: So the first thing I would do is a lot of it goes on the source of the recommendation, so the person that’s recommending that agency or that freelancer to me. If I value their opinion, and I think they themselves don’t suffer fools gladly, then I’m going to trust their opinion a bit more if they give me a recommendation, and then I’ll follow that up with them at a later stage. But definitely a lot of it is some faith.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: You have to have some faith in it and a lot of the time, actually what I prefer doing, because written communication can be misinterpreted so much.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: I’m very much a people person, speaking to them so if they have a requirement, even when we get regular inquiries through our website for requirements, and I’ll get sent very basic hazy specifications, and the first thing is like, “Great, that’s a good start, so let’s pick up the phone and have a chat.” Because actually then I get a feel for, is this client serious or are they just sending out specification to 15 agencies? And also then, they get a feeling of confidence and a bit more in me to be able to then take it to the next level.



Emily Lewis: Now, in terms of the work that you do provide, that you outsource, you mentioned you provide consulting kind of eyes-on for two agencies, kind of doing an audit after their work or some QA, what other kind of services do you outsource?

Carl Crawley: Yes, we have the eyes-on service we do. We have maintenance and support packages that agencies come to us for a lot of the time. That is, I would say, since October and November last year, that's been one of our biggest packages whereby an agency like yourselves or any agency of any size really have a monthly fee, and within that monthly fee, we maintain ExpressionEngine, we upgrade ExpressionEngine, we upgrade all the add-ons. We maintain it, we keep it working and barring any fundamental problems with upgrading from version to version, we will then also go in hands-on and fix any logic or conditional errors with new versions.

And we have a lot of companies that do that because actually a lot of the agencies that we deal with, because they have one to three people in the company, for them it's more of a conveyor belt of work, so they build the work, they launch it, they then want the next project. Because actually once they've built it, they're not generating enough revenue to then just sit on that client, and so what we do is we take that client on. We optionally host it. If we don't host it, then you can host it and we get all the details, and then yeah, we log in and we use various reporting tools and monitoring systems just to basically keep EE maintained, keep all the add-ons maintained and keep the whole site running so that then in six, nine, or twelve months later when the original client comes back to you as an agency and says, "Right, we now need to add this subscription system to the site," as an example, you don't get to a point where you think, "Oh no, it's running EE 2.4, we've got to spend a couple of days upgrading it and all these add-ons are out of date." You know that actually it's going to be running 2.8 and it's going to be up to date and all the add-ons are going to be up to date and you can then just move into the project and you get the peace of mind.



Emily Lewis: So what you're describing to me, correct me if I'm wrong, but the agency builds the site for their client. And then when the site is done, they hand that client to you, you guys do maintenance work, and then if that client wants new development, they then go to their original agency. And that doesn't go to you because you've been working with them regularly on a maintenance perspective?

Carl Crawley: No. That's fundamentally it, yes, but we have two ways of dealing with it. It's that we work transparently, so I could just be the maintenance guy from Emily Lewis Design and I have an email address at your domain name.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And I respond to the client on your behalf and we maintain the site, and then the client may come back to me and say, "Oh, we want you to add this new bit to the website." I will then come back to you and I'll say, "The client wants this new bit on the website. I can do it for you, it will cost you this much, or you can do it yourself, but here's the heads up."

Lea Alcantara: Nice.

Carl Crawley: And then we have other clients whereby they don't want to get involved in any of the maintenance, any of the support, any of the management, and when they launch the website, they then say, "All right, now speak to Carl at Made By Hippo and he will maintain and he will run everything for you from this point forward."

Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Emily Lewis: Very interesting.

Carl Crawley: So yeah.



Emily Lewis: Yeah, it's fascinating because when you operate your own business a certain way, sometimes you forget that there are other things you could do to allow yourself to focus in new areas or reach certain clients. Something like that never even occurred to me, but it's brilliant really.

Carl Crawley: Yeah, I mean, it's worth for us. I mean, it was originally a very small subset of what we do. I mean, our main work was really kind of add-on development and customization and site builds.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: I don't design. Like I said, I outsource my design. I have three or four design companies that I use and/or freelancers that I use, and I outsource all of that. But we get a lot of requirements where designers will come to us. It was about 12 months ago, I think it was, we just started getting all of the agencies: "Look, we'll just give you Photoshop files, you build them. You build them, we'll give you Photoshop files." I don't know one end of HTML and CSS from another, through choice.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: Responsive design still to this day eludes me. So I needed to change my view on that, so I've got resources, and I've got somebody who now works for me who does front end. It just so happens he also does ExpressionEngine, so he can not only do the responsive CSS and HTML, but he then wires up the templates into the basic channel structures, et cetera. And then I get involved if it needs any custom development program and/or add-ons or anything like that.

So it is a good mix, but we do cover every aspect of outsourcing. It's not just "I want you to build me a website." It could be "We have a website, but we want you to build a shipping add-on for us." Or



“We have a website in EE 1, can you upgrade it to EE 2.” The answer will be no, by the way.

[Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: But we do get a lot of them, and like I said, the eyes-on stuff is pretty good as well because you get to see how other people implement stuff.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Carl Crawley: And that’s really quite good just to kind of get an idea and think, “Oh, I didn’t realize you could do it like that.” Even I get those kind of moments every so often because you get stuck into the same way of doing something.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And then when you see somebody else doing it slightly differently, it does make you think upon it and that is the beauty of it.

Lea Alcantara: I want to talk a little bit more about some of the relationships that you are building, especially when it can vary depending on the particular client or the project. You mentioned how some of them just fully give it to you after launch and then other times you have to ask, “Oh, they requested this from me. Do you want to do it or I could do it and I’ll charge you.” What kind of boundaries are there? What boundaries do you set for yourself when outsourcing?

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Carl Crawley: Yes, I'm very honest and transparent and very ethical in my dealings. And right at the very beginning, it can be something as simple as a simple email to the client and it just is "you own the client" or "I own the client."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And that defines the boundaries. So if you own the client, I don't do anything unless you tell me.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: If I own the client, I make that choice. I make that judgment call, and I will never take a project away from one of my clients or one of the agencies I work with because you're kind of biting off the hands that feed you then.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: Because that agency is not just one project, it's 15 projects a year, maybe even more. So it's not in my interest to take a client off the agency unless the agency want to give it to me. If the agency have said, and I've got a few of them now, they don't have the time to deal with the agency because they're moving on to other projects or the client is particularly demanding, however, I've been working on this site on a maintenance and support package for ten months previously, so I know the system intimately anyway, they may then just turn around and say, "Right, you take the client on. You deal with it, and we'll go from there." And I do.



Some clients ask for a retainer or a finder's fee, some don't. Some just want their client to be serviced and to be happy and it varies on the project. It varies on the client, but yeah, I'm very ethical in that and very kind of open and transparent with all of my dealings.

Lea Alcantara: Regarding that transparency, I feel like where there could be a possible sticking point, and I feel like this is all over the agency world, what about rules regarding promoting what you've worked on?

Carl Crawley: So if you will have a look at my company's website portfolio, you'll see that the first thing that I say is "in association with or in partnership with" or something along those lines. Unless it's specifically requested, I always put it in my portfolio that it was done in a partnership capacity or in some kind of association. If the client specifically asked for it not to be in the portfolio, in my portfolio, then I don't. I'm very happy to do that. At the end of the day, they're paying me to do the job, so all I'm concerned with is do the job. Because the sacrifice that I have by not putting it in my portfolio, I would hope, would be redeemed by lots more work from them, but most agencies I've dealt with have not really had many issues with it. Obviously, I would never pass off somebody else's work as my own. If I ever worked in partnership with company, whether it's a designer or it's an agency, I've always wherever possible mention that agency in the write up or in the content.

Emily Lewis: When it comes to that sort of stuff is ... particularly I've received like a subcontractor agreement where I outsourced to a larger agency, and before we even started the work, that sort of defined whether or not I could include the work on my own portfolio. So is that the situation where you actually have like a subcontractor agreement or some type of contract that specifies it, or is that, too, kind of a gentleman's agreement?

Carl Crawley: Yeah, I mean, I have it in the contract. So in my contract of service, I do have a clause in there that says that the agency or client have allowed me to put it in my portfolio. That's in



there by standard. If they particularly take an issue with it and want that removed then, again, pick up the phone, we chat about it, “Why do you not want me to promote the fact that I’ve done this work?”

Emily Lewis: Right.

Carl Crawley: It could be they’re not telling the end client that I’m an outsource agency, which is absolutely fine.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So on that basis, as I said earlier, we work on the invisible contract.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So it’s “I will be carl@whateveryourdomainname.com” is, and I have about 17 of them in my email client, and I am just “Head of Technology” or “Development Manager” or whatever you want. I just pick a fictitious title and I represent your company.

Emily Lewis: So you provide the contract documentation, or does the client also provide their own subcontractor agreement? Because in my own experience, when I’ve outsourced, I’ve had to sign their agreements and I didn’t have my own agreement for that relationship. I just did what their document said.

Carl Crawley: Normally both. So normally they would be both. I always submit my standard terms and a standard contract of things that you can expect from me on how I work. A lot of clients send me their own requirements or their own terms, particularly the work for hire stuff where you have “I signed away all rights to the intellectual property and so and so forth.” But yeah, it really depends and varies on a per client basis. Most of the small to medium agencies make do with the contract



that I supply because they're getting into a relationship with the company. It's not a contract for a specific project.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So we have a mutual nondisclosure agreement. We have the standard contract terms of service, and then we will deal with on per project basis, because it maybe I have a client that I may do a project with and you're happy for me to put in my portfolio that I worked with you on, but the next project you get in, you may not want that, so it can't be a blanket policy. It needs to be on a per-project basis. However, the relationship is just company to company, not for a specific project.

Lea Alcantara: Well, I feel like a lot of these are judgment calls, even with all the legalities and things like that. I'm curious how you would handle conflict of interest, especially because you're working the agency's project and they may have somebody that has overlapping skill set. First of all, what would be considered conflict of interest to you, and then how would you handle that?

Carl Crawley: It's never been raised before actually from them. I suppose I have had a situation in the past whereby one of the agencies that I've got a contract with have received a tender for a contract that I also personally received a tender for, and I only found out that that agency in particular had received the tender because, obviously, they sent me the tender and asked me to provide technology input for their proposal.

In that situation, again, it's about just being honest and transparent, I told them that I had received the tender as well and we agreed that we would submit two proposals, one which would be made by Hippo-branded, and one which would be branded in their company name. The costs were virtually identical, and we both had a mutual understanding that if either one of us won the work, we would



deal with our own respective skills. So if I won it, I would outsource the design to them. If they won it, they would outsource the technology to me.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: I've had one client who asked if I would sign away the rights to building another website like his business. It was, and still is, a client site that I run. Of course, I didn't agree to it. I have said that I would not take on another business in the same sector without speaking to him, and again, we have a really good relationship, and he trusts that I would hold my end of the bargain out if that would ever happen. I deal with it on a case-by-case basis really. I can't honestly say I have a blanket policy on what I would do on those situations.

Emily Lewis: Is that the best advice perhaps you would offer to someone who wants to move forward with outsourcing their work to agencies? Is to be flexible and respond based on the relationship you have?

Carl Crawley: Yeah, absolutely. I think that is the single most useful bit of advice you could give anybody looking to outsource is be flexible. You have to be flexible in lots of different ways. Flexible on costs because once you have a day rate or an hourly rate, the agency are working to different constraints so you have to be flexible to that extent.

You have to be flexible as well on the end result of requirements and how you do it. I'm not a very good micro manager. Actually, I'm not a micro manager. When I outsource to people and when people outsource their requirements to me, I expect some level of autonomy to be able to fulfill the requirement in the most optimum solution that I'm capable. What I don't want is somebody saying, "I want you to do this, and this is how I want you to do it," because actually with that, you may as well



go and get somebody out of high school that knows how to use a computer and you can sit on their shoulder and you can point which keys you want them to press.

What people are getting from me is the end result. So “this is the problem, this is the requirement, give me my solution.” They don’t want to know what’s in the middle because that’s what they pay me for. I always use an analogy of an architect or building a house, you don’t employ a builder to build the house and then stand there and tell him which bricks to use and which cement to use and which wood to use and how to pave the front. You rely on his ability and his skills to do that. You just say, “Build me a house and these are the requirements for that house.”

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Emily Lewis: It’s also a good analogy, house building, for this outsourcing because it’s very rare that a contractor does dry wall and plumbing and electrical and all that other stuff, and so it’s really a matter of building relationships with people who have those specialties and then they do the work together as a unit, but they’re all sort of independently providing their services.

Carl Crawley: Absolutely, absolutely. I had a great chat with Brad Parscale.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: He had done a talk at the time about building websites and outsourcing because he actually has or his talk was about the opposite. The fact is he outsources nothing. What he does, he either buys companies or he employs people.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So he has designers, he has SEO guys. He owns a hosting company. He owns a content company. He has it all, and for that, it means that it’s all in-house and he has complete



control of it. What I do is slightly differently. I still offer it all, however, I do it through partnerships and agreements with other companies.

So like I said, I have two SEO companies. One is very much a high-level SEO and they do some amazing work, and it's on high-level, multi-lingual ecommerce. Amazing stuff. And then I have a freelancer who is a phenomenal SEO guy who does the middle to the low-end stuff.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: But I still provide the service. So my agencies, my clients come to us and say, "We have this website. We want you to do X, Y and Z. We want you to manage an ad campaign. We want you to give us some requirements or et cetera." What I then do is I then speak to my guy, whether it's the high-end SEO or the freelancer, he comes back to me and says, "All right, we need to make these changes in the HTML. We need to add this metadata. We need to put these tags in for Google Analytics." That then gets funneled through to my front-end guy who then does it and maintains it all. So we still retain it. We sort of have them, but rather than having a salary bill of 50 to 60 staff across five or six different companies, it's still only me and the core team.

Lea Alcantara: I still feel like though that you would be doing a lot of project management, especially if it's under your brand, Hippo brand, but you are outsourcing front end here and design here, but the client is facing you.

Carl Crawley: Well, the client never faces me.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, okay.

Carl Crawley: So the agency would face me.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.



Carl Crawley: So I generally don't get design stuff, I have to say.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Carl Crawley: Because most of my clients are designers or design agencies. Most of the work that we get is technology based or back-end based. So yes, I suppose you could say there is an element of project management because we still have to kind of coordinate all of the moving pieces

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Carl Crawley: But it's within a very small subset of the whole project. So we just get a requirement, which would be to manage it or to deal with an ad campaign. We have a site at the moment, it's a multi-lingual site with eight to nine different languages, and all we do is we maintain it. We just maintain the EE add-ons and the code base, and they've signed an ad agency to do a series of ads on their website and they sell advertisement. So the ad agency just send us all of the JavaScript and the HTML we need and what pages we need to do it based on what ads they've sold. Like if it's for the front-end guys, we add it to the templates on whatever snippets are required and hook that up to the click tracking in Google Analytics and that's it. We deliver it back to them, and that's our involvement.

Emily Lewis: And I would imagine that where the project management does exist, if you're working with the same people for the same type of work, whether it's for different projects, that that your communication is down. It's not, you know ... I think one of my greatest challenges with project management is when the client is involved in it.

Carl Crawley: Yeah.



Emily Lewis: When I'm directly dealing with the client who doesn't understand the technology and there is just a lot more handholding and that sort of thing versus me and Lea talking about what needs to be done between the two of us.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Carl Crawley: Yeah, absolutely. I think that because I'm pretty much 99% of the time dealing with other web professionals, there is not so much project management to be done, and there is not so much handholding to be done. Because whilst the other web professional may not understand what it is they're going to get, in the technical aspect, they understand enough to say, "Right, this is what we want you to build. Now, go away and build it."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: Whereas the end client is, because ultimately, it's their money their spending, they're going to want to know a lot more details. They're going to want to know why you've done something a certain way, how you're doing it and all the intricacies, and that's where the handholding, the project management, takes time.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And where we deal with other professionals, it's just, "Right, the client wants this." You've spent the last kind of few hours, few days, weeks, convincing them that that's the best way forward and those are the reasons for that, what I'm getting then is just a definite task.

Lea Alcantara: So it feels like we've been talking a lot about advice you can give to someone working with an agency. I want to flip that discussion and ask you what you think the best advice you can give to an agency that's working with an outside contractor or company.



Carl Crawley: So I would say that you need to have trust and confidence in what they do. I've spoken to lots and lots of agencies who outsource to the Middle East or the Far East to various software development houses. And yes, we all know that they're really cheap, really, really cost effective. However, time and time again, I've spoken to agencies who have just said, "Yes, it is cheap, but you don't know how much handholding you need to do."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: And actually, they are even more robotic in their approach. You give them a requirement; they will do exactly that requirement.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: Whereas dealing with somebody like myself or some of the other agencies that do outsourcing, you're going to get pushed back and that's what you should expect. If you're not getting pushed back as an agency for requirements, you're not dealing with the right outsource company because what you don't want is somebody that is just going to do everything you say.

What you want is you want to be challenged, and if you have a requirement and somebody says, "I want you to do this," you want a "have you thought about doing it this way instead," which could mean that you can upsell, we can add more functionality, we can give the client more value. Because it is in my interest to upsell.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Carl Crawley: So if I push back and say, "You need to think about this, maybe we do it this way," if you come back and say, "I totally understand what you mean, but this is really what the client wants," fine, I'd go and do it. But you want that pushback.



Lea Alcantara: Right.

Carl Crawley: You need that pushback. So you need to have that confidence and autonomy. Like I said, you need to give the outsourcer requirements. If they're not able to then just fulfill those requirements without being micro managed, again, you're using the wrong outsource agency.

Emily Lewis: Wow! So much food for thought here.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, I know. I mean, this is amazing, but we've got to wrap this up a little bit.
[Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: Yes. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: But before we do, we do have our rapid-fire 10 questions, so our listeners can get to know you a bit better.

Carl Crawley: Oh, right. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: It's painless.

Carl Crawley: Okay.

Lea Alcantara: It's all good. Are you ready?

Carl Crawley: Okay.

Lea Alcantara: All right, first question, Mac OS or Windows?



Carl Crawley: Mac OS.

Emily Lewis: What is your favorite mobile app?

Carl Crawley: Oh, Facebook.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: What is your least favorite thing about social media?

Carl Crawley: People believing everything they read and see.

Emily Lewis: What profession other than yours would you like to attempt?

Carl Crawley: Oh, dear god. I'd like to own and run a hotel.

Lea Alcantara: Oh wow! What profession would you not like to do?

Carl Crawley: Be a web developer. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

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

Carl Crawley: Low [Lodewijk Schutte].

Lea Alcantara: What music do you like to code to?

Carl Crawley: It depends on what I'm doing. Web programming and EE work, it will be anything poppy, jumpy, upbeat. Any database development, heavy metal.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: What's your secret talent?

Carl Crawley: I can bench press a lot of my friends.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: What's the most recent book you've read?

Carl Crawley: Dan Brown's latest book.

Emily Lewis: And lastly, I'm still laughing. [Laughs]

Carl Crawley: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Oh, lastly, *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*?

Carl Crawley: Oh, I'd have to say *Star Wars*.

Lea Alcantara: All right, so that's all the time we have for today. Thanks for joining us, Carl.

Carl Crawley: No worries, thank you very much.

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

Carl Crawley: You can find me on Twitter [@cwcrawley](#) or [@madebyhippo](#) or my website, madebyhippo.com, or you can just email me at hello@madebyhippo.com.

Emily Lewis: Great, thanks Carl. It's always great talking with you.

Carl Crawley: No worries. Thank you very much.



Lea Alcantara: We'd now like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, [Hover](#) and [Pixel & Tonic](#).

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

Lea Alcantara: And thanks to our listeners for tuning in! If you want to know more about CTRL+CLICK, make sure you follow us on Twitter [@ctrlclickcast](#) or visit our website, [ctrlclickcast.com](#).

Emily Lewis: Don't forget to tune in to our next episode when Stephanie Sullivan Rewis is joining the show to talk about her experiences evaluating and choosing a CMS. Be sure to check out our schedule on our site, [ctrlclickcast.com/schedule](#) for more upcoming topics.

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]

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