



## Interview with David Weekly from PBwiki



**Adrian Bye:** Today I'm talking with David Weekly, who, I've actually watched him from afar for a number of years, he's a very smart guy in the Bay Area. David's working on a number of interesting things. He actually runs PBwiki, which is short for the PeanutButterWiki, which I happen to know because that is one of the things we use to publish the MeetInnovator's interview. I bet you didn't know that David.

**David Weekly:** No, I didn't. I'm very glad that you're using it.

**Adrian Bye:** Yup. So, we're a user. We can talk about that in the interview. But before we go on and talk about what you're currently doing, David, why don't you just tell us a little bit about who you are, and where you come from.

**David Weekly:** Sure. Well, I'm very much a nerd by versus watch by training. I started programming at the age of 5. My dad was a...

**Adrian Bye:** At the age of 5...I was like, trying to learn to talk when I was 5.

**David Weekly:** We just had an Apple PCU lying around the house. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I just kind of copied in these programming columns that were in the back of a kid's magazine that I was getting at the time. But my father's father, his job title was actually Computer. So, I'm rather literally the descendant of a Computer. So this stuff is very directly in my blood. I started programming very early adloescent and did actually some work in high school for MIT Lincoln labs and Harvard Physics labs, and then went to Stanford as an undergraduate, got my degree in Computer Science. I didn't really have a hard time deciding what I wanted to major in, and graduated in 2000. Worked for a big company, worked for a small company, and then went to go start my own company. Involved in a lot of different random things. I was very involved with

computer graphics, and then computer audio, undergraduate. Believe I wrote the first layman's level description for what MP3 was in the spring of 1997.

**Adrian Bye:** Yeah, you probably still log on your website, haven't you?

**David Weekly:** Yeah, I started that website in 1996 when I was still in high school, about to join Stanford. I first got on the Internet around 1990 through my father's email account at GenRad. I remember back when, this must have been like '92 or so, they actually had a book published that had everybody's email address that was on the Internet, and I was very proud cause I was in that book.

**Adrian Bye:** Well, that's pretty, that's pretty serious. I think I might have you by a year. I think I got on the Internet in 1989. But I certainly wasn't in that book. I didn't have any email address until like, 1993.

**David Weekly:** Got it. Did you mean 1989?

**Adrian Bye:** 1989, yeah.



**David Weekly:** Cool! Very cool.

**Adrian Bye:** I'm out of the book, so I guess my coolness factor has gone down a little bit.

**David Weekly:** I grew up in Boston and came out here for Stanford, and then I've been in the Bay Area since then. Very much enjoying it.

**Adrian Bye:** And so you have the pedigree where you come out and, you should be like a Google fan or a Yahoo fan, or I guess that's what you're looking to do, huh?

**David Weekly:** You know, I'm really enjoying the entrepreneurial bent. This stuff freaking runs in the water at Stanford. It's certainly back when I was there '96 to 2000. Everybody was involved in some sort of start-up in some sort of way, which is what people did. It felt pretty natural to me that at some point I would go and start my own company. That became really clear to me when I was working at Legato before they got bought by EMC. For fun in my free time I ported the company's flagship product to Mac OSX and I got yelled at for it. My manager wanted me to be really grateful that he was shielding me from the wrath of the other managers for working on unauthorized side project. I found out the day that I left that the sales people had actually been selling multi-million dollar contracts based on that OSX port. I knew at that point that in order to get a slice of the value that I was creating as a computer scientist, I'd need to start my own company.

**Adrian Bye:** Yeah right. So you graduated and you hit the corporate world for a year, is that right?

**David Weekly:** Yeah. I think at that point I've been involved in a lot of start-ups, especially around digital audio. I think everyone was kind of expecting me to go to audio start-up, and so I didn't really want to get put into a box. I wanted to be respected as a computer scientist. So, I did the last thing

anyone expected me to. I went to get work for a large corporate enterprise back-up company. That was Legato.

**Adrian Bye:** Yeah. I've got to tell you that sounds like about the most boring thing you could do in the entire world.

**David Weekly:** Well, you know it's funny coz I think it was definitely worth doing. There are some things that large, old software company's do really well, that start-ups don't give a lot of respect to. Like really understanding computer systems engineering, understanding build process and tests and QA and really getting that and to one's blood it's really important. There's a lot of things that they do very badly, like middle management. There was definitely some component of Dilbert world going on there, where the people with full-time jobs seem to strictly consist of playing politics with other people whose full-time job was playing internal politics. So, it's kind of a wonder that anything got done there. But it was definitely an important part of my education that I don't regret at all. I was deliberately doing something different than what was expected of me and it's been very, very helpful as PBWiki has actually began the transition into being an enterprise software company.

**Adrian Bye:** We'll certainly talk about that. So, you spent a year there and then where did you go after that?

**David Weekly:** So after that I went to go work for a very different kind of company called [There.com](http://There.com). It was doing online virtual worlds. They're actually still around. Their most direct competitor is Second Life. So, this is a place where you go into full-screen outfit. It looks kind of a game, but it's not a game. It's not like World of Warcraft. You don't have hit points, you can't die, you're not killing monsters. You're just hanging out with other people in this 3D world. You can go and do things with them, you can chat with them, you can buy virtual merchandise so you can make your character look like whatever you want them to look like. It's not like a game where you're building up points by killing bad guys.

**Adrian Bye:** So, what kind of coding were you doing there?

**David Weekly:** So I did a bunch of different coding there including optimizing and managing their clusters of computers, making their forums much faster. I did the 3D audio jukebox in the world. So if you sign on at some point to There.com and see a jukebox that's playing music in 3D, that was actually my work. That's the first 3D shoutcast implementation that anyone had ever done.

**Adrian Bye:** So you like to be able to just write code around anything you know. I mean if you're doing graphics and sound and that sort of stuff, that's fairly non-trivial programming.

**David Weekly:** Yeah. I enjoy things that affect people, that make a difference in people's lives that they can see, they can hear, they can experience.

**Adrian Bye:** Why did you not go to work for some place like electronic app?

**David Weekly:** Why I was looking for moving out of Legato was a kind of extreme transition of something else. To be put in an environment where I was surrounded by people who were a lot smarter than I was. I frankly wasn't really finding that at Legato. There.com offered me that. It was, still to this day, the most intensely brilliant team of technologists that I have ever seen assembled before. That was due to the CTO, Ken Duda, who by hand pieced together the engineering team. He interviewed about a hundred engineers for every one he'd hire. It was really intensive. What was crazy about that company was how secret they kept everything. I had to go through and pass five rounds of interview before they would even tell me what the company did. They were in stealth beta for a long time before they launched.

**Adrian Bye:** How did they keep you interested enough to go through that many interviews without knowing about them?

**David Weekly:** The interviews were with people who were clearly smarter than I was. At that point was pretty rare for me to find somebody who was just whole giant heads and fields and leagues ahead of me in their technical depths and knowledge. These were people who had written a good part of the operating system VOS. They're very, very hard core folks. So, it's like the quality of the interviews was intensive and very enjoyable. It was clear that if I were to go work there I'd be surrounded by people who I could learn a lot from.

**Adrian Bye:** How long did you stay there for?

**David Weekly:** I was there for a year and a half. Then...

**Adrian Bye:** So tell me how that went. I mean if they got the technology guys right, and the company hasn't been a big success. Was it the management problems? Was the business part not right? What was it about it that didn't get it to where it should have been?

**David Weekly:** I think there're a couple of different factors. I think there's some question as to whether a 3D full-screen, immersive communications environment that's not a game, can ever really be successful. I think that mentally a lot of the communications needed that have succeeded in the last decade or so have been what I call backgroundable. So you take a look at like, IM, SMS, email, any of these things that have become wildly successful. They're things that you can do while working on other things. They're tasks that are backgroundable. You don't have to be fully immersed, fully engaged in that thing, right? But something that's a full-screen application where you can't really be doing other things at the same time, they really demand all your attention. It's not something that's backgroundable, so it's not a way that you would casually go and interact with other people. It could be the only thing that you'd be doing. So, it's not probably you could do for instance, at work, you couldn't keep in touch with people at work, using such a full-screen technology. You need to like, set aside time, and that time needs to be synchronised with when other people, the people who you want to go and chat with are also setting aside that time. That I think is really limiting, the level of participation and the number of participants that you can get online, and the degree to which the experience is compelling. I think that people are willing to set aside time to go play a game, and they're willing to make a game be their full-screen, full time experience little short of chalk out. Like, ok I'm going to go and play World of Warcraft after I get home from work tonight, between 7:30 and

9 pm. I'm just going to go and play it for an hour and a half. You've kind of chalked that time off for goofing off. It ends up almost by accident becoming a communications medium where they're connecting with other people and building these social relationships. But it's a game first, and the social aspects, and the becoming the more interesting part after you've effectively beaten the game...

**Adrian Bye:** So, was the point of There.com that was to hook up with your friends, it wasn't supposed to be like a big game or something.



**David Weekly:** That's exactly right. It's a place where you can go and do things in a virtual space with your friends to get to know them better online. But it wasn't a game. There weren't quests. You didn't go and slay monsters. I think it sort of needed to be a game.

**Adrian Bye:** Right, right. So ok. In the end it was a business model issue.

**David Weekly:** Yeah, I think that was part of it. I think also the whole secrecy for five and a half years before they went into public beta was also a bad idea. My current philosophy on how businesses succeed now is distinctly opposite. I think that in order to make the right thing you need to get the simplest possible thing out there in front of people, hear what they say about it, and iterate it along with your customers versus trying to make this big, perfect, wonderful thing in secret. I think that's just a bad idea.

**Adrian Bye:** Maybe people didn't realize it as much back then, but an add-on to that line is saying, I know, the first version you put out or

something is always going to be the worst version and you're just going to get better from there.

**David Weekly:** That's right. It's important that you get started on that process of getting better as soon as possible. So I think you should take the simplest possible incarnation of your idea and just put it out there. I think a lot of the innovators have a problem that they're too smart. They've got this really complex overarching, interesting and comprehensive vision for what their product is going to become someday, and they want to build the whole thing before they show it off to people, because otherwise the full impact of it won't be understood by the audience. As a result they end up

handicapping themselves. They end up spending years working on something before putting it out there, and then it turns out that what they put out was the wrong thing.

**Adrian Bye:** I know that now, and all the people I work with online know that. Are you saying that in the Valley the people are understanding that, or do they still not get it?

**David Weekly:** I feel like entrepreneurs who have been around the block who has gotten some skinned knees, they understand it intuitively. It's something I still see as a problem in new entrepreneurs. They've got this big wonderful offer from overarching vision, and they're looking to build up the whole thing, to implement the whole thing before they launch any part of it. Sometimes they need some sense beaten into them that they just need to launch the simplest possible for that to work.

**Adrian Bye:** Well they don't even need it beaten into them, but you know you don't have to do it yourself. The market will do that for them.

**David Weekly:** Right. Out of this desire to save them a few years of doing your own thing.

**Adrian Bye:** I think the really interesting example of that is actually Intermix, which was the company that owned MySpace. You know that story?

**David Weekly:** I'd be happy to hear it from you.

**Adrian Bye:** Just that they were doing internet offices selling Hydroderm, which is a wrinkle cream. They did a bunch of other stuff. They had a lot of traffic inventory, and they were doing all kinds of email, and all sorts of stuff like that. Then some of the guys in the team just had this idea for a little site to compete with Friendster. They plugged it into the rest of their network, so that if they get users, then the idea was that they would create their own traffic inventory, so they could run their own offers against their own traffic. Then suddenly that blossomed, and the rest of the company became basically almost meaningless. They jettisoned it all, and it became MySpace. I actually spoke today, I interviewed the guy who bought the rest of the stuff. The Hydroderm stuff is still going, it's about a \$40 to 50 million a year business. But nothing compared to MySpace.

**David Weekly:** I think a lot of modern companies have this. Take a look at PayPal's founding, they were doing Palm Pilot to Palm Pilot encrypted money transfers.

**Adrian Bye:** Exactly. Exactly. That's a perfect example.

**David Weekly:** You take a look at Flickr. That was just meant to be the photo upload portion of this online adventure game. It wasn't actually meant to be a photo sharing service. You take a look at Fly.com's origins. This was a Windows applications that's meant to sit on your desktop for doing catalogue shopping, so you could passively browse catalogues as a windows application. Now they're the number one Facebook application provider. Craigslist was just this guy's mailing list it wasn't even any technology at all.

**Adrian Bye:** Yeah.

**David Weekly:** So it's like, it's really fascinating how these things that start off really simple almost as an accident, as a side project to something else, end up becoming really successful, end up really catching on. The market will tell you what it needs. That's why I think it's really important to get out there as fast as possible.

**Adrian Bye:** I agree. But the other thing that as aside to that is you've got to have the resources to take advantage of the opportunity when it comes.

**David Weekly:** Yeah.

**Adrian Bye:** Like the MySpace guys, they had all the resources. They had the ability to send out emails, so friends could invite their friends. They had the traffic so they could plug it into all these massive inventory and gain traction really quickly. Whereas if you don't have the resources behind you, the opportunity will just whiz by.

**David Weekly:** That said, I feel like the amount of resources that you need to be able to take advantage of opportunities like this has just gotten increasingly small. Whereby an entrepreneur comes to me and doesn't have something implemented and is looking for advice on how they can secure a VC round, just like, I told them to sit down for a reality check because if they can't come to a VC round with an already launched product with real customers, then they're going to get laughed out of the room.

**Adrian Bye:** An interesting topic is, I've been talking with people and the general consensus seems to be that the VC model is going away for internet stuff. I was reading in the Wall Street Journal yesterday about Sequoia Capital is starting to do some stuff with endowment funds, and things like that. What do you think?

**David Weekly:** What I think is that what was traditionally thought of as series A investment has become sort of friends and family, and what was traditionally thought of as series B investment or more expansion capital, is becoming series A investment. The price points are the same, but the stages are different. What do I mean by this? What I mean is that '98, '99 you could come to a VC looking for series A round, looking to raise \$5 million based on an idea and a team. You could just have like some quick, whiteboard sketches of what you are looking to build. You wouldn't even have to have like a functional prototype or anything. Then by the time you got to your series B it was expected that you'd actually launch your product, you're actually making some revenue. You didn't need to be cash flow positive, and you're looking to raise like \$10, 20 million dollars or something. That is what those different rounds meant, these days, you're doing your series A, you're raising like, anywhere between \$2 and 10 million — used to be they wouldn't even talk to you if you're looking to raise like \$2 million dollars — and you're expected to already have a product that's out there that's got customers, that ideally has a small amount of revenue. That's the first time that you're talking with serious institutional finance, as you already have all that stuff built.

**Adrian Bye:** So you still see it applies to this. You still go out and raise – did you raise money for your current company?

**David Weekly:** Yeah. For our very last year we raised a series B from Mohr Davidow.

**Adrian Bye:** So you still see applies to VC. You still want to go and get money.

**David Weekly:** Very much so. It's just a later stage. I don't think it makes sense anymore to come to VC with just an idea for a web start-up. I think they'll laugh you out of the room. I think they're looking for things that have a lot more polish, a lot more finish on them before you go and start raising...

**Adrian Bye:** But a lot of the companies that I talked to like Lead Generation, or Best Market Offers, or whatever else, they're already cash flow positive as soon as they got started and they can scale up as big as their numbers will support. They have no use for VC. You still feel there is something?



**David Weekly:** Oh yeah. Definitely so...I think that having advance on your capital first off is really, really helpful. It lets you go and scale up after the competition. What you go and build up a sales team and marketing team, higher engineers. I think that, even still, having VC financing also just makes a lot of little things easier, knowing that your VC backed will make it a little bit easier to hire employees, will make it a little bit easier to get partnership deals. We found a lot of things just work a little bit more smoothly when people know you have the backing of a real institution, versus just possibly being or not being solvent if you're just on your own finances.

**Adrian Bye:** What about the point one guy told me that if your VC is looking for hard runs, and if you're not able to sell for \$300 million, if you're only able to sell for \$10 million, for example, or \$20 million, that VC's may already liquidate that in their portfolio, so they'd rather the company just keeps struggling along rather than taking a loss or a break even. Therefore you don't get to cash out.



**David Weekly:** I think that actually is a reasonable point, but there's actually a flipside to that same point, and that's that a lot of entrepreneurs, myself included, come into thinking, oh, you know I've got a \$10, 20 million company idea, and what the VCs are very helpful with is opening your eyes that there are still ways you could go and become much bigger than that. Does that make sense?

**Adrian Bye:** So you think that the VCs are helping you think of ways to scale the company?

**David Weekly:** Absolutely. You know I think when I started PBWiki, I would've been delighted to know that there's a possibility that it could become a \$5 or 10 million company. I think that dealing with our VC's have really been tremendously helpful to opening my eyes to realizing that, no no no no, this could become a billion dollar company, and working with me to establish a roadmap for how we could become that big.

**Adrian Bye:** So what kind of things did...so they helped you with the planning. Did you need to take capital from them. Couldn't you just have gotten that same advise from a board of advisors or just some friends.

**David Weekly:** Well, some VCs really got their skin in the game, they really got a lot vested and making sure that you make the right decision, that your thinking is clear and is going to be willing to spend a fair amount of time with you. The people we have on board with us, from Mohr Davidow, have a lot of experience doing this kind of thing. They can do all kinds of pattern matching, that I wouldn't necessarily have been able to get out of my existing circle of advisers.

**Adrian Bye:** So, they've actually extended your network, is that what you're saying?

**David Weekly:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Adrian Bye:** So we talked about There.com. What company...what did you do after that?

**David Weekly:** At There.com, after I've been there for a year and a half, I was actually the first engineer to voluntarily leave the company in the six years of its operating history. Still up to the time I'm leaving, I said, hey, I've really enjoyed working with you all, but I'm going to start my own company. So, I wish you all the best, and I'd love to get in touch with you. Bye! It happened that a month after I quit There.com the CEO got fired and things got really nasty, and then the company kind of imploded in a very nasty, dramatic and fascinating way including your 72:1 reverse stocks split from a largely employee financed company that had pulled 45 million dollars of cash. So things got surprising and awkward.

**Adrian Bye:** Could we say that was all your fault cause you left?

**David Weekly:** No, but people did say I had a rather pre-action timing. We went to a point that if I continued to work at There.com, I'd become an incrementally better engineer, but the over-all value I'd be able to provide the world would not be rocketing up. That I was sort of reaching the point of diminishing returns on my career investment as a software engineer. I was talking with other people

about different places to go at that point, including an advisory from a college professor that I had there, was a wonderful professor who wanted me to go and get a PhD in computer science. I had talk with some PhDs and Computer Scientists, and determined pretty quickly that that wasn't what I wanted to do. I took a look at going to Business School, talked to some people in Business School who all really enjoyed it. But they said, look if what you're trying to do is understand how to run a business, Business School isn't bad, but the best possible thing you could do is, start your own business.

**Adrian Bye:** Right, okay.

**David Weekly:** So, I read a couple of business books and just fired up to go start my own business.

**Adrian Bye:** And what business was that?

**David Weekly:** Well I was thinking at the time that I was going to build a web-based project management application. So, I spent the first two months after I left talking with project managers about what their needs were. Pretty quickly I came around to the conclusion that this was going to be too hard. That the project managers I was talking with had wildly varying product requirements for what they would need to meet their needs. So, there was a part of the project management prototype that I was putting together that involved taking central logs of instant messages, so that people could IM about project requirements. Then those nodes would be automatically attached to the project definition. I decided to productize that part of it because it was pretty novel, and I wasn't seeing some other things like it out in the market. So I called it IM Smarter, and worked for a year and a half on it, had some pretty cutting edge technology. But it didn't really take off. It was not particularly well-marketed and I had spent too much engineering time working on making it fancy and scalable, and not enough on making it like just really super obvious and useful for people.

**Adrian Bye:** You weren't listening to your market.

**David Weekly:** Yeah. Yeah. I was working too hard on making a technology fancy. So I guess as a technologist, you sort of have this belief, not explicitly stated, that maybe if you build cool technology, good things will happen.

**Adrian Bye:** Isn't that the same in music where guitarists want to be able to play like the coolest stuff, but then the coolest stuff is what people don't actually want to listen to?

**David Weekly:** Yeah. I think you'll find it in any field that, what the market wants is going to be different than what you want, or what you feel like doing. You have to listen to the market. So then, realizing that this wasn't really taking off. I had about 5,000 people signed up and using it, but that number wasn't really growing very fast. I started work along some different side projects from IM Smarter, and one of those side projects I went and wrote in a weekend, PBWiki. I launched, hoping that about a dozen organizations would sign up by the end of the year, and 2 days later had like a thousand organizations signed up. I was like, Wow. I need to pay attention to this. So, I switched to going full time on that, and that was in ...

**Adrian Bye:** So that was just something, you were just messing around with some code on one weekend, and that's when you got a start, and people just started using it.

**David Weekly:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adrian Bye:** So why did they all go and start using PBWiki rather than using Twiki, or some of the others. I mean, there's plenty of wikis out there.

**David Weekly:** So in June 2005, while there was a lot of different pieces of wiki software that you can install on your server, pretty much all of them had a Step One: So you've got your Linux server dot dot dot. Most people out there who could take advantage of a wiki, for whom a wiki would be useful, they don't have a Linux server that's just sitting around ready to install some software on. What they wanted was something that they could just go and click and sign up for in a couple of seconds, about as much time it would take to make a peanut butter sandwich, and get their own private hosted wiki and does not have to worry about any of those servers...



**Adrian Bye:** That's a decision that I've made my decision too. I mean, I've used Twiki since like, 2002. I loved it. But I've made the decision that I don't want to administer anything, and that that's not my core expertise, and that I want to leverage someone else's expertise. So therefore, I'm now a PBWiki user.

**David Weekly:** Great! I think that pretty much exemplifies our user base. The people who are smart and a lot of these people even have the technical confidence to be able to go and install and run a wiki service on their own computers. But they've got other things that they're doing, you know. They have other thing that they're working on. It doesn't really make sense to be spending a lot of your time doing internal IT, working on things that are not your company's focus. It's just a distraction by definition.

**Adrian Bye:** Right. So, that started off you got a thousand users. How did you get those thousand users, what it just people referring to each other? Were you using anything to drive traffic?

**David Weekly:** So, I mentioned the project to a couple different friends of mine who have blogs, and they wrote it up. Then some of the bigger blogs noted it and like, Hey this computer science guy went and wrote off this wiki system in a weekend, and it actually looks half decent, and it's very simple and it's very easy to use. Hey, we'll check it out. So, it started making the rounds very quickly.

A lot of people signed up for it and started finding it useful. They in turn told other people about it. In the last 3 years, we've been experimenting with a lot of different kinds of marketing campaigns, different ways to get the word out about PBWiki. But nothing nearly as effective as people telling their friends. People who love the product, people who use the product telling their friends.

**Adrian Bye:** You know I interviewed Jason Fried, you know him?

**David Weekly:** Remind me who he is?

**Adrian Bye:** From 37 Signals?

**David Weekly:** Yes, yes, yes yes.

**Adrian Bye:** In his interview he talked about how a component of all their products... because they're all collaboration tools whether it's Basecamp or Campfile or Highrise. They're for working with teams and so by default there is a viral growth element built in. Is that maybe the case for what you are doing, too?

**David Weekly:** I think to a degree. I think that if it's useful within the team only, there's a limitation of scope, right. I mean if there's 10 people on my team, and the product works really well for the team, but the product is only viral within the team, then maybe I can get all 10 people using the service really, really quickly. The question is then, you know, what now, right? How do you scale up your growth from there? Or how do you encourage the members of the team to go and use the service outside of the team. The way that we address that is we wanted to make a service that was helpful and functional for all sorts of different kinds of purposes. So, somebody could go and find out for PBWiki to go and manage their daughter's softball team right, and then use that for a couple of weeks. Then get this, Aha!, which we'd hopefully nudge them into saying, Ahh this could actually awfully be really useful at my work. Then they'd go and they'd bring PBWiki to their work.

**Adrian Bye:** Let me tell you the two uses I've had that have been really, really profound for PBwiki. I'd give you two free testimonials.

**David Weekly:** Ok. Wonderful.

**Adrian Bye:** So one is when we published the interviews. I have a team of about six people that work on it all over the world. So, we have a dashboard where it takes the interview process from start to finish where one person does their job and then they mark it off as done, and then it goes to the next person. So, we're basically using it as a step by step workflow from recording and interview all the way through to getting it completed. That's just been a major breakthrough because all of these people can be located wherever, and they can all just get in and do their job when they need to. There're very strict parameters around what they have to get done and when they have to get it done, and as long as they stick within those parameters it just works. So, I'm able to produce an interview every week with a distributed team like that.

**David Weekly:** Fascinating. That's really awesome.

**Adrian Bye:** That's one.

**David Weekly:** So you've been using it for lightweight project management

**Adrian Bye:** Yeah. I don't know whether you call it project management because it's the same thing over and over. Maybe it's more like just a lightweight workflow. Because I was actually doing all of it myself, emailing all the files back and forth and everything. It was a nightmare. I could have made a full time job just that. Now we use FTP and PBWiki and it's just perfect.

**David Weekly:** Awesome.

**Adrian Bye:** It's been great! The second one. I'm from Australia and along with other members of my family, we live all over the world. We had a family holiday over Christmas, and so we were all coming in from everywhere. I live in the Carribean, one of my brothers lives in Washington DC, the other one lives in Sydney, another one's in the army off in Canberra, my parents are in Tazmania. We had a family PBWiki and what we did was we used it as a calendar. We basically broke down all the days that we were going to be together. We coordinated as a family all of the different things we're going to do. Like on this day we're going to meet up with one set of cousins, and on this day we're going to meet up with another set. This day we're going to do that. So we were able to kind of coordinate it together as a family remotely thru PBWiki.

**David Weekly:** Awesome.

**Adrian Bye:** We actually had one drawback with that. What we founded actually in practice is that we were too efficient, and we ended up burning ourselves out because it was supposed to be a holiday but we were so efficiently able to pack things in using PBWiki that we ended up having kind of a stressful holiday.

**David Weekly:** Oh no.

**Adrian Bye:** But it really worked, and everybody was able to keep up to date with what was going on and we were all over the place. It was just really simple. Thank you for putting up a great product.

**David Weekly:** Oh thank you so much.

**Adrian Bye:** So, how many users does PBWiki have now?

**David Weekly:** Well, we've got about four million people a month who touch the service in some way. We've got about half a million people a month who make edits on PBWiki, who are engaging the service as an editor. We've got about half a million unique communities that exist on PBWiki. We've got I believe at this point something north of two million unique pages of information hosted on our service.

**Adrian Bye:** Okay, so now we'll ask, I guess this is the billion dollar question is – how do you make money? Because I haven't sent you any money. I'm sorry about that, you deserve it. But you know, I haven't. You haven't asked me. Well yeah, I guess you have. But I haven't the need to.

**David Weekly:** So what we are is we're basically a web of people on shareware. So, if you're using this service for your own personal uses, that's fine, we're not going to nag you too much. If you're using this as a company, and you've got more than 3 people using the service, we're going to start bothering you. We're going to start calling you, we're going to start emailing you, we're going to put messages on you wiki after you've been using it for a while, like 'Hey let's have a chat about how you're using PBWiki. So we charge \$8 per user per month. That's what we charge businesses to go and use the service. We've been having a lot of success in rolling this out to companies small and large. We've got about thirty thousand different businesses that use PBWiki.

**Adrian Bye:** With my MeetInnovator account, do I need to be paying up on that one?

**David Weekly:** Well, how many people do you have using it?

**Adrian Bye:** I'd say 6.

**David Weekly:** We'll be giving you a call then. No, you're first 3 seats are free, so we'd be looking to charge you for the next 3 seats to bring you up to 6, which should be 24 bucks a month.

**Adrian Bye:** Well I guess have them contact me. How come we haven't been contacted?

**David Weekly:** Well, we're actually just getting a number of these processes in place. Having something in the order of 500,000 communities to go and manage has made it pretty interesting for us to integrate with Salesforce and to actually start building up a real human sales force to integrate with Salesforce. We've got 4 people who are fulltime out in Nashua. We hired another 2 people yesterday actually who are going through the different kinds of leads that we have put together and scraped together in sales force. It's really been kind of funny during the integration because we've ended up bumping up against surprising limitations where Salesforce wasn't really expecting a company with 19 fulltime employees to have, like, 2 million customer records. So, it's taken a little interesting juggling there. But we're getting around now to a process where we can take a look at even some of the smaller scale clients who are, like, on your size who have about six unique people using the service and be able to reach out to you and say 'Hi', and 'Hey let's talk about getting you upgraded'.

**Adrian Bye:** That sort of situation in a case like mine, what if I don't want to upgrade? That's going to affect a lot of your users.

**David Weekly:** Sure. We do offer pretty steep first year discounts. We can also have a chat about what are you using your wiki for, like how can we make you a success here, what kind of price point makes sense for you. Especially since these are kind of early days for us, going in and making sure that this first year pricing model works well for customers like you. We're willing to be really flexible

to make sure that we can give you a solution that makes sense for the kind of budget that you have in mind.

For people that are just absolutely unwilling to pay, and are using it day in day out at a company for commercial purposes and have more than three people using it, at point we ask them to not use our service. That's actually been fairly rare. The point that we've got a company that's using our service for business purposes day in day out, has a team of people using it and kind of counting on it, they recognize the value that PBWiki brings to their business and they're willing to discuss with us to have some price point that they're willing to pay.

**Adrian Bye:** What will you do if someone else comes along and makes it all free?

**David Weekly:** I think there's a lot of suspicion about free, because free means kind of re-nudging out any sort of guarantees. It's like are you going to go and crawl my private data here to try and pull up appropriate ads to go on display to me? Are you going to provide me with the service level agreement that will guarantee that my business critical data will be available to me? Am I going to be able to email somebody for support or call somebody for support? There're a lot of things that go away with free. With very, very small clients, somebody who might be in a 2, 3, 4 person operation, may be comfortable with that sort of level of whimsy, as it were. But it's not really clear that larger teams with more serious work, with more valuable IP, are willing to just kind of throw it to the wind and just kind of cross their fingers and hope that the provider whose giving them all this stuff for free will continue to give it for free without any strengths.

**Adrian Bye:** I understood in the beginning the model that you were trying was forcing people to start off with public wikis and then running some kind of ad sense on their pages, and I guess you'd keep the revenue from that. Did that model not work?

**David Weekly:** Actually that's not correct. Actually at the very start when PBWiki started, you could only make private wikis. The ability to create public wikis was something that we added a little later on. We did experiment for about a year or so with running ad sense advertisements on public wikis. But even though we were generating millions of ad deliveries a month, we were not getting anything more than beer money. It was really clear that this was not going to be a business model that's scaled to give...

**Adrian Bye:** Will it be money you like to drink more than they'd pay, or is it just more than beer money.

**David Weekly:** Well you know we're some good drinkers here in PBWiki. Yeah it was pretty clear that in order to get to a business model where we'd be making tens of millions of dollars a year would be the unreasonable amounts of traffic, and it was not something that was going to scale. What was scaling at the same time that made it really clear for us was that people were actually willing to upgrade to subscription payments. So at some point almost a year ago, we actually dropped all ads altogether from our service just to make it really clear to the world 'Look this is our business model. We're a tool. We're selling a tool to people. We're not trying to interrupt you'. I don't think that the ad model really makes any sense at all for a business productivity tool. When

you're performing an internet search, you're open to finding new information. That's actually very explicitly what you're doing. It's your mental model. Help I'm trying to find out some information about blah blah blah. Right? So a company coming to you and saying 'Oh by the way I can help tell you about blah blah blah, and I paid for the right to go and say that I can tell you about blah blah blah'. But that's something that that customer is happy to hear, is willing to hear. But if you're in the middle of organizing your team whose transcribing these interviews, for instance, you don't want to hear about an ad for Huggies. You don't want to be presented with ads for different things. You're in the middle of getting your work done. So, an ad is going to be a distraction to you.

So, we've actually seen this happen. That clicks or effective CPMs in non-search contexts perform really incredibly poorly. But if they take a look at like...and this is sort of Facebook's big issue right now...is how to have a better business model right now than eCPM, because they can not go public on their current model. So, I think as a business productivity tool, it really would not be an effective business model for us to go all ads, let's give away everything away for free. Then let's bother the hell out of our users trying to get them to click on ads that have very little to do with what they're working on, and in the process violate the privacy of the intellectual property by crawling through looking for keywords we can advertise against. That's just not a model I feel, like, makes sense.

**Adrian Bye:** So, the model then is paying per user. You also got a very interesting captive audience there. I remember seeing an email once about a session on using PBWiki for project management. Are you going to turn that into some sort of training model? I mean, if you gave people training and it could be paid sessions where you might pay \$50 to go in and learn how to use PBWiki in project management and stuff like that. Is that something you are looking at? With 2 million users you could do some pretty nice revenue there.

**David Weekly:** Well I think that our success long term is going to come from being able to provide a platform that meets people's needs. Where they've got pain points, they know how to use PBWiki to go and solve those points of pain. So, if we can help PBWiki succeed at an organization by giving away training for free even if it cost us some fair amount of money, I think we get ROI on that in a real hurry.

**Adrian Bye:** Why would you do it for free when you could charge for it?

**David Weekly:** Well you know, it may be something we'll be able to explore to have a premium training. I'm not sure that we want to turn into a consultancy because scaling computer resources in computer time is a lot more effective way to go.

**Adrian Bye:** Well it doesn't have to be because you can still scale cause you already have the user base built in. When I saw you running a call on project management, I was really interested. Like you have no idea how interested. But I didn't call in because I'm really busy, and I don't really want to be on a free call where I might be being pitched with stuff and I'm not really sure of the caliber of it. If you've got a top guy that's running you know, \$10 million a year projects or \$20 million a year projects on wikis to go in there and train about it, and you charge \$50 for the call, I'd pay for it because that's worth my time to go in and listen to it.



**David Weekly:** Fair enough. That may be something we are looking at. We do archive all of our webinars for free later viewing. So, if you didn't have the time to go and make that webinar about using PBWiki for project management, you can come back to it and view the video at any later point.

**Adrian Bye:** Are they selling kind of calls or they're just straight informational.

**David Weekly:** They're straight informational. But what we do is we do collect people's information. We follow-up with them afterwards. We say, Hey what did you think about the webinar? Would you be interested in using PBWiki in your work?

**Adrian Bye:** Okay, so what are some interesting uses of PBWiki? I mean I've told you some of mine, and I'm sure there are some pretty crazy ones out there.

**David Weekly:** Oh goodness. We've got such a wild diversity of users. I have mixed feelings about holding a PBWiki user conference because I'm not sure all of our users would get along. We've got anarchists, we've got people who run churches based on PBWiki. We've got people who are putting together, like, erotic fiction novels. We've got the United Nations going coordinating business responsibility plans. We've got large chemical companies that are going and putting together a product safety manuals for internal consumption. We've got advertising agencies that are using PBWiki to give to their clients so their clients have got this latest up to date information about how their advertising campaigns are going. The FDA uses PBWiki in private projects to go and coordinate the development of new medical devices. We've got three presidential campaigns that are being run on PBWiki internally.

**Adrian Bye:** You mean the actual campaigns are being run on PBWiki?

**David Weekly:** Yeah.

**Adrian Bye:** So, can you say which ones?

**David Weekly:** No, I don't think we're actually authorized to disclose which ones. But these include some people still in the running.

**Adrian Bye:** Wow. Amazing.

**David Weekly:** Yeah. So, there's this wild diversity of folks, I mean, there's this one point where mid last year I was working on some of the firewall ping that I've done, make sure that some of these more aggressive networks that were trying to hack in to our servers, were getting blocked out. I made a little mistake and I fixed it, like a few seconds later my phone rang. I picked up the phone and it turned out that the Utah legislature was mid session, and was counting on using a PBWiki for examining their budget and have been briefly shut off for a couple of seconds and they were rather upset, and I apologized to them for it and I'm just spreading it out now, but it was like wow... this really is affecting a lot of people. Sometimes it's a real surprise to find out about the all the users

that are going on PBWiki, not all of which we know about. One of the really interesting ones is BarCamp, I don't know if you're familiar with that,

**Adrian Bye:** No

**David Weekly:** BarCamp is a series of self-organized conferences that happen all around the world on a pretty much continuous basis. It was all organized on PBWiki. You can go to [barcamp.org](http://barcamp.org), or [barcamp.pbwiki.com](http://barcamp.pbwiki.com). They go to the same place, they're both hosted on PBWiki. You can go and setup your own conference talking about whatever subject that you'd like, and put together the attendee list, and the sponsor's list, and who's giving what talk, and it's kind of a viral, self-replicating form of a conference. Then there's ones like they're happening almost on a continuous basis all around the world. They've been on almost every continent, I'm not sure if there's been a BarCamp on Antarctica yet but they're probably working on one.

**Adrian Bye:** Alright. Well, we're running out of time. Do you have any other things you want to tell us about PBWiki or what you're doing going forward?

**David Weekly:** We've had a couple different market surprises where the people who have shown up to go and use the servers have not been the kind of people we're necessarily expecting. The biggest case is this – how popular PBWiki has been within the education and library sciences. It turns out, in retrospect, it's kind of obvious, that what teachers are looking for is a modern tool that they can use to connect with their students outside the classroom that doesn't require using the computer lab. The computer labs in a lot of these schools are like wildly overbooked. It's some kind of a rare resource. It turns up, Wikis are perfect for them. It turns out over a hundred thousand educators who use PBWiki, they go and provide distance learning, to organize their course curriculum, etc. A wonderful tool for that. And for librarians, this stuff is like crack, I mean you think about what their job is – it's collecting, organizing and disseminating information, and that's precisely what a wiki lets you do in an easy and lightweight fashion. So, Wiki's have taken off like wildfire with the library communities. When I started PBWiki, I did not think that this would be a helpful tool for educators or librarians. But, they're the people who've shown up to the party, so we have to learn to service them, to speak in their language, give them case studies, and make sure the product helps them become successful.

**Adrian Bye:** Cool. Any other point that you want to share?

**David Weekly:** No, thank you so much for your time.

**Adrian Bye:** Cool! Well, thank you very much for doing an interesting interview. I'm glad I finally got the chance to talk to you.

**David Weekly:** Yeah! It's been a pleasure. Feel free to call me anytime.