Welcome to the Event Tech podcast, where we explore the ever evolving world of event technology every week. This show is brought to you by Endless Events. The event AV company that doesn't suck. Now, let's talk tech.

Will Curran:
Hey everyone, this is Will Curran from Endless Events and welcome back to another Event Tech podcast. I am sitting right next to… well, metaphysically, is sitting right next to the boring Brandt Krueger in the house.

Brandt Krueger:
Well, that's okay. Brandt Krueger, Event Technology Consulting. That guy over there, he is the terrible Will Curran. So actually worked out quite well this week that we both had negative adjectives.

Will Curran:
Wow.

Brandt Krueger:
Wow. They actually like all of them are pretty negative. It's like you're the terrible, the unfair. However, you could also be the comprehensive Will Curran, had I read a little bit.

Will Curran:
Ooh. I don't know if I consider myself comprehensive though, I'm pretty more like just like shoot from the hip, like we'll just go for it kind of person.

Brandt Krueger:
All right. But that's not what we're here to talk about, is it?

Will Curran:
No, not at all because then people would be bored.

Brandt Krueger:
Plus Michael would be sitting there going, "What are we doing for the rest of the hour?" So today we're being joined by Michael Bleau out of Los Angeles, California. He's the CEO of Event Hub. And so, Michael works with more than 300 large live annual events through his event management software company, Event Hub, and has more than a decade of experience as an event organizer and brand sponsorship manager. Michael, did I handle that just about right?

Michael Bleau:
That was flawless.

Brandt Krueger:

Okay. All right. Always good with the cold read. So we actually started talking to Michael about Event Hub, and we were thinking about having him come on and talk with a client, and we're still going to do that. But we got so side-tracked talking about event communications that we decided to pre-empt that other episode while we… because we're going to try and get some of his clients on to talk about the product as well.

Brandt Krueger:
But so, I do want to give you a chance to tell the folks a little bit about Event Hub and then we can start to slide into what we're actually going to be talking about today, which is better managing your event, right? So better event management through technology, through these tools. Anybody who's listened to this show knows Will and can talk for days about using different apps and plugins, and things like that to try and-

Will Curran:
I think there was a whole episode.

Brandt Krueger:
It may have been an entire episode dedicated to Brandt & Will's favorite Chrome tabs and things. So Michael, let's get things started right now and just tell us a little bit about Event Hub and what you guys are doing over there.

Michael Bleau:
Sure thing. So my company came out of a background and as you mentioned, in brand sponsorship management. And I was the guy that, to really bring it home for everyone, I was the guy that was in the field that was managing the sampling programs, the pop-up brand activations at different fairs, festivals, races, expos, all the different types of large live events. We'd have floats and parade sometimes. And the thing that became very, very quickly apparent to me was two things. One was when you're asked by the brand or the agency to go find other events that are a good match for them, it's really, really hard to do so.

Michael Bleau:
You're scrambling around Google, you're looking at some different WordPress blogs that may or may not be three years out of date with their information and you're so often emailing an info or sales@thisevent.com waiting for three or four days to hear back from someone who sends you a 30-megabyte PDF that doesn't open on mobile, isn't searchable. And it's just such an arduous, tortures process to really, really pin these people down and get the information you need to say in the first place, "Okay, is this something that's even a fit for what my client's looking for?"

Michael Bleau:
So that's one part of what we're trying to solve, is how to better match the brands and the partnerships, whether they're exhibitors, sponsors, vendors, the B2B partners that are interested in these live events, how to better match them with the live event organizers and with the event properties. The other big piece of what I found out when I was on tour was there were way too

many mornings where I would wake up to an email alert at 01:00 AM with my load and information for 04:30 AM in just a few hours. And that sounds like an exaggeration, but it really isn't.

Michael Bleau:
So often in this industry, there's so many little fires to put out and so many things going on when it comes to the week or the two weeks leading up to an event that the operation seems just totally slammed, and it's too much, it's too hard. So they're getting all these logistical information out at the last second and it ends up creating a lot of chaos when it comes to load in, set up and everything that could be much better streamlined to make sure that all of your partners are able to give their best performance and to give the best experience to the attendees at the event, which is the ultimate goal and purpose for those partners.

Michael Bleau:
So the other piece of what we do, we have a marketplace, we call it a sponsorship marketplace, is essentially like Airbnb for booth or event space, and sponsorship opportunities at any of the events on our platform nationwide. And the other big piece is a streamlined and mobile friendly dashboard to manage every aspect of your relationship with those B2B folks. So it's the applications, it's all of the messaging, it's the logistics, it's booth assignments, it's payment collection and tracking, and it's paperwork review and management.

Brandt Krueger:
Nice, that seems like a pretty concise… I feel like you might have said that a couple of times over the course of the last-

Michael Bleau:
I don't think I've ever hit it right like that.

Brandt Krueger:
You nailed it.

Michael Bleau:
Thank you.

Brandt Krueger:
That's awesome. I think that's what's always fantastic to me is when it is actually relatively easy to explain a product and like, "Okay, here's what the problem is and here's how we solve it."

Will Curran:
Well, you'd say that you probably know a thing or two, Mike, about how this is all done. So I'm curious so that way we can set the stage and maybe put in the planner's head who are all listening, like what does a typical planning and management process without all the fancy tools that we're going to probably talk about a little bit, what does that look like? So then that way

people can say, "Oh yeah, that's me." And then we can start to talk about how it should be done. So what does the current process look like, do you think?

Michael Bleau:
For an event producer, yeah, or an event organizer. And each industry has different terms, guys. So if the terms that we're using don't make sense for your industry, assume that when we say exhibitor, we could mean sponsor, we can mean vendor. When we say organizer we could mean producer, we can mean manager, but it's all the same thing. There's always in the structure, there's a leadership position of some type and then there's either coordinators under them that are directly producing all the aspects of the event or there may be a middle-management tier between them.

Michael Bleau:
So the two general themes that we'll be able to discuss are processes. So team processes, team communication protocols, priorities and really team structure. I want to come sit down and do it. And then the different systems that you can implement around your team to really give you the best chance to be successful producing your event. To go back to your little question a little bit, because I wanted to set the stage for that, but the way it typically works in terms of the structure is there's a couple of key aspects of project management, right?

Michael Bleau:
You're going to have a timeline. Start of the timeline is, "Hey, we're going to start working on this day." End of the timeline is maybe the day of the event or is the week after the event with wrap-up, depending on how you want to lay it out. Along that timeline, there's key dates for… there's an entertainment aspect and programming aspect you have to lock down. There is a sponsorship you have to lock down. There's your attendee, however you're doing attendee ticketing or registration, and marketing that goes involved with that. And then all the back of house ops and partners that are actually going to source the venue, and lock in the venue, bringing all of your bag of house vendors if you're doing stage or sound and lighting, AV, stuff like that, that really helped to bring everything to life for the event.

Michael Bleau:
All of those puzzle pieces have to fit together in a way that makes sense in order to execute everything in time, to get it done in time for event day. And if any one of those pieces are out of whack or if you're looking at the puzzle, if any of those pieces start getting chipped or torn, all of a sudden, there's going to be a lot of holes and the whole thing could potentially fall apart. So, so, so important to understand how you're holding everything together and how you're guiding everything along the way.

Will Curran:
Out of all the processes, which one do you think needs the most improvement?

Michael Bleau:

100%, I would say just team communication. When it comes to processes, I want to say it's not necessarily the stubs... So I break it into three sections, right? When it comes to processes and how you're communicating, I say there's red, yellow and green. Green is like, "Oh, this is cool. We can figure this out in a week." Yellow is, "Oh, we should probably figure this out in the next day or two, right? And maybe three days tops." And then red is, if you've ever seen that meme where it's like, this is fine, everything is fine, and there's a dog and it's inside of this burning house on fire. Red is like, "Show up at my door, rip me out of bed at 02:00 AM, break my door down if I don't answer it," because something's wrong and it's going to blow up everything in your face.

Michael Bleau:
I think that the biggest area that breaks down is the yellow because it's really hard to identify if something's a noncritical issue. And then also super important, is it's super hard to remember when it seems like a small decision that might not have the ripple effect it ends up having to make sure you're recording a document in the conversation and the decisions that are made in a way that, A, doesn't make you have to remake those decisions all over again, and B, you don't end up making the wrong decision later because you don't have the information then you have now when you made certain decisions.

Michael Bleau:
So those could be things when it comes to how you're going to set up your load and those could be how you're going to end up implementing your ticketing campaign or something like that. Or those could be more urgent like, "Hey, what are we doing with this writer for this entertainer?" And it's like things like that that people are so quick to just jump on a text or try to talk over the phone. And when everyone's in go, go, go mode, your mind's blank an hour later and you have no idea what you just talked about, let alone the decision you just made, so.

Brandt Krueger:
Well, I think you bring up a good point to that, like each one of those colors also probably has a different level of communication as well. That's what you're hinting at it. So, I think the greens are easy, right? Like we usually end up just throwing in an email and we'll talk through it, we'll figure it out over the course of a week, a couple of emails back and forth. But then like the bread stuff is obvious, right? Like, yeah, like literally kick down the hotel room door or to call the front desk that tell them to wake you up, or call you on the cell phone, let's fix this right now. Urgent, urgent in bunch of texts.

Brandt Krueger:
But yeah, like in that yellow area, how do you decide whether it's email, in-person or whatever it may be. And I think what ends up happening is that sometimes it needs to be… I mean like I was probably going into a complete separate subject, but like, yeah, sometimes it needs to be a little asynchronous because if you say to me like, "We need to fix this right now," I'm going to say, "I'm not talking to you until tomorrow because I have back to back meetings, yada, yada, yada." But then you feel like, "Oh, it has to be right now." Like how do you set the expectations

who to communicate? I'm really fascinated by this whole thing. So what do you think are the best communication systems and processes for that yellow category?

Michael Bleau:
Absolutely. And so, it all comes back to before you get into the thick of it and things start hitting the fan, you have to have an actual process plan, and what we highly recommend is to write it down. Have a written plan of this is what's appropriate for email and a lot of times it'll tailor along the lines of that regular green communication. So we'll say these are the types of communication that's appropriate for green. It's email, it's snail mail, fax, whatever. It could also be Slack, it could also be… and we'll get into this some later. It could be your project management softwares and it could be set in a calendar invite with some notes in the meeting to talk at a later date.

Michael Bleau:
For yellow, it can be several things, but I highly recommend it not being text, right? Because again, text is not a group thing, it's between one person and another person.

Will Curran:
Text meaning like actual cell phone text or?

Michael Bleau:
Text message, yeah. What we've found is that a ton of teams are just communicating with each other over text message and the problem with that is there's no history and it's not searchable as easily as other things and the group can access all the information. So you might be talking about something that someone else that's not in your text chain needs to know and needs to be able to go and have a log. The other huge, huge thing when it comes to making these decisions is within your process plan, delegating responsibility and making it very clear and written down who is responsible for what decision making aspects of the business, what are the things they have to get approval from, from the top dog or whoever's above them and what they're empowered to make on their own.

Michael Bleau:
And I use the word empowered very intentionally because there's a difference between saying someone's allowed to do this and someone's empowered to do this, and I trust that they'll make the best decision they can. And come what may, I've got their back. Versus they're allowed to do this and I'm going to reprimand them if they don't do what I would've done exactly the way I would've done it. So using the mind frame of I want to empower the people under me to perform to the best of their ability really helps you avoid the pitfalls of what can easily happen if you're an expert. And you can just say, "I would've done like this to micromanage your team."

Michael Bleau:

Because as soon as you start micromanaging your team, they start coming to you for permission instead of forgiveness, and if they start doing that, you get in this hole… you'll never get anything done.

Brandt Krueger:
You hit the five scariest words in my event life, which is let's start a group text, that one always just sends… as soon as you said it out I was like hum, because it's just not the right forum for so much of what we do on site. And so for me, you've hit on something that I think that just we just keep coming back to over and over, and over again in all kinds of areas of our events. And that is simply setting expectations. Whether you're setting the expectations of the attendee because of X, Y and Z, or setting expectations of the sponsors because of X, Y, and Z.

Brandt Krueger:
Setting expectations is such an incredibly important part of just being us, right? Being humans. Like that's what I think one of the biggest things that make people frustrated in life, whether or not much less events, is having an expectation in your mind and then having that not be what comes to pass. I just came in off of a long event, and so much of those little problems that kept creeping up, like you said, was just a matter of expectations of how should we handle this? Who should this go to? How important is it?

Brandt Krueger:
And living in that yellow area, living in that yellow area of is this burning down the house kind of thing or is it something that should be handled in a different way. I know we want to transition into the tools, but I'd love to just stew in this little area just a little bit longer if we can. How do you recommend setting those expectations with your team? I mean, is it just simply a matter of an email? I mean, you hinted at that, or is there a better way to truly… because obviously, you're never going to be able to come up with every possible scenario that's going to come.

Brandt Krueger:
It's just like trying to write a crisis communications plan, right? You have to hit the big strokes and say, "Here's the things that we can do," because we're never going to be able to come up with all the little things. So how would you recommend tackling that with the team of as far as establishing those boundaries and setting those expectations?

Michael Bleau:
Sure. So one thing is I wouldn't do it on an email because then you get into that chain and then there's collaboration, and then all of a sudden it's in someone's spam box and they never get it. I would say use a simple something like a shared Google Doc, right? And it really just has to be the leader of the company writing down how they think things should flow and then a collaboration reviewing that to make sure everyone's 100% on the same page and agrees with everything laid out. Because if someone doesn't agree with it and you don't make sure to get that feedback, there's going to be a problem down the line too.

Michael Bleau:
So there's some different ways to break it out and you can do… I would break it into the buckets we talked about first, right? So you're going to have project leaders in the different areas of the event. Someone's going to be in charge ultimately of programming. Hopefully it's not just the CEO or the director is in charge of every area. Obviously at the end of the day they're responsible for it, but someone's taking over that responsibility sphere, if you will. So I would break it into programming. I would break it into attendee and marketing. I would break it into sponsorships and B2B partners. And then break it into production, ops, back of house. Those are some general buckets that are easy to divide amongst the team.

Michael Bleau:
And then within that, you're going to break that down into maybe the two or three most critical items, or five, we'll say, half a dozen most critical items that have to happen. And then try to delineate within that, what areas of responsibility have to be checked. So for programming it could be up to $10,000 per artist. You have the go ahead. Anything over $10,000, you have to get approval from the director. Something like that as a very easy example.

Michael Bleau:
Same thing with hiring back of house vendors, stage if it's going to… and if total stage budget is the as for final budget approval or something like that, present a plan before and gets final sign off, but empowering you to do the plan and do the research, and do the negotiations, get everything lined up. Every event is so different. You could go into a million different scenarios and each one would be slightly… the biggest thing is, first of all, identifying, and we didn't touch on this yet, but as a event producer, the head honcho, you have to identify the strengths and capabilities of your team, right? Because that's going to inform every area that you really can delegate and feel comfortable delegating.

Michael Bleau:
If you don't feel comfortable delegating almost anything and empowering at all, you probably don't have the right team. So hopefully that's not the case. And hopefully you feel really good about certain team members' skillsets. And then what you're going to do is incorporate that knowledge of their talent into informing your plan for processes, right? So you have people that you feel should be able to do a good job in these areas responsible for them. And then within that, really just talking about when it comes to the decision making process, talking about how…

Michael Bleau:
So you can't list every specific scenario, like you said, but you can say, "Hey, this is how I want approvals to go. You're going to submit it to me via email or on a project card or something like that. You're going to tag me and there's going to be a due date, and you're going to hold me to that due date as the person who has to sign off." Things like that. Setting the protocol for how to communicate and how decision making is going to be made is just as important as empowering who's making what decisions. So that on one side you have who's making the calls, and on the second side is how they're making the calls and when and why.

Brandt Krueger:
I love this idea of the empowerment and having the buckets of cash, for lack of a better term. You know what I mean? Having this kind of zone of empowerment that like, okay, anything within this just, it's yours, just handle it. And I always feel like the best hotels in the world get that. The best customer service regardless of the industry frequently has that as a model, of like you've got a certain amount of wiggle room that you can just take care of. And that always makes me feel better as a consumer when I run into that. That you run into this person who's like, "You know what? I can take care of that for you."

Brandt Krueger:
They don't need to go check with a manager. They just make it go. And so, having people on your event team have that ability as well, that, "Hey, if I need to add a flip chart in room 37, I don't have to come and get that approved from you. I've got a certain amount of authority that as your onsite staff I can just do." So I absolutely love this idea. I want to make sure that we get into the tool side of things though. So if you've got anything else that you want to throw out on the people side, feel free, but then we can certainly transition into the tool.

Michael Bleau:
So here's a quick, just to bring it home, I guess in a real life example in sponsorship. So you have a sponsorship coordinator and they're onsite at your festivals today of they're going to do a site check on the sponsor and it turns out that they needed 30 amp power, but they got 15 amp. So they can't run their set, they can't get power. If that coordinator's empowered to say, "No problem, utility guys get this done and we'll figure it out later," great. If they're not, and there's like, "Oh, I'll have to go check with the sponsorship head, who then it's going to have to go check with someone else to get approved," and your sponsor's down for three or four hours, guess who's not coming back. And all of a sudden, what would be a $20, maybe $5 expense off the full generator pull for that event, could cost them $30,000 sponsorship next year.

Michael Bleau:
So that's the way when you have systems in place and processes, and everyone's empowered, do what they need to do, you make a lot more money, you get more... As you said, buckets of cash at the end of the day, it all works out. And guess what? All of your attendees are going to have a lot more fun than walking past a turned off sponsorship booth than someone that's fully engaged and able to give them the whole experience that you guys partnered to do, so.

Brandt Krueger:
We're snapping, we're clapping, we're nodding. It's an audio podcast though, so that was stupid.

Michael Bleau:
So moving over to… we can do that.

Will Curran:

Yeah.

Michael Bleau:
Moving over to systems, where would you guys like to start?

Will Curran:
Oh my God, I'm going to be… you guys ready for the next like four hour talk? Yeah, let's do it. So I want to start with one of them that you mentioned earlier, which is the documentation of processes. So you talked about Google Docs, but I know there's a lot of options for process documentation and people might be using Google Docs and finding it's clunky or how do you link to other things? What suggestions do you have for process documentation?

Michael Bleau:
Sure thing. So I would say you need to start off with some kind of a project management tool. And one of the things that we've been blessed with as a company that's gone through accelerators and whatnot, and has a software background, is there's a ton of project management tools out there and they all… but you don't have to use project management tools for software. There's amazing tools out there that have free versions. There's things like a BaseCamp, is a popular one among event producers. There's things like Trello, T-R-E-L-L-O, Asana, A-S-A-N-A.

Michael Bleau:
These are all project management tools and a lot of them are what's called card-based. And the best way to describe that is back in the day, if you had a poster board and you had index cards, and for those of you where it's not, so back in the day, no harm done, this is just an education thing, but I highly recommend this. It's essentially a virtual poster board with index cards under different project lists, right? That's what you're going for with project management software, except unlike an index card, you can assign a member to it that's going to get a notification and you can have due dates, and you can have checklists within these things and expand it with attaching links and images, and stuff like that.

Michael Bleau:
So the idea is project management at the top and then everything else is going to buzz around executing the different project management cards within that, if that makes sense. In terms of the other processes, if you guys just want me to riff from there, I can dive into it.

Will Curran:
Yeah, let's go.

Michael Bleau:
So you have your project management card, your next thing up is going to be how are you handling the yellow communication? Right? I love what's called Slack. For those who don't know Slack, if you've ever, back in the day, used AOL instant messenger or anything like that, Slack is

a modern instant messenger that is essentially an internal team messenger system, but it's much more than that. So Slack is a piece of software that can integrate with Google. It integrates with your other systems perfectly, right?

Michael Bleau:
And Slack is essentially, like I said, instant messaging, but a huge difference is there's a history. All of your communications are searchable, you can tag and pin things to the top that are super important. Can even set reminders for yourself within there. And it integrates with Trello and other project management softwares. So you have a constant stream of not just your direct communications but different areas of the project. You can create a channel for it, right? And a channel is essentially a group message, but beyond just a random group message, it's a labeled group message that people can come into and out of as they need.

Michael Bleau:
So you could have a programming channel, you could have a marketing channel, you could have a ticketing channel, you could have a finance channel. And whoever needs to be affected with those areas can be added to that, and then there'll be able to see updates in the channel across that affected their project areas. So I love Slack as a tool. There's a really great free version where you can get a ton of functionality of both Trello and Slack to help out a ton with that. And it's better than, I would say just better than text message for that reason.

Brandt Krueger:
So this is the point where Brandt does his grumpy old man bit. But it does actually factor in greatly to what we're talking about today. That I've got a love hate relationship with Slack for the very reasons that we started talking about how establishing how you get a hold of people, and when and why. And that being very clear about, okay, at this point in time, honestly, I think I'm in five or six Slack spaces, each of which has multiple channels, each of… And so, I'm not reading every message, I'm just… I try to be straight with people about that. And so if you need to get a hold of me for some reason, you need to use what's called an @ and specifically mention me by name so that it gives me a notification.

Brandt Krueger:
So I just wanted to throw this out there, not as any pro or con of Slack, but I think because it is a powerful and useful tool, we have to set those expectations and be sure to say, "Okay, look if this is the only thing that we're working in, great. Also, understanding that different people communicate in different ways and that there are certain people that just no matter how awesome this tool is, you're still going to have to send them an email." So I just wanted to throw those couple of caveats on that, talking about… whenever Slack comes up, I have to throw those couple of caveats.

Michael Bleau:
Absolutely. But at least you can tag someone in it, right?

Brandt Krueger:
Yeah.

Michael Bleau:
Which you can't do in a text. It's just there.

Brandt Krueger:
Exactly. Oh my gosh.

Michael Bleau:
No, you're right. Slack has its pitfalls and I'll say, I'll be the first to say that the actual mobile app for Slack is not always great about pinging you when you do need to see something, it's actually easy to miss things within that sometimes. So it's important to write down that process plan and have everything involved. And what I normally say is, hey, if I'm on the road and I don't answer Slack within X amount of time, so you give an expectation window, anything that's not answered within this amount of time, you have my permission to directly text me or call me, or whatever it needs to be done so that it makes sure we don't miss anything.

Michael Bleau:
But you touched on something else, which is interesting, which is people may or may not be more or less tech savvy, but one of the things that we've found is that the organizations that are performing the best, they're not making exceptions for team members. And by that I mean if you have a great system and process, and you have someone that's worked with you for years and they say, "No, I'm just going to do it the way they do it," and you let them do that, you've just created a massive break in the chain. Because everyone else is going to be firing all cylinders and then you're going to be slowing down. Your organization is slowing down your performance to accommodate them being stubborn about something.

Michael Bleau:
So on the front end when you develop these process plans and determine what tech you're going to use with that, you have to make sure that everyone's on board and committed to using it, and you need them to be willing to go through some growing pains as they learn that. And the other thing is to consider the ease of use and how intuitive it is, and the interface, and how mobile friendly it is when you're choosing what tools you're going to use.

Will Curran:
Yeah, I mean like I couldn't agree any more. I think definitely from an adoption standpoint, I would recommend too like sometimes you have to recognize that there are always going to be stubborn people and they're always going to exist. And it's not a matter of if you are… well, it's the tool, it's just the person might be really stubborn about it. But that's why it's important for you to really think about like how can you get everyone on it as quick as possible. Because far too often I see when it comes to these tools and adoptions, it's like, "Oh, let's just like slowly roll it

out." When in reality, sometimes it's just like pulling off the Band-Aid, just like got to do it really hard and everything like that.

Will Curran:
And definitely when it comes to Slack, I've definitely… when I transitioned my team, it was like four or five years ago now on Slack. Like I remember still getting internal emails and being like, "No," like I think I set an internal automatic email that said to anyone internal, I said like, "I'm not going to answer this, if you need me, get on Slack." I just didn't answer any emails that came internally. And that was obviously very, very difficult on that end. But it definitely got better over time.

Will Curran:
One recommendation I was going to have too is when looking at tools too, a lot of people… the reason why I think I got lucky that bet down on Slack, but also when looking at tools, think about their longevity as well. There's always the cool new hot thing and this is coming... I think I've said this on a podcast before, I'm the cool new hot thing King who can find something neat and be like, "Wow, this is awesome." And like I always have something new to show somebody.

Will Curran:
But when you're talking about rolling a whole organization over, also think about is this tool, A, integrate with things that I already have. So in that way, it's robust but also at the same time, is it going to be around for a long time? And I think I got a little lucky with Slack, but when you look at tools, if it's one of those tools, necessarily, has it been around for a long time? Because I think that's the problem too, is that if you are too late to the party, it's bad. But is it going to be around a long period of time?

Will Curran:
Because as coming from the guy who changed tools, and my team will tell you, we had a point in the company where in a year we changed like four different softwares for one different process and people hated it. You got to look at and say like, "Is this going to be around for a long period of time?" And I think we're in the day and age where software really is around, so don't be too afraid of its software going away.

Brandt Krueger:
There's a quick cautionary there and then we'll throw it back to you, Michael, to continue down your list. Just a quick cautionary there of if you're changing things out too often and too much, that can be a danger as well. You got to let people settle in a little bit, otherwise-

Will Curran:
Totally.

Brandt Krueger:

But at the same time, if something's not working, you got to pull the plug on it as well. So just another one of those little cautionary tales now. Okay. Mike, I'm sure you've got more on your list. So let's continue past Slack.

Michael Bleau:
Yeah, some other great tools I would recommend, so we covered Trello, we covered Slack, CRM systems, right? So beyond that, you're going to need a CRM to keep all the contacts that are important. It could be for attendees, it could be for all your sponsor leads and things like that.

Brandt Krueger:
Most people know at this point what that is, but just in case-

Michael Bleau:
Customer Relationship Management System. Absolutely. This could be as simple as within Google, using your Google contacts and Google groups, and things like that if you're a one person army. But there's other tools out there that make it easier to manage people and have smart integrations with some of these other tools we're talking about to help keep it focused across the business. For example, if you have a tool that's designed for sponsorship sales, does that sponsorship system make it easy to, once you close a sale, invoice the person, and collect the payment and then get it over to your accounting people that they've paid.

Michael Bleau:
So there's a few that have been coming up recently that are popular. Salesforce has been around forever. My company actually uses something called Copper and Copper's highlight is that they're specifically very aggressively engineered to integrate very smoothly with Gmail. So Copper, 90% of the time when you use it can just sit as essentially a widget, which is like a box within the right side of the screen within your Gmail inbox. And you can use your entire functionality of it just from there. And they also have a great mobile app.

Michael Bleau:
Monday, I think it's called Mondays or Monday is one that's been coming up a lot in these round table talks at the various event association meetings I've been going to. And a lot of people really love Monday from a handholding and on-boarding standpoint with customers. Actually one of our clients, Seafair in Seattle, had mentioned how much they love Monday and use that to on-board some of their bigger sponsors and make sure that they're not missing any deliverables and handholding.

Michael Bleau:
So that's some examples of CRMs I like. You can definitely Google or do your research, and really check at the pros and cons, and make sure that the pros line up with what you need for your team. Talking back to how hard it is to on-board stuff because… and by the way, Will, that was a brilliant point you made about on-boarding, because what we've seen, any technology in

organizations, when they make exceptions and say, "Oh, I want to be nice and let them ease into it." It's absolutely the meanest thing you could do to someone because what's going to happen is they're going to feel like they're failing in both the new system and the old system instead of ripping the Band-Aid off and dealing with a little bit of uncomfortableness at the beginning.

Michael Bleau:
And the way to set someone up to fail is to be like, "Oh, we'll allow you to ease into this," because no one ever has the bandwidth to say let me do something uncomfortable. It's just never going to happen. Right? So forcing people to really dive in and do that is definitely the right approach.

Will Curran:
I love it. But I'm looking at Copper. I never heard of Copper.

Brandt Krueger:
Oh man, you see now he's going to have all these ideas.

Michael Bleau:
You should talk to ProsperWorks, they've been around for a while. They rebranded, I think it's Copper. Changed-

Will Curran:
Yeah. I like it that lives on the widget and the side of the email too and kind of does it. I think it also, you brought up a good point too that trying to build tools that fit into existing workflows that are exist too rather than pull you out of it. So for example, like I'll give another adoptions example, we were staying on a software called Hugo, which is like an event note taking app. Or not event note taking, but just a note taking app that people share. Instead of using Google Docs just to keep agendas, notes, to-dos, things like that. It allows everyone to work inside of it and then automatically send it to their own to-do lists and everything like that.

Will Curran:
And I think one of the big things is that it's not a far stretch from what we're already doing and it integrates with everything everyone else is doing as well, which I think is important. So yeah. So CRM, what also is next that you think that people need to be thinking about when it comes to their workflow for their events?

Michael Bleau:
Well, I would pivot to actually ticketing, right? Everyone has a ticketing provider they're using but more how are you picking that ticketing provider? Meaning what do you need to do? Are you trying to maximize the sale volume of high end tickets? Is it free tickets? And you're just trying to collect some information so that you can do some remarketing and other things, or provide that

marketing information to your sponsorships? So when it comes to ticketing softwares, there's a wide range of products out there and they all do very different things.

Michael Bleau:
The easiest example is companies like Ticketmaster, right? It's very not self-serve. They queue it up, they build the entire thing for you. And when you have changes, you have to make change requests to your ticketing pages. The polar opposite of that is Eventbrite doesn't make it to be entirely self-serve, but the events that they may be a good fit for it could be entirely different. So really understanding the pluses and minuses to the different types of ticketing technologies out there. The self-serve versus the hybrids, versus the totally service-based ticketing companies is important.

Michael Bleau:
And understanding the level of data that you need and that you want, and how you're going to get that, and how you are going to use that data is also really important. For example, taking a company we like a lot called TicketSpice, a web connects company based in Sacramento. Their system is meant to be mostly self-serve, but it has customization that allows you to grab specific demographic areas about your attendees, and then you're able to export things like that and do your sponsorship decks, and use that to get better data across the organization for your strategy.

Michael Bleau:
So that's one example. It's just because I happen to know that product pretty well. There's a ton of… ShowClix is out there, Ticketfly is now an Eventbrite company, but they all have their different pluses and minuses, and they could be better fits for different types of events than others. So it's really important to understand what those are and do your research before just saying, "Oh, I heard of that one. That sounds cool. Of course that's the best fit."

Brandt Krueger:
It's a huge point. And one of the other things that I'd like to emphasize when it comes to ticketing and registration, and all of those types of platforms is that there really is, at this point, a platform for every budget. But there's trade-offs for that. You're either going to have to put in more work yourself, like you said, or you're handing it off to someone else, but you're going to pay for that privilege. Or if it's free, which many ticketing and registrations software can be, you always have to ask how do they make their money? And anytime you can't figure out how they make the money, you are the product or in this case, your attendees' data is the product.

Brandt Krueger:
So understanding exactly how that data is going to be used and exactly how they're planning on using it is an important part of that factor. So just making sure that if you're going with a low budget option, if you're going with something that is free, it's either going to be… they're either going to be using and selling your data in one way or another or you're going to be doing an awful lot of work, and probably both.

Michael Bleau:

Yeah, for sure. And the other thing to think about is what your cashflow needs are for your event. When it comes to ticketing especially, because more than anything else, ticketing is the company where if you have a big enough event and you have big enough ticket sales, and you can show that over a couple of years, you can potentially have a ticketing company that says, "Hey, here's a bag of money, you use us." And the question is, over the course of your event, is it critical to get that money up front to help you run your operations? Because you're probably paying a higher percentage to get that on the tail end of it against that advance.

Michael Bleau:

So is it more important to have a profit margin that's slightly higher over the course of your event or to get a little bit of money up front that you can then use to deploy against other things in your operations? So understanding your cashflow needs and how that factors in. Some of the larger ticketing companies that are more service-based are the ones that are more apt to do those big advances up front. So something to definitely factor into your research when you're looking at the different features.

Will Curran:

All right, let's keep going. What else you got?

Michael Bleau:

So let me check out my-

Will Curran:

Yeah, project management, CRMs, ticketing softwares, communication.

Michael Bleau:

So I guess we talked a little about CRM, but specifically however you're managing your B2B partners, like more of your bigger population than just your key sponsors, but your vendors and your exhibitors. We're obviously very biased in this area because we feel like we built something that really attacks this thing head on. I'm not going to do a hard pitch here, you can check out our website, eventhub.net for that kind of stuff and get educated, or you can check us out on Capterra and check out some of the reviews.

Michael Bleau:

But the general gist of it is that we've built a system that allows you to easily manage all the applications, payments, paperwork and logistics that go into managing your craft vendors, food vendors, your exhibitors, your commercial folks, and all the way up to your bigger sponsors, so we have custom deliverables. Not just manage the inbound stuff but actually communicate with them up to and after the event and set the stage well for next year. And we do that all while also tying it into our marketplace leads based thing.

Michael Bleau:
So I guess the things to consider on a more broad aspect when dealing with your vendor and exhibitor management, and we'll talk about those guys a bit, is how are you managing all the documentation that's required. So that's a big area of just stress and it's something that gets left on the wayside, and that's something that has people up till 01:00 AM in the night of their event checking off temporary food facility permits so that people can actually come in and serve food or sample things. And it's things that they're scrambling to meet with the health department three days in a row before the event to get right.

Michael Bleau:
Those kinds of things, if you have a system that allows you to quickly and easily understand who owes you what pieces of paperwork and what's approved versus rejected, and what do they have to correct and get back to you, streamlining that type of stuff is a really critical piece. And then obviously, the money. So you'd be amazed at how many events go through and get up to the event and let people come in without actually paying to be there. And if you think it's hard to get someone to pay you before your event, try getting money after they've already come in for free and executed at your event.

Michael Bleau:
And they can have their own opinions on maybe they ran a shoddy booth and they blame it on you, and it's their fault for being bad managers. And all of a sudden they'd say, "Oh, make me." And do you really have the capacity or the legal expense to go sue every individual 10 by 10 booth who doesn't pay? No. So making sure you have the ability to track and actually get the money ahead of the event is huge. And then that load and that logistical stuff is so, so important.

Michael Bleau:
And by that I mean, the day of the event, if you're a typical festival for example, or a typical fare, you have food vendors coming in either by tent-based and booth-based stuff where you have food trucks coming in. If you've ever worked with food trucks and done an event, then you know that at least 25% of them are going to have a flat tire or a broken engine, or a blown transmission that they just rebuilt this week, the morning of. And being able to have them know what they do and who to reach out to on your team to handle that without freaking out and blowing you up 10 times at 05:00 AM is really helpful.

Michael Bleau:
So some of the other systems, I mean Google Sheets is something that's actually used. We come up against that when we're pitching in to new events, probably more than anything. And the reason is people understand Excel back in the day and essentially they say, "Oh, this is a shareable version of Excel that my team can access to." If you have a very disciplined organized team, you can get pretty far with Google Sheets, but again, it doesn't tie any file management piece to those rows of data, and you're relying on your team to manually update different aspects of the sheet.

Michael Bleau:
So if you're okay with that and some manual errors coming in that are… and by that I mean, so Google Sheet, just to paint a audio picture for you. You have different columns of maybe one thing is insurance or certificates of insurance, which is a COI, colloquial term. You could have overall contract, service contract, you could have payment status, you could have other fire permitting seller prone. In each area that you need to check off, it's going to have a column in your spreadsheet and then you have a row going down. That's each row is each booth or partner, or sponsor, right?

Michael Bleau:
So again, that really comes back to how good of a team process do you have in place? Who's responsible for updating what areas of the spreadsheet and who's responsible for cross-checking it to making sure that nothing's missed and things aren't incorrectly input. How's your system catching when you mess something up on that manual spreadsheet? So those are some different aspects that are really important when determining what kind of vendor and sponsor management tool you're going to use. It may be something that your CRM can help you cover to a degree, it may be something that you need something more expansive in a dedicated system depending on the size of your event, to really optimize that area.

Michael Bleau:
And the whole point of it is the less time you spend managing everybody, the more time you can actually spend selling new sponsorships and finding new partners, and making more top line revenue for your company.

Will Curran:
Awesome. I know Brandt and I have some additional tools potentially, and you talked a little bit about how Google Sheets, if you're looking to level of depth for database side of things, I know Airtable is a great alternative as well that expands upon that and allows you to create databases essentially very, very easily and do some more complex things that Google Sheets can't do, which is really cool. And I know Brandt, you had another suggestion as well.

Brandt Krueger:
Well, I've got a claim, I'm pretty sure it's Smartsheet . I've got a client that uses that pretty effectively. And because there are going to be things that you start bumping up against in Excel or even in Google Sheets and things like that, like you said, when you start dealing with attachments and things like that, that starts to get messy real quick. Smartsheets I've found actually do deals with that fairly well, at least in the way that this particular client implemented it.

Will Curran:
Absolutely. So we're curious to know too, do you have any other non-obvious tools that you think that everyone needs to know about before we start to wrap up?

Brandt Krueger:
Like these are fairly big name things as they're like, actually, you know what works, you know what I mean? It's like notepad, right? You know it works. Notepad.

Michael Bleau:
Yeah, yeah, sure. So some of the stuff that is very popular among the, I would say under 35 folks or under 40, but maybe not over that. So there's some tools that are not Slack that are better on mobile than texting, like WhatsApp for example. You can quickly and easily shoot a voice note to someone or you can send a message. What's helpful is the system shows you when it's been sent and delivered to their phone, but it shows you when they've actually read it. So if you're trying to get a hold of someone pretty urgently, you know if they're actually online and getting your messages or not, that's one of them.

Michael Bleau:
I don't know any off-hand, but I've been hearing a lot around the shows lately that there's some newer companies that are now trying to replicate. Essentially there's the apps out there that instead of the Motorola, the-

Will Curran:
Yeah, the voice, the texting, the… yeah, yeah.

Michael Bleau:
Yeah. At the legendary Motorola handsets. So now there's apps that take over your phone and actually use radio waves instead of the normal bandwidth that supposedly can cut through better when you're outdoors and things like that, and they function just about as good as a Motorola headset, but through an app on your phone, that seems to be something that's very popular. There's also-

Will Curran:
If you ever find that tool, please, dear God, tell me, because we want to get rid of radios. And like sometimes stuff like that's so easily, but even Slack hasn't quite figured out how to send quick audio notes. Like I'm surprised they haven't done a feature where you can press and just leave a quick voice message back and forth. There's some tools like Recordify, you can type /record and then record, but that's like so many steps just to… You know what I mean, versus WhatsApp a little quick, like.

Michael Bleau:
No, you're right.

Brandt Krueger:
Early app things that I tried were terrible. Like literally your phone would heat up like a red hot nuclear explosion just from it running in the background. Like that's not good.

Michael Bleau:
What is it, he said?

Brandt Krueger:
It was one of the early ones that I tried it and it was ...

Will Curran:
Like Voxer or something like that.

Brandt Krueger:
To talk type thing.

Michael Bleau:
Oh yeah, Voxer is another one. Yeah, that's another one like WhatsApp. Voxer is a little more voice-based. Go ahead.

Will Curran:
Yeah. But I think you bring up a good point though. It's like the problem though is it relies on data and not every convention center or outdoor venue has perfect data as well, so.

Michael Bleau:
Yup. That's true. So I guess allegedly, I haven't tested it myself, is that these apps aren't relying on cell phone signal, they're using radio antennas, to be TBD, I guess. So we'll have to do a follow-up.

Brandt Krueger:
Yeah, absolutely. Well, we're definitely going to do a follow-up because we want to find out more about Event Hub and how that worked. You've plenty of opportunity to do that. And then like I mentioned in the opening, we're going to have you back in and talk with one of your customers as well about implementation, because I always love having those conversations about, okay, what was the pain point? Why did you choose these guys? And how is it working rather than just blah, blah, blah, here's our product. So, all right Michael, so as we start to wrap up here, what's the one tool that maybe we forgot to cover? What have we forgot to ask you? Give you that opportunity to just throw that last thing out there.

Michael Bleau:
I know we want to stay tech focused here, but honestly, we've talked about so many great tools. The biggest thing I would say is how are you using them? It really does come back to the process map. None of these tools are good if you're not using it the right way and if everyone on our team isn't on the same page. So no matter what you use, you can get farther with a crappy tool and a good process that you can with the best tool in a crappy process. So that would be, I guess my biggest takeaway that just to harp on it one more time, is like you guys, you can get

super excited as I do too, as a nerd. Like every time there's a new tech tool, I'm diving into it and I'm checking it out and I'm playing with it, but it's only as good as the team that's using it.

Brandt Krueger:
All right. And then what's the one thing that nobody would ever guess about you?

Michael Bleau:
No one would ever guess. Let's see. These were unprompted question.

Brandt Krueger:
You didn't answer that in the survey that we had you fill out.

Michael Bleau:
No, I didn't.

Brandt Krueger:
So now I get to put you on the spot about it. You were like, "I'm not sure."

Michael Bleau:
Never guess about me. Okay. I would say that I was once a drummer in a drum line, in a high school drumline. Have you ever seen the movie Drumline?

Brandt Krueger:
All right. Well Michael, thank you so much for joining us, we really appreciate it.

Will Curran:
Thank you Michael.

Michael Bleau:
Hey, thank you having me. This has been really fun.

Brandt Krueger:
All right, we want to thank you all for listening out there and we want to remind you that the best place to find out more about the Event Tech podcast is, of course, eventtechpodcast.com. There you're going to see all of the show notes, all the links to the resources, all of these products we'll have listed in there. You've got transcripts of what we've talked about today. You're going to find there the links to subscribe to us in your favorite podcast app. That's one of the best ways we can just get these sent beam to your phone on a weekly basis right there so you don't even have to think about it. ITunes, Pocket Casts, Google Play, of course, the new podcasts app that are being released for iPhone and on the Google.

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