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## CTRL+CLICK CAST #55 - Statamic for Large-Scale Sites with Daniel Fowler

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**Lea Alcantara:** From [Bright Umbrella](#), this is CTRL+CLICK CAST! We inspect the web for you! Today we are talking about using Statamic for large-scale sites with Daniel Fowler. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host:

**Emily Lewis:** Emily Lewis!

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**Emily Lewis:** Before we dive into today's episode, I wanted to remind our listeners that we have a [donate link on our site!](#) So if you love CTRL+CLICK and have a little spending money, consider donating to help us keep the show going. \$1, \$5, whatever you can spare will help us continue delivering great content, high-quality audio and transcripts for each and every episode.

Now, back to the business at hand ... So, large-scale sites have unique challenges and needs. Finding the right CMS to handle a "mega-site" is critical. Today we're talking with Daniel Fowler about using Statamic for a large-scale project, namely the University of Georgia's College of Education site. Daniel is a web developer specializing in architecting really big enterprise projects with more than a thousand pages. He's been building higher-ed sites for the past seven years and

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also freelances on the side working on smaller sites for local businesses and non-profits. Welcome to the show, Daniel!

**Daniel Fowler:** Hi, thanks for having me!

**Lea Alcantara:** Thank *you!* Can you tell our listeners a bit more about yourself?

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah. So I am a triple-Dog [alumnus] from the University of Georgia.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Not only did I get my business degree from there, but somehow they roped me into working there for eight years. And I also served on the alumni board for a number of years. So I bleed red and black, as they say.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** I have definitely tried to sort of bring our website and things to a modern level ... goodness gracious.

**Lea Alcantara:** Woo, interesting. Wow, it's very rare for someone who doesn't have, say, a PhD track to stick around the university they went to school for. What made you decide to stay, especially with the business degree?

**Daniel Fowler:** Right, well, if you want me to be completely honest, it was a necessity.

**Lea Alcantara:** Ah.

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**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, when I graduated, I couldn't find a job because I didn't know anything about business.

**Lea Alcantara:** Ah.

**Daniel Fowler:** I didn't know anything about development or professional industries of any kind. My parents, neither of them were business people and neither of them had anything to do with technology, and so when I graduated, it was difficult for me to figure out who these recruiters were recruiting my major. These big accounting firms and folks trying to recruit me to be what felt to me like a software developer, and I didn't know much about what I wanted to do with my life, but I knew I didn't want to be a software developer.

**Lea Alcantara:** Interesting.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah. So I began trying to just figure things out, and it was totally by chance and a god thing that I was in a musical theater production and the director's father found out that I was a graduate from the Terry College of Business and he, without knowing anything else about me, stepped up to bat and introduced me to about a dozen people at the university one of whom eventually would hire me at the Terry College of Business where I graduated from. So it was there that I started as a part-time developer and then was hired full time after about a year and a half, and the rest is kind of history.

**Emily Lewis:** That's nice. I always feel like it comes down to not only what you know, but who you know and the people who want to support you.

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh, absolutely.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah, it makes a huge difference. Well, it's good you liked your alma mater. [Laughs]

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**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah. [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, yeah. Well, being here for ten years, I've uncovered a lot of stuff that you never would guess as a student, but I imagine that's probably the case at any industry, but especially a public university like this.

**Emily Lewis:** Oh, yeah. You get to see behind the curtain. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** So since we're talking about the university level, just in my mind, that naturally connotes a large site. Is that the case? Is there just one big site, or are there many smaller sites? How does the structure of websites exist at the University of Georgia?

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, if you think about the movie *Independence Day*.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And they have all of those saucer ships that kind of hover over the major cities around the world and how big those things were. But then they discovered that there's a mother ship still out there in space that's exponentially larger. That's pretty much how a university website is structured. The big core is definitely almost unfathomable, how big it is, but then the little offshoot websites — which we have over a hundred of them just at the College of Education — are definitely very sizable in their little self-contained environments.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Daniel Fowler:** So it's very convoluted. It's very spider webby, and you just kind of have to take it one step at a time.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** I have to say this is the best analogy ever. [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** With *Independence Day*, that's fantastic.

**Emily Lewis:** Well, it's true though, Lea, we're also working with a university right now.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** And we're discovering that same sort of analogy where they have different programs that have their own sites that are maintained by its own department.

**Lea Alcantara:** Their department.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** But then they are all in sort of, at least in our case with this project, its all-in-one massive, large system and they're just tiny sites running off of that one massive system. Is that kind of...

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.



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**Emily Lewis:** Are all your systems integrated or they're all just tied together with branding and links or are they actually running off a same, similar system?

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh man, well, I feel my blood pressure swell up just thinking about it.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** You mentioned two words in that one simple question that just made me go, "Oh, I wish. Oh, I wish."

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** No, they do not talk to each other. These systems do not talk to each other, and then also the branding is a major issue.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** They are all over the place. Most of those offshoot websites I mentioned have no branding whatsoever that links back to the mother ship, the College of Education at the University of Georgia.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So that's our major challenge right now is moving forward. I think the project we're talking about today is going to be just pretty much the mother ship that I mentioned.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]



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**Daniel Fowler:** We have yet to really tackle the hovering craft, if you will, those hundred offshoot websites, which are primarily in WordPress.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Interesting.

**Emily Lewis:** So let's talk a little bit of generalities before we talk about specifics with the College of Education site. How do you define a large site, like what makes a large site a large site?

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs] I think it's probably subjective depending on who you ask, they'll have different things to say.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I tell people that I specialize in mega-sites and I don't know if I'm the only person using that term or not. I know it's not an industry standard, but typically I define a large site by a thousand pages or more.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Which again if you tell somebody ... it's so weird, it's a very lonely industry, web development.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Because if you try to describe to my wife or to my parents or even worse, my wife's parents on what it is I do and why I'm important, they can't figure it out.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Describing to them, if you have a website with over 6,000 pages and when you rebuild it to only be 1,800 pages or 800 pages. They just don't really grasp it. They just nod their head and they say, "Yeah, yeah, wow!"

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And you can tell it's just not clicking, and that's kind of where I draw the line with large site.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But at the same time I work with a lot of local folks and to them a large site is anything above 50 pages.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** That's typically kind of a line I draw on the sand where I say, "Okay, you have a lot of content here, but you really have a pretty simple business model, so maybe we need to scale back."

**Emily Lewis:** So at least with your definition, it's about pages. Does anything else come into play that maybe it doesn't quite hit a thousand, but it's got some other complexity that sort of combined with, let's say, 500 pages makes it a mega-site?

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, I deal with that on a regular basis trying to describe ours, and I imagine a lot of ecommerce sites deal with the same thing where you can have a very simple site with just your home page and About Us page and then you have your product section that might be 500 products. But



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ultimately you don't really consider those a page of their own because there's only a little bit of content. So yeah, I definitely think page volume is one factor, but you're right, the complexity of the backend can very easily make a small site seem very big.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So from a developer side of things, I would say the number of templates that it takes to build something is probably *our* primary definition of what makes our site large.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Is there a difference between just a general large site versus a large Statamic site?

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs] Maybe. To be honest, my background is in flat-file static HTML websites, which is why I was drawn to Statamic in the first place.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so I imagine if we try to have this website in anything besides a flat-file system, it would be just utter chaos. It's hard enough as it is to open a file directory, sort the contents by last opened or last edited and kind of throw a benchmark where we say, "Okay, anything three years old or more or older we'll get rid of." In a database-driven system, I imagine it's hard to sort content like that and do sort of a black-and-white, categorical removal of old content.

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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]



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**Daniel Fowler:** So large Statamic site might be a little bit more of a clear-cut page volume “these are the number of files we have on our server” versus a CMS is more ambiguous.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Well, no pages really truly exist on our site and so roughly with search results and categories and things, I don’t know, what’s the URL structure that works?

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Something along those lines.

**Emily Lewis:** Do you work with a team of people, or are you solely responsible for this, the College of Education site?

**Daniel Fowler:** I think it’s a personal thing that I do. I always refer to our team, my team, when I’m talking to practically anybody. And I think I do that just because it gives me this feeling that I’m not alone. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** When we were tackling the project, there was only a team of two of us. I was hired to come in and oversee the project. I had one team member that I inherited and his development skills had not been really maintained — by no fault of his own — for the past 15 or so years. Because he had been with the organization for 20 years and had a lot of organizational knowledge that was



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tremendous regarding the project and being able to move forward with certain clients. But at the same time, it was pretty much designed and built by me.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** And do you have content authors that maintain content or does that also fall to you and your teammate?

**Daniel Fowler:** We do now.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Well, actually the structure that I've always followed at the university has been pretty much with program coordinators and department heads and faculty people. And if you're not in Higher Ed, maybe you don't know the difference between faculty and staff. Faculty are the professors and academics.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Staff are the support specialists, kind of the employees, the administrative assistants, the developers, the designers, folks like that. So typically, content is owned and edited by the program faculty.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** The thing is they often say they don't have time to edit things. They don't like to write things for the web because they don't understand the web and how a website functions, and that makes total sense.



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**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So one of the first things I did was draw up a schematic of what my team's makeup would be, which included content development editors. And so now we have two news writers who hired as news writers for the College, but I was able to emphasize that I needed them to have a technology, web-based skill set so that they could help just manage the content of the site. Because I am not a content specialist, and no one on my team is a content specialist, but we are able to use them now pretty much, I would say maybe 25 to 50% of their time is spent helping to update content, texts and pictures on our website, our big, primary website.

**Emily Lewis:** Well, I was asking these questions because I'm curious. Since you chose Statamic, are you having these content authors work directly with the files on the server?

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** Or are they managing things in the control panel?

**Daniel Fowler:** They *are* managing things in the control panel simply because to give them the ability to upload a file to the server was going to be much more risky for non-developer types.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And so we struggled a lot in the early going, because once we begun using these content editors in the control panel, not only did that introduce some challenges with Statamic's member feature because we have so many members, and I'll probably get to that later.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But also we ran into some version control issues where they were editing on the live site in the control panel and then the developers would be making changes and upload the file and overwrite some things.

**Emily Lewis:** Oh.

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh, right.

**Daniel Fowler:** So we definitely had to overcome it. I'd like to say we installed preventative measures before we had a real problem, but that's not the case.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** We learned by mistakes.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah, yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** And so we definitely had some "deep breath, take a walk" moments where things got overwritten.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And finally we got to where we needed to be for now.

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay. So I'm curious because obviously we'll talk about version control a little bit deeper. This brings the question, why did you decide to work on Statamic over other systems for this project, especially since it seems — famously — Jack McDade tried to dissuade you?

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]



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**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs] Honestly, I couldn't believe that he did that.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** I thought he would be really excited that the University of Georgia was reaching out to use what I think at the time was almost a fledging product. And so I was really excited, but again my personality is one that when I think I have a good idea and someone tells me that it can't be done that way, that really, really motivates me to do it that way.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Sure.

**Daniel Fowler:** So he said, "You should probably check out something else," and I said, "You know, I really don't have an interest in checking out anything else." I had a friend that told me about Statamic back in, I want to say, early 2013?

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And I was hired by the College of Education at UGA in October 2013 so it was just within that year that I was told that I had a blank slate to build a brand new website. They were currently using WordPress. I knew that I had previous experience with WordPress. I did not foresee it being a permanent solution. It's just not scalable for this size of a site.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Daniel Fowler:** Not in my opinion — and I'm sure several people would beg to differ. And it was already built in WordPress and I inherited it. I looked at it. You mentioned earlier that some sites kind of are built within themselves.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** Well, this site, I think it had 60 or 80 little sub-sites within its central WordPress implementation, and it was extremely hairy trying to keep all those updated.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** The user management was a nightmare. The content was just awful. There were over 6,000 pages at that time, and again, those weren't pages that I could go, see and feel.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I mentioned that my background is in static HTML development and so ultimately Statamic offered me what I was familiar with.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Working with files, I could choose whatever code editor I want to use and as long as I have ready access to sync the server with what I have on my local machine, Statamic was what I wanted to do. So I guess the long and short of it is, Jack said to try something else, I said, "No, thanks. I'm going to make it work. You'll see."

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]



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**Daniel Fowler:** And here we are. I don't think we're the largest site using Statamic anymore, but that was something that I tried to promote ourselves as when we first launched.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But again, going back to what really is a large site? Who knows?

**Emily Lewis:** I find this really interesting because we talk so much to people who are using database-driven CMSs.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** And it's not often that — before I got into working with CMSs, like yeah, I built static HTML sites, file based, and worked with those.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** And you just don't hear that very often anymore, but I completely appreciate that like you embraced where you're strongest and where you felt you can make quick decisions, and I think that's what it comes down to. We had a listener write in and the long and short of her question is, "what do I look for in a CMS to make my life easier the next time I have to work with it, especially coming from some other CMS?" And I think you kind of answered it: you pick something that you can get the job done in.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** I mean, there are other factors for sure, but that's a huge one.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, where I came from at Terry College of Business, we had just launched a new website that was built in ExpressionEngine.

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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I was not the lead developer on that, and I didn't know anything about ExpressionEngine when that project started, and so I went online and started reading the documentation, watching video tutorials and learning what ExpressionEngine was all about. I turned around to try and apply my newly-acquired knowledge to our implementation, but it had been so customized that nothing I learned was really applicable.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** It didn't look the same. It didn't function the same because it had all of these, you know — ExpressionEngine developers love this — but we had dozens of add-ons and plugins that really changed the core functionality of the system.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So that's something I'm really big on. I'm always trying to keep and use the system's core strengths to the maximum capacity and customize as little as possible.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** And again, that probably comes because I've worked on really, really, really big sites and so I know standardization is of the utmost importance.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And to roll into an upgrade in the future is really, really difficult to do when it's severely customized.



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**Lea Alcantara:** So I'm really curious about once you've decided on Statamic and you're like, "Okay, I'm going to go through all of this," how did the planning process go? Did you do some sort of audit? Did you create a spreadsheet? Like I'm just trying to figure out what your planning process was over, "Okay, here's what Statamic offers. Here's what we need. How do we combine the two?"

**Daniel Fowler:** Unfortunately, I didn't get much of a whole planning phase like that. When I came in October, I spent the first couple of months trying to get the lay of the land. Like any new organization, you have to figure out who the people are, who the key players are, who your staff is, how things operate, what are the procedures that are in place.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Timestamp:** *00:19:56*

**Daniel Fowler:** And in January then of the following year, when I finally sat down and said, "Okay, it's time to start building something new. I think I've gotten enough of the big picture." The dean then told me that I had seven months to do it.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so I originally had drawn up a timeline that was 12 to 15 months.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And again, the old site had 6,000 pages on it. And when he told me that, we kind of said, "Well, we had better get cracking."

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]



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**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so really I didn't have a lot of time to evaluate whether or not it was going to work, but I knew that even a static HTML site that we had total control over was going to put the College in a better position than a WordPress site that had all these kinds of plugins and add-ons that no one really knew how to use and that were broken in certain areas, but not in only a few areas, but *many* areas.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And so trying to make sense of the mess that was there already was going to be much more burdensome than just saying, "We're going to do this. We're going to keep it basic. We're going to build whatever we can using minimal infrastructure, and then we can grow from there," instead of trying...

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I even overstepped that a little bit, because I tried to implement some features that I thought the College would love, that the faculty would be like, "This is wonderful." But what I discovered is that the faculty was so ingrained in the way things were done that even my really cool new features like a central calendar — which was brand new to the website when I came along — even those really took several months after the initial launch to catch on because people just weren't used to having it.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** It really wasn't until the past few months even that the calendar has really taken off. If you go to our calendar now, you'll see about 30 events in October, which is still probably only about half of the number of events we actually have going on, but it was just really incredible that things didn't go the way I foresaw.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I'm so sorry. I ramble a lot in case you didn't figure that out.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** But ultimately the planning phase had to get cut out. I drew up this whole project life cycle and explained, "These are the tests that we need to undergo. We need to do the research, the information gathering with the stakeholders and everybody."

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And to an extent we did those things, but as far as weighing the pros and cons of an information infrastructure, we weren't really afforded that opportunity.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** So I had decided that Jack challenged me to do it in Statamic and I was going to do it in Statamic.

**Lea Alcantara:** You know I appreciate you saying this type of story.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Lea Alcantara:** Because sometimes you go to conferences and we have these presentations where everything is ideal, you know?

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Lea Alcantara:** As in, “You get all the content at once. Force your client to give you the content. It’s so great,” and like, “Here are all our perfect wireframes from our perfect timeline of our perfectly-paid project life cycle.”

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** And the reality is that you — and a lot of us listening out here — have different timelines, different bosses, different priorities. And it’s not because we didn’t, you know, like you mentioned earlier, you had a 12- to 15-month timeline. It’s not like you weren’t aware that for a specific vision that you had, that it would need more time, but if the dean says seven months, then certain things need to get cut.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** You know that’s the reality.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Lea Alcantara:** Are you going to like start arguing with the dean at this point?

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** I mean, in some ways as a professional, there are points in time where you do need to have those difficult conversations and you have to argue. But at other times, it’s like, if something

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needs to launch in seven months, then we just need to figure out what can we do in those seven months.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I mean, I can talk about that project for days, and I'm going to get to because I'm attending some conferences here in the next couple of months where I'm presenting.

**Lea Alcantara:** Perfect.

**Daniel Fowler:** So I'll try not to go into too much detail here until you want me to, I certainly can.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** But yeah, that's absolutely true, choosing your battles became an integral part of how we function. And now that I've given some context, you kind of see how the one-team member that I did inherit, his organizational knowledge was critical.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Because I had to say, "We're moving forward. I'm sorry, but we're moving forward."

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And he was able to navigate those client relationships with a little bit of finesse that I just didn't have the time for. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right, right.



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**Emily Lewis:** So now that you've had time from your initial "I'm going to make Statamic work" mindset, and now that you've worked with it, have you discovered any surprising strengths that it offers for this type of large site that you suspect is better than some of the other options you could have looked at?

**Daniel Fowler:** Absolutely. I would say, number one, is the speed.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** Because it's a flat-file build, you don't have to ping the server a dozen times, that's really nice.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** At the same time, we have so much content in our navigation and in our footer that we are pinging the server more often than probably as much a smaller site would do or a much more streamlined site, but I think that's just the nature of Higher Ed, not so much by Statamic.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Statamic I think is handling that much better than would a database-driven CMS, given the same parameters that we're working with regarding the industry and our content.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So not to mention, I mentioned earlier we have these little sub one-off sites. We have about a hundred of those. Most of them were built in WordPress and the people that those were built for control their own content, going back to that question.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And that means they're also responsible for maintaining their navigations and their menus and populating the content there, and in WordPress, that requires a lot of technical training that you have to go through with the person for that.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** With Statamic, what I have found is that I cheat a little bit. I use editing the home page because the home page is pretty much completely dynamic. It pulls all of its information from other parts of the website. So for our content editors, I use the home page to set up a lot of the variables that they need to edit things in the navigation and in the footer. So if you go to edit things on the home page in the control panel, you don't actually see content that's on the page, but you see header navigation, you know?

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And you can add and remove items from that, and then you see footer menu and you can add and remove social media links and university resources that are down there, and so it's really helpful. Again, taking that core basic functionality of the system and I guess I don't consider it to be that creative, but finding a creative way to use it instead of going and looking for an add-on that will accomplish the same thing that someone might have envisioned without trying to think outside of the box.

**Emily Lewis:** So it's like you're using your home page to store global information.

**Daniel Fowler:** Pretty much.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Because that is one thing that Statamic global variables are possible, but as far as I know they're kind of only possible for now for developers. And so you have to get into the file and edit global variables versus allowing the content editors to make changes in the control panel. I think with Version 2 — which Jack and his team are working on — I think maybe global variables are making it into the control panel, but I'm not entirely sure.

**Emily Lewis:** Well, I did something similar myself with a Statamic client. I just converted a page that actually wasn't a content page to hold global information that would show up in different places on the site.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** And from a content author standpoint, it kept his workflow the same as it is across the board. I just trained him. I'm like, "On this page, this is what you do for your global stuff."

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** Done. Straightforward and simple. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** And you're right, just to reiterate, you've said it a couple of times, I think it's worth saying again — especially for our listener who was asking, her name or his name is Darby Dixon, with regards to choosing another site and what you should look for — I think having that core functionality and having a creative approach to leveraging the core really helps you create that foundation that you



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don't have to worry about the complexity of an upgrade later when you have dozens of add-ons in place.

So you mentioned earlier, you had a few issues with version control. When we talked with, I think, [Jack for the first episode that we had about Statamic](#), one of the things that really appealed, just to me, in general about Statamic was that we weren't dealing with the database and so we could version control everything, which is super nice because having to deal with bringing in the database into the version control workflow is a bit cumbersome.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** So can you talk a little bit about the challenge you had and what you did to resolve that for Statamic with version control?

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah. We were... oh man...

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** The University as a whole, to be completely frank, has been really backwards with its web resources but its technology resources also. They upgrade in chunks and certain pieces. So when I came to the College of Education, I mentioned that I wanted to get the lay of the land first with procedures and things. Well, there was almost nothing for me to really grab a hold to, no protocol to follow, procedures to follow. I walked in at a time where those things were being defined and created for the very first time for this organization.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]



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**Daniel Fowler:** So yeah, version history, version control was one of those things. And so we walked into a situation where that was not happening and the first thing I wanted to do was figure out what Git was all about because that was something that as a static HTML person, I probably should have known about Git ten years ago.

**Timestamp:** 00:30:08

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** But because Higher Ed is so far lagging behind private industry in development, oh, that's the soapbox that wanted to chase right now.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** But I'm not going to, and oh, I want to. Maybe we'll circle back.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** So I had to figure out what that was all about, and I actually started looking for a developer to hire. Specifically on the job description, I said, "I want this person to manage our Git repos."

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Because I didn't really understand them a whole lot, and I was so focused on the redesign that I only had a limited amount of time to actually figure it out.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.



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**Daniel Fowler:** And for someone walking into that for the very first time, it's very difficult. So luckily, a few months ago — maybe several months ago by now, I'm not sure — Jack and the Statamic team did roll into the core functionality of Statamic a revision history feature (<http://statamic.com/learn/advanced-features/revisions>), which is really nice. We actually turned that on about a month and a half ago, and it's been wonderful.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But before that, for the past year or so now, we have been using Git repos so that on the developer side, as we make changes to the files, we sync them to the repo for our backup copy and then we also sync it to the server. Originally, we were doing an automatic synchronization so that as we push things, committed things up to the remote repository, we would sync it over to the server.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** We just thought then actually we didn't have to do that extra step.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** But ultimately, we realized that we wanted to keep better tab on the changes that were being made. And sometimes we were in the wrong branch making changes and then all of a sudden, it would sync over to the server, but we weren't ready for it to be synced over so we made that disconnection. And so now it's in our workflow where our repos are pretty much our backup copy.

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay.



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**Daniel Fowler:** And we just sync up and down to the server using SFTP.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Aha!

**Daniel Fowler:** And then from the content editor side, they have their version history, the Statamic revision history plugged in. And we also have a daily script that we run, that our developer built, that every morning, it runs a script that downloads new content from the server and commits it to our repo.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So I don't know if I described that very well, but we have now version control happening on the developer side and on the content editor side.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So it's a two-fold process for us, which is really, really nice because that situation I described to you earlier where we overwrote server files that the editors had worked on because the developers were unaware, now we have the opportunity to roll back.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** If an editor overwrites something a developer has done, the developers, we have our backup system we can pull from. And if we overwrite something the editors have done, we can go into the Statamic version control and pull that revision out.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.



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**Daniel Fowler:** So far it's been working really nice for us because for the past couple of months, we have had a couple of incidents arise where something got overwritten and we had to go find the correct version of the file and sync it back up.

**Emily Lewis:** I'm glad you described that because I think it's easy to forget that ... like Lea and I, we do version control with the two of us, and if we're dealing with a client who has a single point of contact for the CMS and they're the only person that's maintaining content and all that other stuff, then it's sort of easy to bring them into that workflow. But the instant you're dealing with a team of content editors, it increases the complexity of what version control needs.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** And it really never occurred to me until you described it today that Statamic would also have those issues because you do have making changes in the control panel and you have making changes on the files. And those two, I think that's useful to describe because I think I made an assumption that, "Oh, just be like, you know, super simple version control because you're just dealing with flat files."

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** Well, not if you have a team of 20 people editing content from the control panel.  
[Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Right.

**Lea Alcantara:** Well, the other thing that I was thinking about too, I guess the benefit between flat files system versus a database is I know for us, there's always a "content pause" situation whenever you have to do a database sync between like local development and live servers.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** With this type of system, does that also occur where you're like, "Okay, we're going to be pushing stuff up," or like do you tell people like, "Okay, we're going to do this between 12 to 1 p.m. this lunch time. Better not edit anything."

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah. During our redesign and right around launch, we definitely did a lot of that.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** We tend to be in agreement with the content editors that after 4 o'clock, they were hands off and the development team was going to be making site-wide or had the opportunity to make site-wide changes. Now that we're kind of in a day-to-day maintenance mode kind of, if you want to see it that way, but we're still in redesign mindset. We've only just finished the mega redesign, and now we're doing all the little mini-projects on the areas that gotten neglected during the redesign so that's a little different thing.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But yeah, what we do now is that we have a chat room service that we use, HipChat around the office and so what I'd do about every other week or so, I throw a message in there that says, "Is anybody working? I need to do something site-wide and so I need everyone to finish what you're doing and let me know when you're backing off of it."

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so once I get the all clear from the four people around me, then I'd go in and will download everything from the server or download the content that might have changed on the server



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and make sure I have the most current version, make the changes I need to use, that again is something I love to do. Since my background is in static HTML, search and replace is something I'm just pro at.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so I love doing search and replace across the entire site for something and then uploading those files to the server.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So that's been really handy, but it might not be the most efficient, but that chat room especially then becomes a referential archive for saying, "No, I clearly said this was happening. Sorry."

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah, right. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right, right.

**Emily Lewis:** You know, these are the workflows that you have to do. I think the minute you deal with a larger site, whether it's large in terms of number of pages or large in terms of the people involved who have their hands in it, your workflows ... you have to come up with these sort of, "All right, at 4 p.m., this is when you're going to stop and we're going to use this."

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** And maybe it doesn't seem efficient, but it gets the job done, and you have to do that stuff. We did that recently with, again, it's a Higher Ed client that we're working with, and we took like



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hours to define like the workflow of how they were going to, you know, when we told them to pause content and what they should be doing and when we would come back in just to cover our butts.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yes. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** And to give them as much information as we could before we actually started doing it, and I'm not sure it was the most efficient approach, but it got the job done. [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, I know, and you have to do what you have to do.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, we'll still struggling with documenting procedures because they get defined kind of on the fly.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so we kind of forget to write them down from time to time. We use Basecamp all the time. I love Basecamp, but there's sometimes stuff that I remember having a conversation about it.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I know we made a decision that that's what we were going to do, but then I can't find confirmation in email or in Basecamp or anywhere. And so I have to sit down with him again and say, "Okay, this is our procedure. I'm documenting it here in Basecamp like a source that we can all access and then use it as a guideline going forward."

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Lea Alcantara:** I definitely think that documentation and all this communication and everything is important for all clients, big or small, but especially for large sites and larger clients, this type of communication, like making sure you really document things is very unique to like super large sites.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** I think it's also worth mentioning, and I'm not sure where budget comes in with your role, Daniel, but when we're working as an agency with a large client, we increase our project management hours because there's so much extra communication. There's so much extra documentation because we're dealing with a team of 15 people versus one person, and that's just 15 for that one department.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** And that's not all of the departments that are involved. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right, right.

**Daniel Fowler:** Man, I wish I could charge for the amount of overhead that we experienced.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Unfortunately, my services are free to those that choose to use them within these walls, at least.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]



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**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** That's why I freelance on the side. I have to supplement my income, you know?

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But you're absolutely right. Communication is a big deal to me, both professionally and personally, and I could again talk about that for half a day. It just comes up over and over again. I just went on a vacation, a weekend getaway with my wife and her parents, and they wanted to stay with us the first night of the weekend, and she failed to mention to them that we did not have a guest room.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so they kind of showed up expecting to have a bed and stuff, and we had an air mattress laying on the floor.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And we're like, "Okay, there was a miscommunication that happened here." And that happens in different context around the office all the time.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And I'd like to say that my team is impervious to that, but we have a single graphic designer, a couple of news writers and a couple of developers who need to be talking to each other about projects we work on, but we don't regularly.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Timestamp:** 00:39:59

**Daniel Fowler:** We're pretty good about chatting in HipChat about things, but you're absolutely right, communication channels have got to be wide open.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** If I can chase a rabbit for a sec, but that was actually a big thing for us during the original redesign of that 6,000-page website.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I came in and it was explained to me that the College had some major communication issues, and that we needed to be as transparent as possible communicating to the faculty — 400-something faculty and staff in the College — and making sure that everyone was aware that a change was coming. And so we pushed it out in the biweekly newsletter — and that's twice weekly, not like every other week, but twice weekly newsletter. We were pushing out information as the project progressed. I built a blog that I maintained throughout the project. I emailed department heads from time to time with information.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And still when we launched after that seven months, there were so many people that just screamed bloody murder because they had no idea.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah.

**Lea Alcantara:** Interesting.

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**Daniel Fowler:** And so you expect information to trickle down and it does not trickle down. Especially in an organization this large, we have about 450 or so faculty and staff, it just does not flow the way you expect it to.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** You think people are going to be excited with you when a new product is coming, a new website is coming. But the truth is they're off in their own worlds doing their own thing.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** If people are in classes, they're doing that. If they're designing logos, they're designing logos. And you have to kind of pull people out of their own little world, out of their own little silo and make them understand.

**Emily Lewis:** And to kind of piggyback on that comment, I think not just to pull them out of their silos, but make sure they understand that on some level, all the silos need to know that the other silos exist. For example, we finished up a project with this Higher Ed client and we had like a — I don't like the word "post mortem," I like the "retrospective."

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** Sort of looking back on what went right and what went wrong. And we found out after the project launched that they had a bunch of other things going on that we didn't even know about.



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**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** And it's not that it necessarily affected us directly, but it did affect the launch to some degree. And us knowing that the team members that were working on for this site were also working on this other project sort of tangentially related but not specifically related would have been helpful for us so that we weren't like, "Why haven't we heard back, or what's going on here?"

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** They didn't think to tell us because it wasn't part of the website, but it was related to some degree. Even just from an asset allocation; where resources, time were.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And see I think that's what separates me a little bit from a typical developer, especially in Higher Ed. It's kind of rare that you encounter a Higher Ed, a public university with a web team, especially a College within the university that has a manager. I'm the first web manager that the College of Education at UGA has ever had.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so what separates me not only being in that position, but also because I have a business degree, I come at things from a business process perspective.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

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**Daniel Fowler:** I want to know what the goals are so that I can problem solve the best solution to get there. A lot of people come to me with a solution that they want and they don't know anything about websites.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And so they say, "We need this," and I say, "Okay, can you tell me what you're doing this for?" And then they get defensive.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so that's really difficult to deal with, and I honestly think that that will be something, at least in Higher Ed, that we deal with forever. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah, yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** Well, I think there's always a disconnect between technology and academia.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** At least thus far.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** Absolutely.

**Lea Alcantara:** I think any large organization though in general.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah.



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**Lea Alcantara:** Because I think the larger the organization, the more set in their current ways they are, especially like government, for example, which is probably quite similar in terms of red tape, communication issues in like how long it takes for them to even upgrade a small part of their site.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah. Well, ultimately we are a government.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** As a public university, we are state-funded and that is where most of the political red tape exists is because we can't just do things. I imagine if we were a private university, maybe the web team could charge for their services almost like literally an internal kind of consulting group that charges departments to us.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I think that would be a great business model, especially since universities are increasingly being run more like businesses. I think that's laying the foundation of potentially seeing more of those kind of charges for services, just so that departments understand that when they make a request ...

**Emily Lewis:** The value.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, it's costing something. And if they want to increase the scope of a project midway through, it's going to take more time and it's going to take more money.

**Lea Alcantara:** I want to circle back towards some specific Statamic questions or technical questions actually. We talked about...



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**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, let's dig in.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yes, so we talked about the version control stuff. The other major things that I want to make sure we talk about before the show ends are the security concerns and backup options for Statamic.

**Daniel Fowler:** We have a ton of them. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay, so let's talk about security concerns. What kind of concerns would you have for a site as large as this?

**Daniel Fowler:** Well, I don't know how much I'll be able to say about this because I don't know who's going to listen to this.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Well, I think it's important to know, but okay.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** We don't have a lot of external security concerns. We hardly have any at all.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** I think with a flat file system, server permissions and robot text files and things go a long way of reducing the ability for hackers to get in.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Sure.



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**Daniel Fowler:** Maybe I'm inviting hackers to attempt now that I said that.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** But I don't know, it would be interesting to see. I think most of the holes come in other university applications that are not as secure web apps that people use. Because we do have a university central system for authentication, and so that's kind of like if there's a small hole into there, you get access to all kinds of stuff. But our issues with Statamic is just kind of one thing — and I'm given to understand that it's going to be resolved with Version 2 — but that is from a content editing standpoint. Currently, the membership roles are not very diverse and so you either have to give a member access to the control panel or not.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so Jack and his team have said that more member roles are coming with Version 2, so we're really excited about that because, again, I have two content editors that I want to have kind of full access to the website to edit things. But then everyone else, because we have them set up as members to let them populate their own information on their profile, that creates a security risk because if they knew that they have the same level as those content editors as far as access to the control panel, they might decide they want to go in and edit their own pages.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** Especially on a bad day when I've told them no.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]



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**Daniel Fowler:** Because sometimes they might decide they want to do it themselves, and they might do it wrong and then create some havoc. I don't think anyone would do something like that maliciously, but accidental is definitely a big risk.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I had to put in some just basic style rules so that if someone was logged in and on the control panel and they were not one of the four people that should be able to edit anything, they just simply don't see those tabs in the control panel to go look at the web content. They only see the tab that says, "Edit my profile," and that's all they see, but that's purely CSS. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** Oh, nice. That's clever. I like that, and that never even occurred to me.

**Lea Alcantara:** It's very simple solution.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah, but I like that.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** I could easily implement that for the Statamic site we've got running right now with a client.

**Daniel Fowler:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** Because when I was doing the training, he's like, "What's that tab for?" I'm like, "Don't touch that." [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Don't touch. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Now, just hide, to hide it.



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**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** Don't let him see it or they will ask questions.

**Emily Lewis:** So we talked a bit about security, let's talk about backups. What sort of protocols do you have in place to protect the information on the site?

**Daniel Fowler:** Really, the only thing we have is those version control systems that we talked about earlier.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** We had a separate thing, it wasn't web-related, a problem came up where we just rolled out our big annual report, which is a big printed publication that we do every year, and as it was about to need to go to the printer, our information technology office decided to do some system upgrades over the weekend, which ultimately erased the past two weeks of data that had occurred on this shared server drive.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so that was not very exciting for that whole team that was involved in that project. But that is another area where we have a shortcoming, and I don't know how widespread it is within Higher Ed, but a backup like an offsite backup of server contents, server files, server configurations is not something that we have, but that we need.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Daniel Fowler:** So like I said, we have a two-fold version history that we can pull from to preserve our changes, but if Plan A fails and then Plan B fails, we're kind of back where we were nine months ago when we had none of it to begin with.

**Emily Lewis:** Now, when we're dealing with a flat file system, is there any need for any kind of caching? Because at least with my limited experience with caching, it's caching database queries.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** So like you were describing how very complex navigation are in footer, like those are can be huge database query hogs.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** And so those would be typical things that we would cache. Is there anything with Statamic or the flat file system that you do need to do some type of caching?

**Timestamp:** 00:49:49

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, Statamic has this great little feature called HTML Caching. That was another feature that they didn't have when we originally begun working on the redesign, but that came later, and so when they introduced a new feature and I'm drowning in massive project like the one we tackled, I don't have a lot of time to evaluate the new features that are coming out.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So I didn't think anything of it. We launched the site. A month or two into it, the dean noticed that the site felt slowed to him. When the dean notices that the site go slow to him, you take steps to make it faster.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so we investigated. I knew that they have this caching feature. I turned it on and it was wonderful. Pages that were taking six to eight seconds to load began loading in under a second.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Wow!

**Daniel Fowler:** And it was fantastic until we realized the side effects, which is where — I mentioned that we introduced a master calendar of sorts...

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** Well, our little event feeds on pages here and there were cached as September 21. And September 29 came along and that page still showed the past events from the past week, so that became a real problem with content on the home page. Especially we get three million page views a year, and 300,000 users touch our site every year. The home page itself gets — I want to say — 750,000 page views a year. And so very, very high traffic, looking at a home page where it says, “Upcoming events,” and none of the events were upcoming.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.



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**Daniel Fowler:** And so that was a big, big, big issue. I had to turn off HTML Caching for that reason, and we have not reactivated it because we streamlined the site in other ways such as making the navigation smaller.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** I had a lot of dynamic content in the navigation, so you would pull down the dropdown that said, “News,” and it would populate with the latest news articles and really cool stuff. But I took all that out so we just had static navigation and that helps speed us up a lot.

**Emily Lewis:** So the HTML caching, it’s sort of site-wide or system-wide, you can’t specify it for individual elements or pages?

**Daniel Fowler:** You probably can customize it. At the time, again, it was just me and another guy.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And we didn’t have the time to really investigate it. We just had a problem in our hands that had to be rectified. So we are finally now in a season where that’s the kind of question we need to circle back to and reevaluate.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** But at the same time, we’re running a site now that speed is not an issue.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

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**Daniel Fowler:** So even without HTML Caching turned on, we're kind of good to go.

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay. Although what happened between things were loading between six seconds, you turned on the HTML Caching, it went quickly, but that made things mucky, then you turned it back off, like...

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** So was the six-second thing resolved? [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, it was, and that kind of goes back to the question of what defines a large site because we have about what depends on how you do the page count. We have upwards of 1,900 pages on our site today, right now. However, that is 400 pages that are dynamically generated from the member files that I talked about.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And we have over 400, but probably up to close to 500 now, news articles that are constantly being published. We publish five of those a week or so. So what happened is where I had that dynamic content, we also have 400 to 500 events in the calendar, and so if you strip just those three areas out, our site size is only about 800 pages.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But because those are three areas that I wanted to speckle throughout our site, especially in the navigation when I had that dynamic content pulling 400 news articles just to display four of them, and that was very resource intensive.



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**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So when we took those things out, we've got really basic information on the pages and the resource expense is nothing. The biggest resource taxation we have is just the volume of users that are looking at our site. It spikes every day. People love looking at our Google Analytics on a daily basis because in Higher Ed, it's very wavelike.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** On the weekends, it dips off real bad and then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, it spikes and it's very, very cyclical, seasonal.

**Lea Alcantara:** Do you do any caching or specific things to deal with those spikes?

**Daniel Fowler:** No, it's mostly dependent on the university bandwidth, for the actual ability to flow, like the hardware, its physical ability to flow information in and out of campus. And that's one of those areas I was alluding to earlier that in the past, our network has not been up to snuff. When Netflix became a big thing and YouTube exploded, the University was very slow to catch up to those needs because of that increased need for bandwidth.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** The dorms can have thousands of students living on campus who are using internet for daily things.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** Daily, regular things.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Daniel Fowler:** And luckily, the University instead of blocking those sites — it took them ten or twelve years — but they finally approved the infrastructure so that it can handle it.

**Emily Lewis:** I think one of my favorite things about this episode is that the solutions that you're coming up with are simple.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yes.

**Emily Lewis:** And like not having the navigation be dynamic. That's a simple solution to an important problem when it comes down to like speed and performance, especially if the dean is the one who's pointing it out to you.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** Well, then just change that feature a little bit to not be exactly what you had it before, it's still just, you know. I'm sure you still have a link to the news articles.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** It's just that you don't see the latest four.

**Daniel Fowler:** Right. We do still have that on the home page. Another little trick that I learned is that if you don't want to pull 400 or 500 events into your feed, just to display a few of them. You can leave that up to a content editor who periodically, every week or so, goes into that site and defines what three or four news articles to see what would get on our home page.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** We had four slots for news articles and so they started going into the home page and selecting the four articles that they wanted to feature. And that would swap out every two weeks or



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so, so we were still pulling a list, but we could say specifically, “Don’t pull all 400, but just pull these four.”

**Emily Lewis:** So I want to make sure we address some of our listener questions. I already mentioned that Darby Dixon had asked about choosing a CMS and working with an unfamiliar CMS, like Statamic, and I think really the simple answer for that is if you have experience in a CMS, you have some knowledge from which to evaluate other systems.

You can say, “Is it something I’m familiar with? Does it need add-ons?” Those basic questions, but I do think that we should kind of circle back to one of our first questions to answer some questions that Addison Hall submitted. He was curious when Jack had told you not to use Statamic, did he point out any specific things that he thought you might encounter that would be problematic?

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah.

**Emily Lewis:** And if so, did any of those problems actually occur?

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh yeah, absolutely! He was right about everything.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** But I chose to take the plunge, and I’ve never looked back. Even hiring developers and people asking the question, “Why didn’t we go with the WordPress since those sites were already in WordPress? Why didn’t you use ExpressionEngine?” because that’s one that Jack specifically mentioned that I should look at. I informed Jack that I wasn’t particularly fond of ExpressionEngine.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]



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**Daniel Fowler:** And so yeah, he specifically mentioned the membership.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** Which as I already mentioned has been one of our major sticking points.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** We're doing membership in a very special way in that we want our faculty and staff to be able to edit their own profile, but that's all we want them to be able to edit. We don't want them to edit content about a degree program. We want them to just be able to edit pieces of information on their profile. Statamic does have a front-end form tag pair that you can use for editing a member profile.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** However, I think two or three times I tried to implement that and ran into the fact that it just couldn't handle the complex field types that we had employed in our member profiles. So in other words, we have tables of information being created in the member profile to display education backgrounds for our folks so they input the university that they attended, the degree they got, the year they graduated, what their concentration was, and things like that, that are grid field type in Statamic. But the front-end HTML form that they had could not handle taking the user input from just a collection of input variables and translating it into a grid on the back end.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So because of that, we've never rolled out a front-end solution, instead I took that CSS hack approach for the control panel. So yeah, he warned me about these things, and they were



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definitely our major sticking points, but we've managed. I haven't ever regretted choosing Statamic over ExpressionEngine, which was the closest thing that we had to a Plan B because I was not going to use WordPress. That was for sure.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** But yeah, it's been a delight. The other thing is that I'm a very patient person. I'm so dedicated to the minimalist approach that I'm willing to wait for the features to be implemented versus demanding that they come now and if they can't do it, I'm going to go find an add-on that will do it.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** So if I can't do it and they tell me that, "Oh, that's a good idea, maybe we'll have that in six to eight months," I'd say, "Okay, I'll figure out some other way to do it for now, and we'll tackle it later."

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** So you're not using any add-ons for Statamic?

**Daniel Fowler:** Man, I wish I could say that.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** But really, we're using Raven, which Version 2 is going to be baked in.

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay.



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**Daniel Fowler:** We're using Bloodhound, but not for our primary search. That's only for our intranet which is a sticking point for internal faculty and staff. Our intranet is not publicly Google searchable.

**Timestamp:** 01:00:05

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** So it's not publicly findable, but the pages do not require a login, so it's not a password-protected area, but it is a non-searchable area from Google. So we have Google Search implemented on our site that cannot crawl our intranet, instead I employed Bloodhound search, a Statamic first-party add-on, for the intranet search.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And that has again solved that issue. That's more of an internal issue. That's not a system issue at all.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** They have Bloodhound search that we could use for the whole thing if we wanted to, but Google, everybody loves Google. Well, not as much as I think they used to, but it works for us and I don't want to mess up what people are used to, which is Google.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Sure.

**Daniel Fowler:** So anyway, what add-ons are we using? We're using those two and then we're using a Calendar add-on, which again is going to be baked into Version 2. And that was Jason Varga add-on that I mentioned, we hired him as a freelancer. He was going to build that calendar add-on for



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us and then it was in his contract that he was going to be able to resell it, but again his contract took so long to approve that he had already built it and started selling it before he started working with us. [Laughs] So he helped us implement it and we're still using it. Those are the only three add-ons we're using.

**Emily Lewis:** Is this the calendar that he's got on pixelfear.com?

**Daniel Fowler:** Yes.

**Emily Lewis:** Okay, great. We'll make sure to include that in the show notes.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, the only thing that the Calendar add-on is really doing for us is giving us a nice little monthly view of the events. We have a little calendar element that's really pretty, and that's really the only thing it's doing. The actual functionality of a calendar as far as listing events and having feeds throughout the site is all handled with core Statamic functionality.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Very cool. Well, I feel like we can continue talking about this for a long time.

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh yeah.

**Lea Alcantara:** But I'd like to know, before we wrap up, what your best advice is for anyone planning a large site, especially a larger site on Statamic.

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh yeah. You have got to get clear, decisive buy in from the people above you, especially the top, which is going to be difficult because they are not tech savvy. And if you're in a situation like I am with no budget and limited team and everything like that, it's going to be very



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difficult to put together a flashy presentation like the vendors will be able to, who will come in and say, “Let us do this for you.”

So it’s really difficult. When I arrived, I was told I have a blank slate, and that was very, very helpful. Everyone told me — I have three levels of bosses all the way up to the dean — and they each told me that we were starting from scratch, blank slate, build it the way it needed to be built, so that was extremely helpful. The timeline was not very helpful, but the ability to just ignore what we had at the time and build it following best practices and web standards was tremendous. So that’s definitely one thing, especially with a large site.

The other thing I would say is communication. Even though we didn’t get the word spread the way we wanted to, the way we thought it was going to spread initially, I mentioned we had a blog and we had a newsletter and all these different ways we were reaching out to people to let them know that this was coming, they still didn’t get the idea. They still didn’t know. But what we had was a multi-layered paper trail where we could go back and say, “I’m sorry you’re upset, but if you look at all these things we sent, if you were reading the newsletter, you would have known. If you had checked your email and actually paid attention to that one that said, ‘Big and important web update,’ you would have known.”

So have a paper trail, make sure you’re communicating clearly about the scope and how things are working because in a project this big ... actually that’s going to be my number three. In a project this big, it’s very difficult to see the finish line, and so I don’t think I’m particularly skilled at being able to wrap my head around a big picture, but communicating that to my team for day-to-day to-do items is very difficult. So what you need is the ability to paint the big picture for later, but keep your team focused on the here and now.



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You have to set those mini deliverables to accomplish the large deliverable, and so following your life cycle to a tee, making sure that anyone that starts to sort of steer and meeting discussion towards, “Well, I don’t know if we can do this design because when we developed it, it’s not, ‘Oh, time out, time out.’ We’re not talking about development right now, but we’re talking about design, and before we talk about design, we talk about content.” So making sure people are just focused on the mission for this phase and then sort of guide it. When you’re ready to graduate into the next phase, you then cast the vision for that phase, but never do you try to cast the overall vision for the whole thing because it takes a very special person to be able to track with that train of thought.

**Emily Lewis:** Excellent. I also think one of the pieces of advice I’m going to take away, well, two. One is simple solutions still work.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yes.

**Emily Lewis:** But the other thing is, you just mentioned it, that you’re a patient person. And we often have clients who are like, “Oh, I want this latest and greatest thing,” and all of a sudden the project has gone off track because they want this new thing.

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** Lea and I, I think one of our greatest flaws that I think our clients love it.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** But our greatest flaw is we give them what they want.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** And sometimes we should do a better job of saying, “We will give you that later.”



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**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** You know that that's not necessarily right now.

**Lea Alcantara:** You need to give them what they need.

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh.

**Emily Lewis:** But not what they want.

**Lea Alcantara:** What they need, yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** There's an old mantra, I don't remember where I heard it for the first time, but the whole philosophy of "everyone wants it fast, good and cheap, but you only get to pick two."

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Daniel Fowler:** And so that's perfect, and I remember a very specific conversation after I'd only been at the College of Education for three weeks, and I listened to the guy on my team talk to some clients. I finally went into his office one time after he hung up the phone and said, "Okay, just real quick, these are some things we need to eliminate from our vocabulary: 'yes,' 'anything you want,' and 'whatever it takes.'"

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]



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**Daniel Fowler:** Okay, we need to stop saying those things to people because the truth is, when we get into this redesign project, we're going to be saying no to a lot of stuff.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Daniel Fowler:** And so you really have to draw those boundaries and try with everything you have to keep the scope wrangled.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah.

**Daniel Fowler:** And then that's where the communication comes in and you have to set the scope and make the agreements, get the signatures you need and the approvals in writing so that when someone tries to invent a new feature later on, you say, "Sorry, we can do that later, but this is the scope we're working with and this is what we're moving towards right now."

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Absolutely. Awesome. Thanks Daniel!

**Daniel Fowler:** Man, thank you all! This has been a hoot.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah, but before we finish up, we do have our Rapid Fire Ten Question game so our listeners can get to know you a bit better. Are you ready?

**Daniel Fowler:** Let's practice that decisiveness right now.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Question one, Android or iOS?



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**Daniel Fowler:** It's iOS.

**Emily Lewis:** If you were stranded on a desert island and can only bring three things, what would you bring?

**Daniel Fowler:** My wife, my MacBook and a satellite WiFi.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs] What's your favorite TV show?

**Daniel Fowler:** *The Big Bang Theory*.

**Emily Lewis:** What's your favorite dessert?

**Daniel Fowler:** Pecan pie.

**Lea Alcantara:** What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh, attempt? Man, that's a unique spin on the question. Attempt? The only thing on my mind is professional tennis player. I love tennis.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh, interesting.

**Emily Lewis:** What about a profession you would not like to try?

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh, teaching.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]



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**Daniel Fowler:** No, no.

**Emily Lewis:** You work for a university.

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, you know that's a total lie. I actually love educating people, and I love teaching people. I don't know where that came from.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** My wife is a preschool teacher. I'm not a fond of kids, but teaching I love to do.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** I love to teach.

**Lea Alcantara:** What's the latest article or blog post you read?

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh, I'm a big Fantasy Football guy, so the latest injury updates ... Jamaal Charles' ankle injury, ACL injury is terrible.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah, my boyfriend was complaining about that this weekend because he's (Kansas City) Chiefs' fan. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** If you could have a super power, what would it be?

**Daniel Fowler:** Oh man, I thought about this so many times, and I think I have to settle on reading people's minds. I always want to be the guy in the elevator with people speaking another language

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and they don't think I understand what they're saying and as I get off the elevator, I say something to them that lets them know that I know.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Daniel Fowler:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** I love that. What music do you like to work to?

**Daniel Fowler:** Classical. Right? Isn't that the baby psychology thing now, classical music stimulates brain activity. It definitely does for me.

**Emily Lewis:** All right, last question, cats or dogs?

**Daniel Fowler:** Cats.

**Lea Alcantara:** Awesome.

**Daniel Fowler:** Although I think I secretly love dogs. It's not outward. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs] That's all the time we have for today. Thank you for joining!

**Daniel Fowler:** Thank you both. This has been wonderful!

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

**Daniel Fowler:** Yeah, you can find me. My website is [fowlertown.com](http://fowlertown.com), but of course, as with most people these days, hit me up on Twitter [@danielfowler](https://twitter.com/danielfowler).



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**Emily Lewis:** Awesome. This was a great conversation. Thanks again, Daniel!

[Music starts]

**Daniel Fowler:** Thank you so much!

**Lea Alcantara:** CTRL+CLICK is produced by [Bright Umbrella](#), a web services agency obsessed with happy clients. Today's podcast would not be possible without the support of this episode's sponsor! Thank you, [Visual Chefs](#)!

**Emily Lewis:** We'd also like 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](#). And if you liked this episode, please give us a review on [iTunes](#), [Stitcher](#) or both!

**Emily Lewis:** Don't forget to tune in to our next episode when we will talk about native versus web mobile design with Wren Lanier. 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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