

Wade Foster - Zapier - Spotlight Podcast

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SPEAKERS

Wade Foster, Ben Tossell

Ben Tossell 00:00

Hey everybody, it's Dan here founder of make fat, a platform teaching individuals and companies how to build custom software workflows and tools without writing code. This show explores the people behind the no code tools and the stories of folks using them to automate work and launch companies. Okay, today we have Wade from Zapier think

Wade Foster 00:21

we know that be ready. But wait when we're, it's just stuffing box. It does. Yeah. So I'm waiting. I'm co founder CEO here at Zapier and Zapier makes you happier. It helps you connect all the different tools you might be using at work, air table web flow, MailChimp, QuickBooks stripe, Salesforce, you name it all the way down to like, tiny startup that you may never have heard of 2000 different apps, create all sorts of automations connected and all sorts of creative ways. You know, in the maker pad roll, it lets you build apps without code is sort of the crux of it. So I think that's it.

Ben Tossell 01:00

Really what Zapier is all about. Awesome. Well, I think I'm really glad that you started off by saying exactly making beer because so many people say how have you pronounce it as a PA? And I'm like, on the footer of the site and says that it makes you happier. I spoke to wade and he says it like that.

Wade Foster 01:19

Yeah, yeah, it's our it's our gift GIF controversy, right? We're just trying to we're just trying to pour some fuel on the internet fire.

Ben Tossell 01:27

Well, speaking of that, I suppose no code and nobody's doing that. where it's like, people debating the no code thing of, is it no code? And you say it was like, they don't give a fuck like blockbuster thing. What is your take on how this movement is seemingly come out? I think over the last year or 218

months, probably where it's really blown up of people taking notice of polishing it up and do stuff. Have you seen similar things?

Wade Foster 01:56

I mean, I think this is you know, I give credit a large part to to you and to the maker bed community, I think no code has been a thing that predates, you know, a couple years ago. It's been around for a long time, but it sort of happened in the corners of the internet, people would just be doing this stuff. And there wasn't really a lot of evangelism around this concept. And, you know, folks like you and make Pac community and others have done a really good job of teaching and educating. And I think the power of it is, it's not about replacing developers, it's not about getting rid of code. It's about empowerment, it's about helping a person who's got an idea who's passionate about trying to do something, it's about giving them a place to start where they can get going, where it doesn't require them to, like, do all this other work first, and then spend, you know, four years in a university or like slog their way through a bunch of tutorials, and then realize like, Hey, there actually still is like, a whole bunch of other stuff. You got to learn to actually get to where you want to be. And you can go Oh, and you know, a few hours or a weekend or whatever you can be like oh, I have Have a thing and it works. And it does what I want it to do. And that feels so awesome when you're able to have that ability.

Ben Tossell 03:07

Yeah, I think it was when I was a product. And when I discovered XMP, I think for the first time, I think must have seen one of one of the launches. And then there was like, type form and bubblegum web flow and things that came along. I was like, wait, I can sort of make this feel like a real thing, but connecting these pieces, and like it's fake signup flow real. But yeah, it was just empowering the ice house. And I was trying to build a bunch of things. I thought one of these ideas will be my thing. But I didn't realize it was actually not that it was the process of making pieces. Like, how did you think that wasn't? His appearance form and web frameworks don't know this, if you don't know that, but it does take a few people to really sort of drive that home that this stuff doesn't need to be Like really a specialized skill and that anyone can learn this quickly, and it's a lot quicker than people think.

Wade Foster 04:07

Yeah, I think that's totally right. You know, I, I sort of, you know, it's like, it's like learning to type for the first time. It's like learning to do some of the things where it's like, yeah, it takes a little bit of work. But once you get the hang of it, really anyone can do this stuff, just like anyone can use Gmail. It's like, oh, how does email work? You send it fine. Okay, I think I got the hang of it. But you have to take a second just to really get what you're doing. Once it's under your under your belt, you're off to the races at being technical in any way or at the moment. I'm like a little technical. So when we started Zapier, I was teaching myself to code at the time I built some very, very basic stuff, like I'd gone through the learn Python, the hard way tutorial, and some other things like that. But I was more from a marketing background. And so I was doing like a lot of marketing automation. And that was where I was kind of kind of dipping my toe into the technical world was I wanted to send trigger emails based on different events and like run better campaigns. I wasn't approaching engineering from a standpoint of how can I be the world's best engineer, I was trying to be a better marketer. And so Brian, one of my co founders, he and I had been like, just spitballing back on a whole bunch of ideas. And at some point in time, he

pitched me idea and Zachary was like, I think we can help connect all these tools where folks don't have to hire engineers to do this. Instead, they can do it myself. And I was using Marketo and the Marketo API, and I was struggling because I'm not a very good engineer. And to me, it was just like, yes, like, if I had this, I would definitely do that instead of what I'm doing right now. Because it would be better it would be easier.

Ben Tossell 05:44

Yeah. And then so let's go down like the person business route straightaway, right is like, did you when I suppose Did you see this opening up like this thought Businesses can be whatever it is definitely businesses that have been thumbs up. I mean, there's agencies that specialize in just doing for people as well. What did you expect? So did you see the potential of your data taking a while,

Wade Foster 06:12

you know, it took a little bit to really understand that holy cow, this could be a really big idea at the beginning. You know, we're three guys from Columbia, Missouri, which is like, right in the middle of the US. It's not like a tech hub or anything like that. It's a college town. So you know, it's not it's not like the bat country or anything like that. But it's, it's not Silicon Valley either. And so our ambitions were pretty modest, honestly, like, we were like, if we could turn this thing it was a side project if we could turn this thing into a business where it could pay for our paycheck and in my mind, I was like, I could get \$100,000 a year like that, to me would have been like, I'm like, I'm goal like I'm set for life at that point in time. That to me, was it I could do that and work on Zapier, I would I would have been set. And so getting to that point was sort of what I was focused on. I wasn't thinking about, like, wow, there's this world of makers out there that are sort of dormant and need just a little bit of a helping nudge. And then all of a sudden, their their potential can sort of be unlocked that came later on that came after starting to see some of our customers some of the things that they were building and realizing like wow, there's a lot more potential to this. It took them to sort of open my eyes to what what

Ben Tossell 07:32

what could be Yeah, I think that's quite an interesting like sit analogy, though, that I've been saying to other families are these no code unquote go tools is it's only when their customers like stop like hacking it a bit or like pushing it to its limits and show him a visa. This is what I want this to work for me. So it's like, oh, wait, there is this complete. Other thing that I've created slowly, not necessarily on purpose, but Really? Yeah. So with that we're curious make it and that was definitely not me at that point. I was like, No, I'm gonna make this feel a lot bigger than a alteration or something.

Wade Foster 08:12

Yeah, I think I saw you on Twitter talking about this this weekend, like, how's the maker pack community is better than you right at some things now and like I definitely have that experience was after we're for a little bit early on. I felt like yeah, I'm probably the best app your user just by nature of like, I used it a bunch, I built a lot of the stuff like I know what all the features are. But like, not that soon into it. I stumbled across some users and they were like, we're doing this with this and this and this and I'm like, you're doing what? How? Like, I don't think it can do that. And I'm like, no, it definitely can do that. And I'm just I'm like, Okay, I'm, I'm not the best at this. And like, since that time, I stumbled across users

every day, every week that are doing things that are just beyond me, and I'm like, this is pretty awesome to see it sort of take a life of its own. Yeah. I mean, I yeah, I think I'm similar to human thinking early on with makeup. I was like, yeah, I'm probably like the very forefront of building with no code coatings, there's like, a lot less tools that are also especially. And then now it's just like when I need help, I'm thinking maybe the community will have an answer and I definitely don't have right now.

Ben Tossell 09:21

So when, like, when did it start getting bigger and just really taken off with all these things that you see in other people making?

Wade Foster 09:32

Yeah, you know, I think it was, it was like a very slow, but steady and consistent growth pace for us. Like if you look at the bend in the curve of growth, it looks very sort of normal or like just sort of like steadily grows every year. But to me it really felt like it took a like lurch forward in 2016. That was when we introduced multi step zaps. Before that it was just one to one You know, when this happens do this, like that's all you could do was after 2016, we added the ability to say, and this and this and this and all these other things, you can add filters and you can format things and just give a lot more ways to manipulate the data and change the destinations. That like opened up a whole set of things that were really just like people's creativity to call

Ben Tossell 10:24

it what So you talked about some of the things you were blown away with what people were making, what what what some, is it the things that impressed you then and now. Fast forward to now what are some of the things you see people running? Like?

Wade Foster 10:39

I remember like, fairly early on there was this guy in Australia who made a I think it might have been the first time I saw something that was like kind of app like it was called get two of them. One was called Kanye texts, and one was called Seinfeld quote And he have a landing page for it. You go, you put like your friend's phone number in and you could pay like \$1 for a few text messages \$5 for more text messages and \$10 for even more text messages, and it would set up like every day a text message that would either be like a quote from Kanye or quote from Seinfeld. And that was built off of like stripe, Zapier, Twilio. And I think like a spreadsheet, and he, he like, messaged me and started telling me about he was like, yeah, I'm making money off this thing, like not a lot, but like I you know, I launched it this weekend, and I made a couple hundred bucks, and it pays for my Zapier bill. And that was where I was like, Oh my gosh, people can build. It's not just about like integration and connecting tools. It's about building stuff and making things that really is where I think the future belongs. It's about putting real solutions in people's hands. Yeah, I remember seeing that,

Ben Tossell 11:55

like spirit, a bunch of other people and see, oh, I can build this sort of thing. As long as Like, selling products, and that we just these past tense sentences and

12:05

Yeah,

Ben Tossell 12:07

I bet that he knows everyone's in. Sure.

Wade Foster 12:10

Yeah. And it's great. I mean, you look at products these days. And like, I mean, how many of them now are literally like no code apps, their web flow and Zapier and air table and member stack and like these other tools, and you go look at them, and you're like, this looks pretty good. Like, this looks pretty legit.

Ben Tossell 12:27

Yeah, I think that's one of the things that one of the signal defects of the no code space is that these tools give you design of the box. So that user experience has already sort of baked in a bit. And there's, you have to think so much about this perfect flow and just sort of almost lead you down that path in life. People start to sit and rather than what NDP would be right? I think it used to be very different to what it is today, and I think I did mention some talk. We said this like what the fuck is up anymore But the MVP news used to be the buffalo one was the page you click upon, say hoops, somebody's got to say, how is the VP and then you can fossils like today where you can build a functional DMD with hosts with ratings with on payments and everything. And that could be seen as MVP, too. So I mean, it, it annoys me to some extent when people saying that no goes straight, it's just like, it's just for people to shut down GPU.

13:32

MVP is things like that. Well,

Wade Foster 13:36

I think that's for sure true. But I think that misses out on like this world where like, where we see most of the no code stuff happening actually happens inside of companies, it's the back office tools where, you know, they don't need like, they need something like they need a custom app that runs like a very specific thing for their business. And they're not going to deploy engineers on it because one their engineers aren't interested in Doing it where they can't afford to hire engineers for that stuff. And so it's like a marketing ops person or a sales ops person or an IT person who is says like, Oh, I can create like an order invoicing, purchasing form for you real quick and like, you know, make it happen. And so in a day, they've actually built like a mini app. And then that runs this back office process for years. And it just sort of works like they don't need some like really slick custom mobile app or whatever. They just need a thing that like gets the job done. And to me, that's where this like iceberg of no code apps is happening yet.

Ben Tossell 14:36

That's what we're trying to do more of making these not so much his own doing Airbnb, because that's great for like, a certain subset of users who are probably in their circle of Twitter that I lived in for so long, but it's more like how do I recreate the sales process of morning brew? Or how do I like do data

enrichment, follow up emails in an automated way, rather than like manually copying, paste this in here over here and then do a lot of stuff. So, yes, that doesn't we're trying to do more of them. It's one of those things again, where, where the initial piece of no code was, you have to educate people to show them. Look, you can build an Airbnb style app. It's like a sales team. You can build all of these types of posters that you're copying and pasting and doing the same thing over and over again, every day, you can automate that. Now, he does have that solution. Sure. You can do that.

Wade Foster 15:31

Yeah. And the Airbnb comm part is an important piece. It's the part that's like, it's grabs your attention, because you're like, whoa, wait, like I think of Airbnb is kind of like, that's a big business. It's kind of complicated, like, how do you do that? And so it pulls you in, and you start to realize, like, well, I'm probably not going to try and compete with Airbnb, like, it's just not a thing that I really want to do. But there is some of these. The fact I can make a clone means that I can make other types of things and there's probably something in my world that I can make for my For for my team or for whatever, that's gonna be really powerful.

Ben Tossell 16:05

Yeah, I think it also helps put you down that rabbit hole is so quick to go down. Whereas with learning to code, I mean, especially was the trigger multiple times get to a point where like I do now don't get me, okay, from this experience first of all on StackOverflow I just can't i can't figure it out. But then when you stop doing something like that it's just like a quick feedback loop. You got a certain window this thing? Okay, I'll just take one from the Peace Corps and see that working rather than I spent nine months on this, I don't quite realize where I've gone wrong in the lines of whatever I've been doing. What I'm looking at, I asked Twitter yesterday, what were what some questions as well and skew, so I'm just looking at them now. There's plenty there will not be Can each one of them is from David had he? I know he built something called 60 or 60. And it was like a little code, the old g code marketplace first, and then they built it with Google Sheets and Zapier and then lose it to bubble. And then he went to like yc and stuff. And he's he went up recently lambda school and been doing a lot of the data side of things he's interested in. No code limits. can't really go and was thrown to him. In terms of making things get messy because we built it in January 2017. We just built on top of it. But being of technical debt in and of those is a real thing. So he's asked him where were you These limits on where would you advise? taking that next step to the code piece for them? To see if zappy will do something for you when you think, yeah.

Wade Foster 18:14

Yeah, I don't have a lot of hard and fast rules for this, I think there's a few things that sort of, like, take you over, you know, is it you maintaining this, there is a team of people maintaining this, you know, if it's you maintaining this, this probably lasts fairly long, if you start at have to have a team maintaining it, then that's a lot of people that heard it have to get up to speed on what this thing is and how it works. That sort of stuff. Um, you know, how, how critical is it that you migrate? Like, I think a lot of times, there's this sort of fear and no code or that like, I don't know, what could happen. And so, you know, folks, especially engineers are like, want to move to tools that they're familiar with, because they just worried that it might not without a lot of founding so it's like, Is it really a thing that you need to move or

become Have some limitation that you've actually run into? Or is it just like, I'm just nervous, which, you know, it's fine to be nervous, but, you know, understand what that like, do a proper risk assessment there, I guess. And then, you know, if you literally have, you know, particular, like opportunities to chase like they're, I think is a place to consider, you know, maybe moving to code. Like if there's a place a part in your stack that you feel like we add specific by writing code, I add specific value to it that I can't do through no code mechanisms by doing that, that I can monetize in a certain way or generated customer experience that it couldn't do a certain way. It's the value add piece of it. Like, that's where I'm saying, okay, maybe we should go to code for that piece because it allows us to do this is a little more flexibility in what we have to offer. But for things that are like commoditized and routine, like why like what's the point? You know, this no code stuff works? pretty darn good. Yeah, I

Ben Tossell 19:58

think I mean, people do ask him like the limits and things before getting to like the smallest get attend destination 100 customers will definitely zone or will they still with a scale of 10,000 customers away and got 10,000 chins up Zapier going through every day, we said, well, do you? Are you there yet? Cuz I'm sure there's definitely like a period within that that's like, that's when you can start thinking about what is that piece? And is there a function that helps you fix a piece for another year or two years or whatever it is? Or is it Yeah.

Wade Foster 20:38

Yeah, I mean, we have a guy and internally that is sort of our Zapier wizard and I, you know, I remember early on, you know, he has some of those similar questions like, well, should I build it this way? Like, will this scale like asking all those sort of classic questions and I'm like, I don't know. But like, I don't know that we need a thing that scales right now. So can just make a thing that works and so we made it and not too long ago. This is probably Five years ago at this point in time, not too long ago, I was going back and asking some of our employees as I came, you know, what, what tips would you give to folks who are just starting out? What advice do you have his comment was, like, just build the thing that works now, and you'd be surprised how long it lasts, because he's like, I've got things that have been running for years, and I'm gonna have to touch them. Like it just works. And so as of now, sometimes I do have to update on and sometimes I have to, you know, add something special to it, but more times than not like the original thing was good enough. And so like, it's it's sort of that don't fall into the prey of the premature optimization thing. path, just like really just solve the problem you have in front of you.

Ben Tossell 21:38

Yeah, that should probably look at and actually will seem to like thinking of or even worse, what about mistakes? What about us better when it works even bigger? What are some of the big there if you can say, what are some of the largest companies that are using Zapier and what like, what are the core things that they're using w for

Wade Foster 21:59

I mean, we have About 70% of the Fortune 500 using Zapier in some form, or fashion, mostly it's what I was talking about. It's like, Hey, we're running an internal process and internal tool behind the scenes

sort of things, then there are other companies that are doing actually like public facing things. You know, we've got a fairly large consumer tech company, I don't think I don't know if I can say their name, but they they're running a, they run their, they have like a lost and found service and they have like a kiosk for it. And so like the customer kiosk that enters all the data and stuff like that as a form that and then WhatsApp or handles all the logic to put it in databases and work various boats and things like that. And that's being used very heavily, like that's deployed across globally across tons of these different kiosks that they have. Since things like that, so, uh, you know, it spans You know, I think it starts usually on a small, small little thing over here and then it starts to grow as people get a little more confidence and understanding How to use it a little bit more, and they just get more ambitious with the things they can build.

Ben Tossell 23:03

Yeah. Is there? Is there like a natural pull from attack enabled companies or startup? I know you're based in San Francisco and people would assume I guess it's like, stuck with that stuff mostly is that do you see even local businesses using it for certain things like back office and stuff, too.

Wade Foster 23:26

We see a lot more like global usage than I would have expected, like, at least half our businesses outside of the US and mostly coming from folks that I would say are like, they're, they're forward in their tech usage, but they're not traditional technology companies. They're like, like what you said, I think tech enabled or like, you know, service or tech adjacent type businesses, and they're using technology to run better operations to run better companies. And that type of business really benefits from no code meant movement because they can use These tools to go faster to deliver what it is that is the most important thing, which usually isn't technology for them. Usually it's like a service or maybe a commerce like or like physical good or you know, something like that.

Ben Tossell 24:15

Yeah, I think but the longest period of delivery every day, right with what is a tech company like the other website?

Wade Foster 24:23

technology is everywhere. It's in every business. Yeah, definitely.

Ben Tossell 24:28

With what's currently going on the world, if for those who listening if you don't remember, it's the COVID-19 like, lockdown period that we're talking about. There's I mean, we're seeing a huge increase in companies looking at operational efficiency and like, that's going to be a sweet spot for Zapier right off is just seeing a ton more people doing a lot more things people are home learning that way I can be I've also got rid of my commute. I can also get rid of slides. should be done to be seen.

Wade Foster 25:03

Yeah, I think we've definitely seen that. And, you know, it's it's a tough time for a lot of folks right now. And, you know, part of it's a lot of folks have been laid off and they're trying to learn a new skill. So

there's a part of that part of it's these companies have laid people off and now they got to get more efficient. And so they're, you know, look into tools like Zapier to get more things done. You know, some of it is that all these companies are moving to work from home. And so they're adopting a whole host of digital tools way faster than they ever would have done it. You know, I think, what's the quote, it's like, you know, first it happens really slowly then it happens all at once like COVID has done that for a lot of things where it's like happening all at once now we're folks are adopting slack and zoom and online teaching portals and all that stuff means that Zapier is sort of like, called into service to help these tools perform at a higher level. And so we're getting we're like benefiting from that wave right now and seeing a whole bunch of different types of use cases emerge from this. I think the the ones that are getting me really excited are a lot of those businesses who are on the front lines who are been disrupted so heavily like the physical economy, your you know, your restaurant chains, your gym memberships, like these folks who basically just lost their business overnight. And then watching some of them just like pivot on a dime, to create like curbside pickup apps and like all these little things, that they're like, what we can still operate, we can make money. Yeah, it looks a lot different, but we're not totally underwater, because we've been able to use tools like these no code tools. Allow.

Ben Tossell 26:48

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. I mean, we've we've seen like all sorts of things like that with small influence and for restaurants and things like that you even have VHS over here is being looking at No code solutions with us for certain things to which is really interesting. Have have. I've got question from Brienne Kimmel who asked a question that sort of wouldn't have been on my mind, but quite an interesting one. And then we can sort of start talking about the funding landscape of netcode stuff. But she said, when you raised in 2012, did you have a clear use of funds as a goal as a single funding? If not, how did you operationalize business across everything to make it possible?

Wade Foster 27:40

Yeah. So we raised the 1.2 million in September of 2012. At that time, Zapier had been publicly available to sign up and pay for for about three months, and I think we were making something like two \$10,000 in, uh, I want to say a month, something like that. So like very little revenue, but some like and it was growing. But it was not like not not enough that like the three of us who just moved to California for yc could afford to live in California. And so for us, we were looking at that money and saying, hey, this lets us continue to like really work hard on Zapier for the foreseeable future until that revenue mark, like can sustain us. And so we treated that money as like just a bit of a buffer against sort of a worst case scenario. But we were really trying to figure out how do we not have to raise ever again, and we felt like we did. I think one of the things the three of us have done well over time is we're good at marketing, like we know how to generate users and we know how to attract folks to the platform. And so from day one, we were already thinking About how do we get people into this product? And so we felt like we saw a future where Zapier, we felt like we had a scalable acquisition strategy. We just needed a little cash to get that thing humming. And once it was humming, it was like, well, maybe we raise, maybe we don't like we're not particularly inclined to because, you know, so a bunch of dilution. And if you don't need it, it's better to get revenue from your customers. And so that was our mode of thinking, circa 2012. And with a lot more, I say that right now with a lot of confidence. But in 2012, it

was like, here's what we think is right, but we're just sort of a bunch of dummies from Central Missouri. So who knows

Ben Tossell 29:42

how to deal then when is all he assumed speaking of VCs and in funding, the traditional funding state of tech investments is you don't go in and pitch a company to say, yeah, this is how we're going to get your life Money better tenants over life, do you still go in with that same type of pitch, but in your head, you're thinking, Well, hopefully, we just been

Wade Foster 30:10

seed. Yeah, seed funding is a little different, right? Because they're sort of just like placing a bet. And they're sort of just, you know, 10 years down the line, maybe this is something, it's probably nothing, but maybe it's something and maybe it's big, right? So it's a it's a lot different than like, you know, growth stage investing where they're like, I can five x my money here, in seed stage, it's more of a binary, it's like, it's probably zero, but maybe it's 10,000 X, maybe it's 100,000 x. And so that's kind of what it looks like. So the pitch is not really about like, Hey, you know, give me some money and I can turn it into five that it's more just like, do you think this thing could be really important? And if you think it is, like, maybe you should be along for the ride. And, you know, I think enough folks thought it was that they gave us some money. Yeah. Do you think I was a bad I was bad at fundraising in 2012? I can't tell you that I was like super polished founder pitching VCs or anything like that. I was just sort of like, Look, it's working. We have something that's cool. Do you like it or not? Yeah.

Ben Tossell 31:16

Let's see the solid pitch to me. Why

31:25

do you think that now?

Ben Tossell 31:28

Like the whole no code space is a wide scope, it's like, enables people to build software without having to write the code. And it is calling to this no code. We will right now. And we are seeing more and more people make businesses make them really efficient from like, day one with automations here like this thing happens. Maybe there's like a VA that does something manual or maybe there's just like a bunch of things that work together. Do you think we're going to see different types of things incoming mail. There's, there's obviously fans that, like his, for example have invested in. So there's different types of funding, for instance, I mean, do you think there's going to be like a, an awakening of there's a different type of business out there? I think that is probably one of the big ones that people look to saying, Well, here's this company that, like, yeah, they raised money, all in 2012. they pride themselves on making money. Like that's, that's what a business traditionally looks like, or feels like it should be to a lot of people. And do you think that? Yeah, we'll see a lot more of like, these combinations of the funding and people with no codes businesses happy? Well, I think it's it may be that it feels like this whole production economy of people who use that as an in house, as I've said before, that maybe this kind of

situation should be extended to something goodness and the same thing that you just said, which is Yeah, you think about this idea for a reason, all of a sudden, well, that's just like, go for it.

Wade Foster 33:00

Yeah, I so I'm not a I'm not a VC. I'm not an investor. I'm a, I run a company. But I have thought about this a little. And I do think that we will see people being more experimental in the way they try and fund gun companies. vc is, you know, a very like a very small, it's one asset class, and it's a very small portion of total investment dollars goes into VCs. And VCs typically look for a very specific type of company to fund their pattern matters. So they say like, Oh, you look kind of like Facebook, or you look kind of like Google or you look like Amazon. And so you know, that company was successful. So maybe you will be too. But I think one of the things that, you know, VCs learned time and time again, is that pattern matching is actually not like it can be a good way to win, but it's not always like the best businesses are by definition, outliers. They look different. They come along and you can't match it to a pattern, because it's something totally new and different in the way that it operates. And so you have to be willing to like, the best companies buck the bolt, sometimes they do it in a different way. And that's actually what makes them successful. And so I think the types of investors that are capable and able to buck the mole are the ones that will be, you know, are the ones that some of these new types of companies that are being built in different ways will get money from and they'll track because they're willing to just try something new and different.

Ben Tossell 34:33

Yeah. Yeah, I think it's interesting to see that. Yeah, I think I saw a tweet yesterday about the VC asset class being like 33 billion or something probably messed up the other day a piece of Yeah, a whole investment piece. And people just like to hate VC. Whatever it is, they just, I mean, I'm obviously in the wrong circles on Twitter. That's what I see a lot of

34:58

so what

Ben Tossell 35:00

So what's next for exactly? Like? This is big? I mean, how many how many employees is it now is 334? Hundred? People? Yeah,

Wade Foster 35:09

we're about 300 300 employees. Yeah, full time. That's gonna be 350 actually thing?

Ben Tossell 35:18

Well, I mean, I suppose we've got to talk about that as the world looks to remote work of like, how there isn't a playbook for about, like how to scale a company to 350 employees. How? How'd you just figure that out?

35:36

By default, but I'm just like, we have to.

Wade Foster 35:38

Yeah, I think so. In some ways, it's easier than you would think. And certain but but don't mistake easier than you think is easy. So, you know, I think the thing that I've uncovered or I've learned as we've gotten bigger and bigger is that the problems we face as a remote company are not so different. Then the problems that like just any fast scaling company would face. You know, early days, I would go talk to other remote founders who are like running a small team or maybe scaled to 50 people or 100 people and try and learn from them. And then we got bigger than all those companies. And it was like, okay, not well, now, who do we learn from? There's not that many other remote companies, there's like, get lab and vision and you know, automatic. And so certainly learn from those folks. But there's things that they do that we don't do, and vice versa, that like, Well, that doesn't really match. And so I started just going to talking to companies that were going fast all together. And I'd asked them, What are the things that you struggle with? It's like, Well, you know, aligning the team is really hard. Hiring hiring executives is really hard. Sending a vision is really hard. Getting incentives right is really hard. building a culture is really hard. And I started going like, yeah, those are really hard. Like, those are the same problems that we face. And so it was, in some sense, that was reassuring to say like, Look, it doesn't matter how you build a company, you're going to run it to certain problems, whether you're remote, whether you're in an office, whether you're hybrid, these are just things that you have to work on. And so we just recognize that early on and tried to identify those things and said, Hey, we need to figure out how are we going to build alignment across the big teams? How are we going to build culture and camaraderie so that people feel like they're a part of a community that they feel like they're a part of something? You know, how are we going to do incentivize folks how we're gonna motivate folks? How are we gonna manage teams like all those things you need to have like a bit of a playbook for and sometimes the office playbook works just fine. So like how to do good management, I found is generally just be a good manager, like the in office playbook tends to work well for remote, just that most in office managers kind of suck. And so it's like, well, if you actually were doing it, well, you would probably be doing it well remotely, too. So some of those playbooks, you can just pull it over and then some of them you have to create sort of from scratch. So like the community side and the camaraderie side, you kind of have to think about a little differently, you know, Have a cafeteria table, you don't have a breakthrough, you don't have some of these things. And so for us, we look to other types of online communities, we paid attention to things like what like what makes a Reddit community really hot? What makes like a Facebook group really hot? What makes Twitter work? Like, what are these things that where you see like, where you see it working, where it's like, oh, this is actually a really positive and fun community to hang out, versus like some communities that are really easy to find online, where you're like, Oh, this is actually not the type of community I want to be a part of. So like, how do you? How do you try and get more of the first kind and less of the latter kind as part of a culture, that company building? So those are the things that we just sort of looked at to help us scale. And then we just asked the team regularly, every six months, we run employee survey and we say what's working, what's not working? We track some scores, we track some metrics, and we try and fix some stuff up as we go, and then stuff will break and then we fix it again. And so it's just sort of this like, continual. It's like gardening. Oh, Little bit, it's like you just sort of keep tending to it over and over again and, you know, yield your crop sometimes. And then sometimes, you know, you get a weed in there, and you got to prune that out. And like, it's just really is like this, this constant effort, I think to make it work.

Ben Tossell 39:15

Yeah. How did you, you set it up in those communities? I think actually, a lot of people try and build. A lot of people like came to me after product and especially incentives, like how do I build a community and lots of times? It's like for a product that doesn't exist yet. And it's like, well, just any hole fire on the dog community stairway doesn't always happen like that. So how do you how do you build an internal community? Well, what he said, looking at Twitter, Reddit, and all these things, is there. Do you have your own forum is there like, subgroups is there like these as people doing my live zoom Hangout, so things that

Wade Foster 39:56

you do, there's a few like tactical things We do. And a few things that I think are more strategic. So the the big thing we focus on is getting people into the company that share principles that share values. So for us, it's like default to action default to transparency, empathy, no ego, have a growth mindset, like these are things that we're, we believe are important to be a part of our company. And to be successful here, you need to demonstrate to share those same values, if you think otherwise, like, we're just constantly going to be at friction, and it's just not going to work. And it's not an inherent thing that says that you're wrong, and we're right or that you're right, and we're wrong. It's just different. Like we think it's better to just roll your sleeves up and get started on a thing. Some companies don't think that way. like Apple is very, like perfection oriented. And they're one of the biggest companies in the world. It works great for them. Like, we're not that mo like we approach working a little differently. We're a little more I guess, Amazon esque in that way. We just sort of roll our sleeves up and get started on problems. So sharing those values is really important that we have that as part of the hiring process. We ask questions around that. And then we have it part of our performance reviews. So we're just saying like how well you're doing against these things that really helps it flow inside the company like that shared DNA just becomes this thing that like it like I don't even have, I don't have to preach it that much anymore. Like everyone else preaches it now. And sometimes they preach it back to me, they're like, wait, I don't think that this is I think you can be more transparent about this, or I think that you're not, you know, and so I'm like, Okay, yeah, I got it. I can try that. I'm there, you know. So that's when you know, it's working when the community starting to hold you accountable where they feel some ownership over it, too. That's a really important part of it. Then there's the more tactical stuff like inside of slack, we have a bunch of channels that are off topic. They're all prefixed with fun. And so these are non work channels, and it recreates the watercooler a little bit. It's where people can talk about sports or movies. or music or books or gardening or ham radio or like whatever, like niche hobby that they're into. And they're fairly low volume, but like people gather around there, they chat and get to know each other. And it just makes people feel like they're a little bit part of the community. So little stuff like that helps, too. So I think it's a mix of like getting the big picture thing, right, and then just providing little spaces and little niches, little communities inside of the company where folks can gather around shared interests and feel like they belong.

Ben Tossell 42:32

Yeah, that makes sense. Oh, well, um, how are you seeing those lessons translate to building the Zapier extensible community?

42:43

I think

Wade Foster 42:45

yeah, I think you know, the challenge we have with the external community is similar. So you have, for example, there's the broader Zapier community, there's all the users that we have. But just saying that you're part of this actor community doesn't mean that these folks share interests naturally, like there can be people from totally different backgrounds, totally different walks of life, totally different tools that they use. And it's like just sort of dumping them in one ground is not going to be effective. And so we're starting to look at things like just traditional things like what are you interested in? What types of tools you build? Are you an accountant or your lawyer or your market or your operations like, and just trying to like, make it smaller where you can feel like you connect with your people and not necessarily like this big massive group of folks. And so I think that's like been one of our things out the gecko is just trying to get it where folks like you, I would rather have like a small group of people very deeply engaged, then a lot of folks like very passively interested in it. And so we're really trying to get those small things off the ground and it's granted it's very new, like our community at Zapier is less than a year old. Like the public facing stuff. So we're still we're still working, learning and working this out as we try and scale. What about? Yeah. And you mentioned like the different people you have using Zapier. I mean,

Ben Tossell 44:08

I struggle from being the person who built mega pollution, our learning is probably the wrong thing for me to be doing right now. It's like the leaf, the founder, CEO person and do these things like this. Nothing world and things you could do exactly. You could do anything, almost anything in any field. So there's like this huge broad spectrum of stuff available, or do you like, okay, cater to everything? whilst also like, people I was talking about being really specific, when we were talking on open indication? Well, you could do the sales processing because after doing nothing, but you can also build like this movement that did this. Yeah. So you get like, it's been a struggle for me specifically to like, convenience. Yeah, yeah. You've got like a Yeah, you

Wade Foster 45:00

can't serve everybody. Like if you just can't like it's not possible. it'll pull you in weird directions. And so, you know, I think you look at, to me a strategy is when you're picking Who do you want to win with? Who do you want to? Who do you really want to solve for? And so, you know, classical classic example might be, you know, Google search engine, right? They've got this great search engine, but they have two constituencies with the search engine, they have the person who's doing the search, and then they have the advertiser who's paying their bills and keeping Google alive. So like, Who's most important in that situation? If you have to build a feature for the search results, do you care if the advertisers needs are met, or to care about the searchers needs are met? Now in a perfect world, you can do both, right? So you, you do as many of the things that you can sort of meet both of their needs. But there's this section in the middle where you're like, they're in direct conflict with each other. How do you resolve that? And you have to choose you can't say, well, we'll do both. It's like, No, you can't choose both these things are in direct conflict. And so you have to make a choice and you in Google's case, they

said the searcher is more important. So we're going to serve the searcher over the long haul. Because we feel like if we take care of the searcher, then the advertiser will be there like there. If people stop searching, the advertiser loses period. So we pick the searcher versus if we pick the advertiser, the searchers might go away. And then the searchers with the advertisers would go away. So that's how they've made their their call. And so for us, it's something similar, where we look at the user and we say, how do we solve for them? How do we make life easier for them. And if we keep driving more adoption of Zapier, we keep making easier and more accessible. All these other stakeholders in this app ecosystem who have means that we should meet like they will be they will be happier if we do these things, even if that means in the short term, sometimes their need is not prioritized at the level that they would hope for. Because at the end of the day, it's better for no code as a whole to grow. It's better for automating To grow as a bigger trend than to solve this very, you know, niche thing. And so I think that's how I've always thought about it is like really understanding who it is that you're trying to solve for, and making sure that when you do get in conflict, you keep that in mind. Now, when you're not in conflict, great, do you do both? Like, try and do both? Like, that's what you should do. But there's those moments where you're not, you can't confuse who you serve most. Yeah, I think it's probably the same with like, who is a beginner? First, you've seen Zapier of like, how do I extract the product versus someone like me and feel, which is like, I know exactly what I've had to do this stuff on the news really quickly, and it must be a difficult thing to juggle of how the individual uses UI or how they discover what's possible and and thinking back that way. Yeah, absolutely. I think it's like you need like the reality is like, folks like you are the earth. Doctors, you're the ones that are teaching folks. And so we need to meet the needs of folks like you, because you're not going to be advocates for what we do. But sometimes there's things that you all want that's like never going to be relevant to a mainstream audience. It's like, well, what when that happens, how do you make that choice? Right? This is sort of like a, you know, there's a whole bunch of analysis about how MacBook Pros have, like, declined in their favor building wants developers over time, because they sort of let the ecosystem swing. Now, people still be MacBook Pros a ton. But maybe it's starting to hit a plateau? I don't know. Is that because they haven't paid enough attention to developer community? Or is that because phones are more popular and iPads are more popular? It's a really tough problem to answer. You know, people get paid tons of money to run studies and lots of consultants get brought in to try and answer this question. Like, should we build more features for developers who build more features for a, you know, a college kid or whatever, right? Eventually, you sort of have to make a choice. It's like We don't have all the time in the day and all the resources and so you have to pick who you serve.

Ben Tossell 49:04

Yeah, definitely. I always have been a fan of it here. But I'd love to know what is on the horizon for zappy? What? What is there anything specific? like milk, some crystal, anything that that you're looking?

Wade Foster 49:19

Yeah, I think, you know, we're, our mission is to democratize automation, we're gonna make this easy for everyone in the world to have happen. And so you will always see us pushing on how to make this stuff simpler. I think one of the things we're realizing and spending more time on is how do we how can various other people help us with that? So we're spending more time on our teams and companies

product to like help folks in bigger groups like how do they use apps better ways? We're looking at our agency world and saying like, hey, these folks are already selling and advocating for zapier, how can we better support and enable them to do what they do best to bring Zapier to the people that they have? How can we maybe even bring people to them and say like, actually think If you can help this person because we have a lot of folks that are asking for help. And then just like, how can we continue to just plug in all that make sure we support all the apps and support all the triggers and actions and keep it really high quality and the uptime is great. Like, there's a lot of work that just goes unspoken, for a lot of the times. That is just making Zapier hum, quietly. And so there's a whole bunch of work that goes into that.

Ben Tossell 50:27

And what do you think about the Nike station as a whole? as a whole? What do you think?

50:32

Yeah, expect to see

Ben Tossell 50:33

that?

Wade Foster 50:35

I think for I mean, I think the thing I like to pay attention to is what were the gaps? Like, you know, no code, I think, does a really good job of thinking through like, what are the it's almost like the the primitives, the like components, what do you need to do? And it's like, I need to send an email or I need to store a piece of data or I need to have a front end. And so like, we're paying a lot of attention to like, what are those components that people have? And where are they gaps, where were things worse friction and how can we help reduce friction? You know, people are using lots of different tools. Can we make it easier for them to use those tools in combination together? Yeah, I think that's a place where Zapier can can play play a hand, but it's going to be a be a long time to solve some of these things. It also boat Yeah, somebody has been, like a key piece of software that

Ben Tossell 51:25

wouldn't be around them. If it wasn't present be of software, give you an all three of them. 50 of the employees, kudos to them. And it's been awesome. Yeah, we always continue to use it and like, our business wouldn't have been without us. So your role is fruitful for the preacher. Jason's on the third of June. Thank you.

Wade Foster 51:47

Yeah. Thanks. Thanks for having me, Ben. You know, you can find me on Twitter Wade Foster, I'm active there. You can shoot me an email. I read all email. And yeah, thanks for having me. Thanks for all you do with maker pad two. I think you've done such an amazing job. The community is Awesome. It really has been fun watching it grow from you tweeting out these little threads of like I did build an Airbnb clone to like lots of people doing all sorts of random stuff. It's been so awesome to watch everything.

Ben Tossell 52:17

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