

Really Specific Stories: Michael Camilleri

Duration: 59:06

SPEAKERS

Martin Feld, Michael Camilleri

Martin Feld 00:21

Thank you very much for joining *Really Specific Stories*, Michael; it's great to have you on.

Michael Camilleri 00:25

Yeah, it's great to meet you virtually.

Martin Feld 00:28

Thank you. Now, first question, you know what's coming: how did you get into podcasts, Michael?

Michael Camilleri 00:34

I have been thinking about this question for a couple of days. I want to say that I listened to a podcast in early to, the mid-2000s, maybe, between John Gruber and I guess it must have been Dan Benjamin, but this was before *The Talk Show*. I think they had a podcast before then or I think Dan had a podcast and maybe John went on it, but I have this memory—I'm from Australia, but at the time I was in Japan—I have a memory walking around suburban Osaka, listening to Gruber and Benjamin talk about some Apple-related thing. And that would have been before the iPhone, so I think I was listening to it on a PlayStation Portable, of all things.

Martin Feld 01:24

Wow, so were you loading the MP3 files onto that PlayStation Portable?

Michael Camilleri 01:29

Yeah, I think that's what I did because I know I did that for music. And I think at the time, I don't remember now what software, but I think the word 'nullriver' comes to mind, I think there might have been an actual, um, there was sort of a fairly vibrant home-brew software scene for for the PSP. And I think someone made an app that would relatively smoothly transfer podcasts—can't even remember if the PSP could play MP3, so it might have had to transcode them, and then copy it across. And I would listen to it that way.

Martin Feld 02:03

See, I'm gathering very early in this conversation already that you are very technically inclined to be manipulating a PlayStation Portable in this way to engage with this content. So, can you tell me about how you came to enjoy technology in this way? What brought you into engaging with this genre and using these tools?

Michael Camilleri 02:25

I think it was: my father was the one in the family who brought a computer home. He is a teacher, and he was bringing it home to do admin stuff, that type of thing. So we had a computer in the house, probably from around the time I was eight, maybe even a little bit younger. And it was his computer, but he'd let me muck around on it a little bit. And it was a DOS machine and then eventually it ran Windows. And I just thought the computer was fascinating. I don't remember really, I've listened to other people talk about how they were sort of deeply engaged with the machine. I don't remember it being like that; I just thought it was an interesting device, and I always wanted to sort of spend time with it. But I didn't get into it, I think, as much as other people did. I didn't do programming. I did sort of put computers together later on. But that was more a cost thing: I found that if you would buy certain pieces, you could sort of assemble the computer more cheaply than if you, than if you bought something from a shop, but I wasn't that interested once I'd put it together. I wasn't necessarily, you know, wanting to keep tinkering with it that much. It's sort of hard to say, I just I liked having technology, I liked seeing new things. And yeah, it was a computer; there was a MiniDisc player at some point; there was some consoles. And then before I moved towards the, into the Apple sort of ecosystem, I had the, the PSP was the sort of media player that I used, while I was basically a university student.

Martin Feld 04:12

And also for gaming? I assume, you were into gaming to have that device?

Michael Camilleri 04:16

Yeah, I was into it but I... because I had the PC growing up, I tended to play games on that. And I found that as, well, I mean, it's it's a bit different now but as someone who sort of grew up in the '90s, there was a divide between the games that were predominantly on consoles and the games that were on PC. And so I grew up playing point-and-click adve-..., like LucasArts point-and-click adventures or um, the *Sim* games, then eventually first-person-shooter games and role-playing (Western) role-playing games. And then the consoles would have, you know, they'd have platformers, they'd have shoot-'em-ups, they'd have have sports games, that type of thing. Um and so when I got the PSP, I found the games that were on it just, they didn't appeal to me as much as using it to watch movies, using it to listen to music. And so I ended up using it more, I think, as a media player rather than as a games device.

Martin Feld 05:19

So, podcasts (you thought) would be good on this device, to walk around and listen to this—walking around, as you said, suburban Japan. What was it like to be walking around in a place like Japan, where you had moved, listening to other foreign voices from the US? Was that an interesting experience?

Michael Camilleri 05:38

It was interesting. I do sometimes worry that it retarded my ability or my desire to learn Japanese, because I had this—especially as podcasting really sort of took off. I mean, it went from strength to strength, but I mean, amongst the sort of nerd community, there was just more and more and more things to listen to—and you could avoid needing to listen to the radio or listen to things that I imagine if I had been in Japan a decade before, I probably would have listened to more, more Japanese-language material, just because there would not have been other things to listen to. Whereas, I was, um, listening to tech podcasts, I was listening to video-game podcasts, the news, politics... and almost being, like, I was I was in a bubble, in a lot of ways.

Martin Feld 06:29

And if you don't mind my asking, I'm very fascinated that you live in Japan, because it's perhaps less common to hear of an Australian moving to Japan than the other way around. What appeals to you about the culture?

Michael Camilleri 06:42

I do, sort of, I'm proud of being Australian but when I was growing up in Australia, I was the type of person that liked generally following rules. And if the teacher told us to do something, then I'd do it and if a teacher told us not to do something, that I wouldn't do it. And it's a stereotype to say that Japan follows (Japanese people follow) the rules all the time. They, they don't... there's, there's more nuance to it than that, but I just find it a relatively easy society to, uh, live in, both for that reason, and I'm very fortunate to have the privilege of being a white Westerner, and that makes living here a lot easier than perhaps it would be if I were a different, uh, from a different ethnic group.

Martin Feld 07:27

That's really interesting; thank you for sharing that. And returning to the podcasting point and walking around listening to this stuff, how did that kind of guide you through your everyday being a technological enthusiast? What things were you getting out of listening to this content?

Michael Camilleri 07:43

I mean, there was a variety of different things, but if we're looking specifically at like the tech podcasts, I was moving into, as I said, the sort of Apple ecosystem, but I didn't come from that at all; I, in fact, grew up in a sort of very anti-Apple household—like not, not really that there was a

reason to be anti-Apple. It was just in the same way you might be from a family that buys Ford cars, and so you just don't like Holden cars just because. I just didn't like Apple computers: they're overpriced, they're not worth it, etc., etc. But over time I was, I was becoming attracted to, I mean, I was, I came in initially through iPods and then I had a girlfriend that had a Mac computer. And so I was messing around, sometimes fixing things on her computer. I was doing web development and it was a lot easier to do web development on a Mac with the sort of Unix underneath it all.

Michael Camilleri 08:41

And so I was coming into the Apple world, but I didn't really know the history of things that well. I knew enough that there'd been an Apple computer, for, like a sort of range of Apple computers. Maybe there was a Mac, at some point, Steve Jobs was there, then he wasn't there, then he was there again. But I didn't really understand, sort of, the full arc of things. And I never listened, I think there is actually a podcast now that sort of goes through more of the history of Apple, but this was more just listening to people talk about—like, people like John Gruber, people like John Siracusa—talk about their experiences and often contextualise things for their listeners, or just relate stories of, you know, experiences that they'd had in the '90s, and how, uh, in the 2000s, as sort of Apple was going from strength to strength, things are so different than how they'd been before, and so they need to talk about how things were before. And I think I just enjoyed kind of filling in that knowledge and, and learning where things, where we were and sort of the story, if that makes sense.

Martin Feld 09:50

No, it definitely makes sense, and I like how you've picked up on that point that you were a kind of anti-fan beforehand, even if there wasn't really necessarily a reason or a motivation to dislike it. So when you made that transition over time from being a non-Apple user to being an Apple user (based somewhat on these podcasts), how do you think you changed, in shifting brands like that?

Michael Camilleri 10:17

I'm not sure, did I change, or did...? I think more, I just, when I... I'd grown up on Windows, I'd been using, you know, Windows software, and I think what I came to sort of embrace was a dissatisfaction that I had had with Windows software before, but that I had just sort of, 'Well, that's just how it is; it's just the case that you download these apps or these programs, and they're just not very well designed'. Like, that's just how it is, or you're using Control Panel and it's just not clear where exactly things are and how you're supposed to find things or just the kind of the cruft. I don't know how much you've used Windows but there's a sense, I mean, it's, it's even more extreme nowadays, because there is the—I know they don't call it Metro—but the sort of Metro overlay that is on top of like, that sits basically as the as the user interface now. But if you dig sort of deep enough, or if you have to click on a certain menu, suddenly, you'll be sort of back in Windows 95. But even back in the day, it was I mean, Windows 3.1 was just a, basically a program

running on top of DOS, like I remember getting Windows 95, wanting to play games, you'd have DOS mode, you'd have to reboot into things. And so you were always kind of aware that things were sort of built up, and that they didn't really fit together very well.

Michael Camilleri 10:30

I mean, this is not especially important, but you'd turn a Windows computer on and it would not matter how good the graphics card was when you started the machine, it would show the ori-..., like the initial loading screen in 640-by-480 resolution—didn't matter that it would then boot into a higher resolution once it had sort of loaded in all the other bits that it needed, it would begin with just a 640x480 sort of image, which as screens, the monitors got progressively larger just became increasingly sort of silly, but that was just something that you just, you just like accepted that it was just like that. So you accepted it but it wasn't that I didn't notice it, it was just well, 'That's just how it is'. Then I start using Apple products or Apple computers and I turn on, you know, I boot up an iMac and it boots into the native resolution, because, of course it does, why would it not do that? That would be very strange if it didn't use the native resolution of the screen; Apple made the screen (or they made the computer), they know what the resolution is. Um, they just make it so that's what it does. And as I got used to that, I just lost my sort of patience (maybe?) that I had had before. And so when I went and used Windows or did things on Windows, I was just like, 'Oh this, this sucks, like this sucks in a way that I noticed before, but I would put up with and now I'm just not really interested in putting up with anymore'.

Martin Feld 13:10

I resist saying this too much but I can't in this case: I love how specific that was, and that's a great answer, so thank you for that. Um, that's a great point because you noticed something in the design and it stood out to you. And you do hear these kinds of experiences and stories coming out in tech podcasts like the people you mentioned, John Gruber, John Siracusa. When you were listening to these shows, let's say for example, *Accidental Tech Podcast* (or you can name any others that that pop up), what were some of the experiences or topics that you found yourself relating to? What would come up on the shows?

Michael Camilleri 13:55

Well, *ATP* specifically is interesting because there's the three hosts. There is John Siracusa, who's used a Mac since 1984, or whatever, and so he has just this sort of deep history with the platform, knowledge of the platform. And so, you know, him talking about the way he thought, he thinks the Finder should work or, or the way that certain apps should behave, that contrasts really interestingly, for me, with the other hosts, with with Marco and Casey, because Marco and Casey, I'm enough of an internet stalker to know they're the same age as me.

Martin Feld 14:36

Mmm...

Michael Camilleri 14:37

And they got into Macs around the same age I did, and they grew up with Windows computers, like I did.

Martin Feld 14:45

Wow.

Michael Camilleri 14:45

So they very much sort of speak to my direct experience, but then when John criticises them or points out, like, 'You don't understand, it used to be like this', or, 'You think that', you know, 'It seems like Apple doesn't care about the platform at the moment, you don't know what it was like during the Series 6', or whatever, um or the System—sorry—System 6 days? Like, I'll feel like he's actually almost talking to me because it's like, 'Yeah, I don't know what that's like, I wasn't using a Mac at that point!' So, so that show specifically is interesting, just because all of the hosts kind of, their experiences both as (to some degree) new, new users, and as old-timers, it just fits very interestingly for me.

Martin Feld 15:34

Yeah, so on that, I like the way that you've distinguished the different roles that happen on that podcast and that relation that you have.

Michael Camilleri 15:43

Right.

Martin Feld 15:44

How does it feel listening to other podcasts? Do you find that intimacy that you were talking about—relating to the hosts that way—how do you experience that on other shows?

Michael Camilleri 15:55

I think I'm really looking for that, honestly. I mean, this is somewhat artificial, in that I don't consciously do this exercise, I think, in the way that I'm describing it to you now, but looking at the types of shows that I listen to, or the ones that I, you know, I, I try other tech podcasts from time to time, and I tend to stick to a relatively small number, where I think I kind of just have that relationship. I mean, it's admittedly basically a one-way relationship, but that relationship with the hosts of the shows where I feel like there's a certain similarity in our experiences, or our outlooks or what have you. As I said, Marco and Casey just coincidentally are basically the same age as me. So that's very similar, have similar backgrounds.

Michael Camilleri 16:45

I listen to John Gruber, still, on *The Talk Show*, but I also enjoy listening to him with Ben Thompson on *Dithering*. Ben's a bit younger than John, he's a bit closer— I think, again, as a crazy stalker—I know that Ben is slightly older than me, but but basically in the same range as I am, and I think has a similar experience of: grew up with PCs, then came across to, to the Mac, um later on. Whereas I find some of the other shows I listened to, I just don't... the hosts, I don't resonate with them in the same way. And so I find myself not as interested usually, in continuing with those shows. And that's true for, for a lot of the other podcasts as well, like I do listen, I like the NBA, I listen to some basketball podcasts. There's a lot out there, I try to, again, sort of sample some of them, find the ones that I like. And inevitably they tend to be people who are in, I guess, similar to me, which is maybe not great. Like, maybe it'd be better to be listening to people from from more different perspectives, and perhaps that's a negative in some ways of podcasting is that you really can, I was talking before about walking around Japan in an English bubble, but like I can literally just be anywhere in a sort of, I'm 40 years old, a 40-year-old white-guy bubble, just listening to other 40-year-olds talk about things that I like. But yeah, I think that tends to be how it works.

Martin Feld 18:11

I like how you've described the consideration that you put into your media diet, so you're constantly revising what you're listening to or how much you listen to. And I'm assuming that maybe even relates to other media that you engage with. When it comes to how you consume podcasts, what kind of consideration (beyond the number that you're listening to) do you put into how you listen to it, whether that's, uh, the apps or the tools, the time or the space? What's the context for you around listening?

Michael Camilleri 18:42

I tend to use podcasts as things that I listen to while I'm doing something else, with the... 'caveat's, the wrong word, but I, I do things that, like I do chores, so I can listen to podcasts, sometimes. Like, I will be like, 'Oh, great! Time listen to... there's a new episode of *ATP*—can't wait to do the dishes!', because that's when I'll be listening to *ATP*. Um, but I don't, I don't tend to like just sit down and like, 'OK, now it's time to listen...!', to, you know, *The Talk Show* or *Dithering* or something like that. It does sort of fit in amongst the other things that I'm doing in my life. That's one of the things that I like about podcasts, particularly ones that are basically people talking, is that it's pretty easy to stop and start it. I like television, movies, but I don't generally enjoy watching those in little pieces; I'll want to really sit down and watch a whole TV show or a couple of episodes or something like that. Whereas with a podcast, I'm quite happy to listen to it in snatches and just slowly work my way through an episode.

Michael Camilleri 19:47

In terms of the actual, like, apps that I use, I use Overcast primarily on my iPhone. I have (I think) a rather finicky kind of playlist. One of the things It Overcast will let you do is create sort of smart

playlists that do certain things like exclude particular shows—maybe that you are subscribed to overall, but that you don't want to appear in a particular playlist. It'll, it'll let you say, these shows should have top priority, so when a new episode of this show comes in, put it at the top. Uh, the other ones should all just sort of fit in chronologically. And I'll do that with the shows that tend to be more news-oriented, like even tech podcasts, but tech podcasts where they are discussing news, so that, you know, I'm not listening to something three months from now and they're talking about, I don't know, the new HomePod that just came out, and it's sort of like, 'Oh, yeah, that happened three months ago'. So I utilise the fact that I can kind of queue up, well, I don't have to manually queue up episodes, I can just sort of have a, an almost never-ending stream of content to listen to.

Martin Feld 20:59

Customisation is very important to you when you're listening; when it comes to podcasting as a medium, we have this kind of consideration of openness, there's RSS, there's this subscription and customisation element to it, which you've just touched on in the playlist element. How important really is that to you beyond just the smart playlist, when we think about Spotify's or other kinds of platforms? How important is an app like Overcast to you in the overall experience of listening to podcasts?

Michael Camilleri 21:32

Well, I'd say it's actually, for me, personally, it goes even beyond Overcast. I've written my own... it's a little too grandiose to call it a web app, but it's basically a, uh, I've got a server sitting on the Internet, where it sucks in RSS, uh, certain podcasts that I want to listen to, and then I have it so that it will strip out things that I know already that I'm not list-..., interested in listening to. So one thing, for example, is NHK, which is the um, the national broadcaster in Japan. They have an English-language news podcast that they put sort of the bulletins for sort of 7:00 am, 12:00 pm, 3:00 pm, etc. I'm not interested in listening to every bulletin during the day, because it tends to be the case that the content is the same, mostly, from bulletin to bulletin. So what I want is a stream of just say, the 7:00 am episodes. Uh, now they don't provide that and there's no way from their RSS feed, to say, 'I'm only interested in this episode; I don't actually want all the other ones, please'. So I have this little thing running on a server that takes in the RSS feed, and then just gets rid of all of the other episodes, uh it, and then saves that as, as RSS, uh, with the episodes I don't want taken out. Then in Overcast, I subscribe to the feed from my server as opposed to from NHK directly. And then I've got basically just the 7:00 am news bulletins.

Michael Camilleri 23:11

Now, I can't do that if it's only on Spotify. I can only do that because RSS is an open medium and it's relatively trivial, uh, with, you know, a programming language—I'm using Ruby to do this but there's plenty of other programming languages that would very easily be able to take in an RSS feed, and just, you could very easily say, 'Anything that matches this, keep it; anything that doesn't

match this, just get rid of it, and then output the file over here and then serve it up'. You know, in Overcast, say, 'Here's the address of the RSS feed that I want you to, to download'. So I don't think very many people would do that but, uh, the fact that I can do that is incredibly empowering. And I worry that as things—services, like Spotify—become more popular as a means to distribute podcasts that there may come a day where people just... I mean, we saw this with the Web, I'm old enough that there was a time when basically every single website had R... an RSS feed, and then slowly that's kind of gone away. And now maybe, you know, they only have one RSS feed, it's just got everything in it, and unless you've got some tool like mine that you sort of stripped the things out that you don't want, it's either too much to be useful or it's just there's nothing there. So I do worry that, uh, that maybe is inevitable, that that's just where it ends up, that most people just want to listen in the app that they use regularly for audio and probably for a lot of people that is, that is Spotify.

Martin Feld 24:53

That is amazing that you've done that and when I asked that initial question I did not expect such —no that, that's really, really interesting, um, I mean it. And it kind of strikes me and correct me if I'm wrong, there's kind of this irony in what you're saying that RSS as this relatively older technology—at least relative to algorithms and other subscription services that we have—it is more restrictive, or prescriptive in how it delivers something to you, but because of its openness, you've been able to use your skill to unravel or redesign it in such a way that the supposedly more customisable algorithmic service couldn't let you.

Michael Camilleri 25:34

Right, yeah, yeah, and I mean, sort of, it's not really on the topic of what you're doing, because you're mainly looking at podcasts, but the same scripts that I have to do this for podcasts, I use those as well for just ordinary blogs. So there's, again, there are these websites where people have an RSS feed of sort of everything. I don't want everything I know, I only want, you know, this particular element and so, I can, with the programming skills that I have, I can ingest a, an RSS feed and then output it in the format that I want. And so, he's since gone independent, but for a time, Matthew Yglesias was a writer that I enjoyed reading. He was working at the website, Vox, Vox had an RSS feed, but it was an RSS feed for everything on the main page. I just wanted to read Yglesias's stories, there wasn't an RSS feed for that, but I can take in their sort of global RSS feed (if I can put it that way) and just filter out everything that's not Yglesias. And then I basically created my own little Yglesias algorithm to serve that up to me. And now I can put that into a feed reader and those types of things.

Michael Camilleri 26:42

I wish that the tools were better for less technically inclined people to do that type of thing, or that's possibly not even fair to say technically inclined, I mean, it takes time to do that. And a lot of people, they're busy, they've got other things to do. And even if they have the skills, like

programming skills, they just don't necessarily have the time to set up a server. And you've got to administer that and program this thing. And occasionally it does break because you know, the format of something changes. And now you've got to go back and tweak it again. And it's a shame, in some ways that there isn't better tooling for ordinary people. If I can say that, in a way. I don't mean that in a disparaging way. I just mean people who have better things to do with their time.

Martin Feld 27:32

And you mentioned feed readers in there. Beyond podcasts, when it comes to reading blogs or going through the Web to find the RSS feeds—fewer of them, as you said—what are you using to keep up with RSS and blogs these days?

Michael Camilleri 27:46

Oh, I used Google Reader, like I think everybody did, for a long time, and then after it went away, I kind of groped around looking for something else that never really clicked until... I, I don't know why I sort of res-..., I probably I resisted because I was... Google Reader was something that I read inside a browser and I kept trying to sort of recreate that. And then eventually I realised I don't actually want that anymore; I'm going to go to a native app, and so I started using NetNewsWire. I did have a Feedbin, I think is the name of the service. So I've got an account on Feedbin and NetNewsWire is clever enough to be able to kind of say, 'Oh, yeah, just give me those credentials or whatever and we'll, we'll suck it into the app, so we'll make sure it's all, we'll use it to sync everything'. So if you read something on your phone, then if you open on the on the Mac, it doesn't show that it hasn't been read yet. So yeah, it's Feedbin as the kind of syncing engine and then NetNewsWire on the phone, the iPad and and my Mac, to actually read, read blogs.

Martin Feld 28:52

That's great. I also use a NetNewsWire, so it's nice to uh, come across someone else who enjoys that app. Now, you mentioned the skills that you have in developing these tools, and whether it's podcasts (there may be more), I'm interested in to know: what other kinds of enthusiastic or hobbyist project or other things are there that you've done? How have you put your development skills to use in other areas that you can share?

Michael Camilleri 29:21

One thing that I keep wishing, I keep thinking about going back and doing it again, was maybe 15 years ago...I can't remember exactly when it was... probably about 15 years ago. I wrote a service that again, would run on a server, it would go to *The New York Times*... *The New York Times*, they have like a you know, obviously they have their front page of the of the website where they post stories, but they actually have a page that is: this is the contents of the newspaper for this day, and then there's all the stories that appear in the newspaper with links to the story on the Web. So, if you want to kind of read the newspaper via the website, you can go to this page, and then

click the links and sort of go through the newspaper, like you kind of would if you had the actual physical newspaper. The problem I found was that I hated the experience of reading *The New York Times* on their website. They are not the worst offender, but they do things that I find distracting. So they are, I think, terrified that you will leave this site, not the page itself, I don't think they actually care whether you stay on the page; once you've seen the ad, I suppose they probably don't actually, probably would really like you to go to another page, so they can show you another ad. But so, there would just be constant distractions while you were trying to read the story. And I don't mean, there was a there was a joke going around Mastodon the other day where *The New York Times* had a story about being careful who you give your email address to. And then there was like a pop-up that *The New York Times* website was saying, please give us your email address! I'm not even saying that type of thing. I'm saying the type of thing where you'll be reading a story and then halfway through the story, there will be a like a link to promote another story from *The New York Times*—not, not actually an ad, just like, 'You might want to read this!' And it's like, but I want to read the article that I'm reading at the moment. Like you could put that at the end, I guess, but like, in the middle of, of the story.

Michael Camilleri 31:27

And there, you know, I see this on *The Atlantic*, I've seen this on *The New Yorker*, like this is a, seems a common practice. I'm sure it—I'm sure they can measure it and show that it increases engagement but I found this incredibly frustrating and so I wrote a script that would go through that page that I was saying (that sort of contents page), and then it would visit all of the links that were links to the actual stories, it would download the actual text of the article and then it would just display the texts like it would... it was basically a text-only version of *The New York Times*, running on my server. And so it didn't have any ads, it didn't have any distractions. And then what it would do is you'd get to the end of the story and then there'd be a button that would say, 'next story'. And then you'd click that button, and it would take you to the next story. So you didn't have to keep going back to the table of contents and clicking the thing you could just, if you were a person, like I was, who grew up reading a newspaper from cover to cover—which I know most people don't do but that's the strange type of teenage boy I was—you could easily do that by just kind of going through, and just like 'next story', 'next story', 'next story'.

Michael Camilleri 32:34

And I think I had some affordances, so you could sort of... I don't think, I think this is before swiping and things like that on phones were popular, but I think I had it so you could just click on the empty right-hand side of the screen—didn't look like it was a link but if you clicked on it, it would just take you to the next page. So if you're reading a story, and you're like, 'I'm not actually that interested, I don't want to scroll all the way to the bottom, I'll just click over here', and it would sort of automatically load the next page. And I constantly wish that that site still existed, like I still had that script working. The problem with getting it to work was that it was painful, because I pay for *The New York Times*, so I could put my cookie detail, like the stuff that so *The New York Times*

knows you're a subscriber, I could put that in my web crawler so that it, *The New York Times* wouldn't constantly be blocking me saying, 'Hey, you've read your five free articles for the month'. But I'd have to like update it when the cookie changed and I'd have to be able to work out in the sea of HTML, what was the actual story that I, you know, what's the actual text that you wanted? And then sometimes it wouldn't work and you'd realise as you're reading the story that like, 'Wait, I think I must have missed the first paragraph because it was written in a slightly different font than all the other paragraphs'. So my very hacky kind of algorithm made a mistake here and so, it just became too much trouble and I sort of let it atrophy and then eventually turned it off.

Michael Camilleri 34:01

But I do sort of wish like, 'Oh, I wish...!', I called it Kabatsu. I sometimes wish, like, 'Oh I wish I had Kabatsu again', and then I could, you know...? I think actually at one point, you know, I actually think I did it for more than *The New York Times*. I think I went crazy at one point, I did it for *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*. That's why I think I know that they were annoying because I was like, 'This, this', and I, again, I pay for the, like I paid for a subscription to all of these sites. So it wasn't trying to get around paying, I was happy to pay the money and in fact, it made me read them more, like I was, I was reading them more than when I just had to go to their website because it was a more pleasant experience.

Martin Feld 34:43

Now forgive my ignorance here; you said the word 'kabatsu'. What did that mean?

Michael Camilleri 34:47

Oh, that's not a real Japanese word; it's, just sounds like a Japanese word. I took it as uh, the way you'd say 'cover to cover'...

Martin Feld 34:57

Ooh...

Michael Camilleri 34:57

...in a Japanese accent saying 'cover to cover' would be 'kaba tsu kaba'. So it's just, I call it Kabatsu.

Martin Feld 35:05

Oh, right, so you're kind of doing this Japanese-anglicised...

Michael Camilleri 35:08

Yeah, yeah...

Martin Feld 35:10

...naming.

Michael Camilleri 35:10

It was a terrible, terrible kind of pun, I guess.

Martin Feld 35:14

I've learnt something in the pronunciation there. Now, in that really, really intriguing account of that app that you made—the thing you just told me—something kind of stood out to me and I wanted to, kind of, put it to you: you were talking about when you're listening to podcasts and when you still listen to podcasts, that that intimacy aspect is very important. A lot of people say that, that idea that you're connecting with the hosts and who they are or the experiences that they share. But when you said yourself, and I loved the words, you said that you were somewhat of 'a strange teenage boy' wanting to read the stories through in that linear kind of chronological or page-after-page fashion. The fact that you're having trouble doing this on websites these days, how does that connect to your desire to listen to podcasts? Because podcasts really offer that beginning-to-end talk. How crucial is the story or the narrative flow of what you're listening to or what you're reading?

Michael Camilleri 36:11

I can't say that I consciously thought of it before, but now that you are linking them together, yeah, I guess it does appeal to me. I said that one of the reasons I was listening to these tech podcast (the Apple podcasts specifically) at the beginning was I wanted to understand the history of what had come before. And that's true to some degree with some of the other podcasts I listen to. So I, I listened to a bunch of podcasts over the Northern Hemisphere summer that were about NBA—great players, people I've never seen, I'm not going to go and watch those games, but I just appreciate knowing kind of the history, better understanding the history of the game, so that when I'm watching something now, things fit better into a sort of context. And I guess, I like the fact that there are podcasts that do that, that people will go very deep on topics that you just could not have done before the Internet before you could have a show that was three hours long or two hours long. And it doesn't matter that only a thousand people, 10,000 people want to listen to it. That's perfectly acceptable in a way that it's not acceptable if it's radio or if it's television. So yeah, I guess I do. I feel bad because I think I'm going to derail things for a brief moment. My absolute favourite podcast at the moment is *22 Goals*.

Martin Feld 37:37

Mmm.

Michael Camilleri 37:38

It's finished now but it was a, I believe it's a 19-episode series. Each episode is about an hour, so you're talking 19 hours, about goals that are significant in the history of the World Cup, the FIFA World Cup. I am not particularly interested in soccer but the um, the person that that writes and um, narrates the episodes, I really, his name is Brian Phillips. I just think he's a great writer. I liked reading him, uh, reading his writing before he made this podcast. And I didn't even know the podcast existed until after the World Cup had finished. So, after the World Cup, this was supposed to, I guess, get everyone excited about the World Cup but after World Cup, when it was finished, I have been going through this 19-hour series, and as my absolute favourite podcast at the moment, I try to get everybody I know to listen to it. Nobody has taken me up on the offer to listen to it. I mention it frequently in my blog. Nobody mentions like they, they talk about other things that I talk about but no one ever talks about *22 Goals*. So I'm not sure if anybody ever listened to it but I, that's kind of what I like about podcasts, like I like the fact that this guy could go and make a 19-hour series about essentially the history of the World Cup told through important goals, and that someone like me, who just likes knowing things almost more than anything else. I can just listen to them. And I can listen to them after they were relevant. As I said, the point of this, I think the point of the show, was to get people pumped for the the World Cup, I'm listening to it afterwards and it doesn't matter. And it doesn't matter that no one else is listening to it. It doesn't matter that sometimes I listen to two episodes back to back. Sometimes I wait a week because I'm... got *ATP* episodes or whatever to work through. The flexibility, I guess, which comes back in some ways to RSS and what we were talking about before, but just the flexibility of podcasts, I think I appreciate that even more than the intimacy. Like the intimacy is um, significant, uh it is important.

Michael Camilleri 39:45

The *ATP* was not a podcast that I was listening to originally; it's not one of the tech podcasts I was listening to but during the 2015, I think, 2016 to 2020... whatever the period of the crappy Apple keyboards was on their laptops, Marco Arment was particularly vociferous about how this was terrible and it was a disgrace and it was just, it was beneath Apple. And he could not sort of contain almost the anger that he had about this. And I was listening to other podcasts where the hosts were not as angry, it sounded like. And I started listening to *ATP*. I'd listened to some episodes before, but it hadn't resonated. But I'm talking to you right now, on one of the crappy, I'm talking to you on the 'MacBook Escape', as they call it on *ATP*, which is, does have the crappy keyboard, but does not have the Touch Bar, which was another thing that Arment really hated, really, really hated the Touch Bar, whereas other people would be a bit wishy-washy about it and be like, 'Well, it's not for me, but I know some people like it and uh, maybe I'm just, you know, I haven't found the right use for it yet'. And people would be very understanding and Marco is like, 'No, this is terrible. It's a terrible idea! Why don't they just get rid of it? Nobody likes it!'

Michael Camilleri 41:12

And that was actually one of the things, I had resisted listening to *ATP* originally, because Marco does do that, from time to time, he will talk in extremes. And if you find yourself on the other side of an extreme, it can be really frustrating, or at least in my case, I found it very frustrating sometimes to listen to him and be like, 'No, you're just, you're just wrong about that'. But when I wanted a champion, he was fantastic. And so I started listening to it because he just talked like a normal person who was very upset by this expensive computer that he had bought and it didn't work properly! And so I liked that. That's definitely an important part of the appeal of podcasts to me. Um and the same same sort of thing with the other podcasts I listen to, whether they're in, in sports or whatever, I don't tend to listen to podcasts from professional media organisations, because they feel distant. They don't have that... I don't know if 'intimacy' is the word I would use. I can see how it can apply but I'm conscious of the fact that it's a one-way relationship, right? Like, I am not friends with Marco Arment; I'm not friends with Casey Liss; I'm not friends with John Siracusa, so I don't really think of them as my friends, but I do think of them as ordinary Mac users, people who are in the similar situation to me.

Michael Camilleri 41:23

And in fact, again, that was part of the appeal; when I started listening to the show regularly what really drew me in was I realised that I was, I'd become frustrated with other Mac pundits, who I felt, they would review, like, Apple would release a new MacBook Pro and they'd say, 'We fixed it, we fixed the keyboard, we found with the... I know, we said that there wasn't a problem with the keyboard, we fixed it anyway, even though there was no problem. Now this one doesn't, it really doesn't have any problems!' Whereas, especially at the time, John Siracusa was working, he had one of these Macs, I believe, that work had bought for him, and it kept breaking, and he kept having to give it back to them, and they'd swap it. And I just appreciated that, yeah, I wouldn't say intimacy, it's more authenticity. I know that sounds very disparaging to professional journalists, like I do appreciate the work that they do, but they sort of, there's a remove there, I think, sometimes in the way that they interact with their audience, which makes sense, given who they are. But I very much like the fact that podcasting, in addition to providing those people with, you know, they have shows too, they have audiences, but if you are looking for ordinary people, especially in tech, you can find ordinary people who've got a podcast about something, and you might find you resonate more with them, then with a more professional pundit or professional reviewer.

Martin Feld 42:56

'Authenticity' certainly does work, I think, as a descriptor for what you're saying, because when you said 'relating' or 'resonating' before, it's connecting with someone or something that matches your experience. So 'authentic' makes sense.

Michael Camilleri 44:19

Right! If you are a person who is not a professional blogger, and you are in fact using technology in a more sort of ordinary, mainstream way, and I just really liked the fact that podcasts especially, I think blogs to some degree and Twitter, but especially I think maybe the fact that you could hear the voice of people on podcasts was sort of important.

Martin Feld 44:42

And you've used the word 'professional' in a way that I think is very interesting. So, are you saying that professional in your eyes is someone who in the case of podcasting, only does podcasting, whereas if they're balancing it with something else, it's not quite the same? What does professional mean to you?

Michael Camilleri 45:00

I mean professional in this case in the sense that their career is in producing this type of content, whether it's a podcast or a blog, or that type of thing. So again, in the Apple tech ecosystem, people like John Gruber, people like Jason Snell, even someone like Myke Hurley, who was not, I, you know, I would not have classed him as a professional sort of media person when he began his podcasting empire. But like, that is his job now, that's what he does. And so those people, I would class professional, whereas somebody like, you know, Casey, when Casey was just going to an actual job where he had to write C Sharp, or whatever he had to do, and then we'd come home and talk to his friends about the fact that the space bar doesn't work properly on his computer like that, I would call that, it sort of was amateur, in the sense that it was, it wasn't, the livelihood wasn't tied to that.

Michael Camilleri 46:04

And I don't know, I, I think all the people, all the people that I've read, you know, in the sort of Mac news ecosystem, who've hung around, I don't think there's really hacks, like I think everyone is being as genuine as they can be about their experiences. But it just comes back to what I was saying before, like, if you're reviewing a product that Apple sent you, and they sent you the top of the line one, it's the best one they've got, if you've got any problems with it, you just put it back in a box, send it and they send you another one. That's just a fundamentally different experience, than, you know, if Marco literally stays up at night, so he can order a laptop to be delivered the next day, and it comes in, there's a piece missing or something. And that's just closer to my experience than what I'm calling a professional podcaster or professional writer.

Martin Feld 46:58

That makes sense, so it's about that relation, again, and balancing with other things in life, I totally understand. And talking about your media diet, thinking about the people you listen to, the reasons you do and don't. Surely you're thinking again about the next revision or keeping things in

mind. Where do you see your media diet changing or do you have any other kind of adjustments on the horizon in mind?

Michael Camilleri 47:23

I do. As strange as this might sound after I've just spent however long we've been talking to each other, um rhapsodising about podcasts, I do sometimes think I spend too much time listening to podcasts, and that, as enjoyable as they are, they are almost like junk food, in that they are, or comfort food, maybe is a kinder of way to say it, um in that they don't provide the same nourishment, the same sustenance, the same challenge as, say, an audiobook would, so that instead of like an audiobook of, of some great work of literature or something, so instead of, instead of listening to, you know however many hours of *ATP* I've consumed over the last 365 days, I should have instead spent that time maybe listening to an episode here or there. But I could have instead, listened to something like an audiobook or read a book. I mean, things in terms of podcast, like things that could fit in where I use podcasts, like, as I said, when I'm doing chores around the house, and things like that, audiobooks seemed like a very natural fit of something that I could listen to instead. But I have also had this thought, probably for the last five or 10 years, I'm still listening to a lot of podcasts and not very many audiobooks. So probably I'll keep listening to podcasts, but I do try to keep things varied a bit. So I feel a little bad, I guess, if I stop listening to a show, but I try not to just listen for the sake of listening, like, 'Oh, well, I've been listening to these guys for so long, so I better I better keep going.

Michael Camilleri 49:09

And I will sometimes listen to something and then when I feel like it kind of gets a bit repetitive, or like, one of these sort of more discursive where, you know, it's a bunch of white guys talking about Apple products, I'll listen to it and then I'll be like, 'Yeah, I think I've you know, we've kind of gone in a bit of a loop now, so I'll just leave that'. And then sometimes I come back to it again. So I mentioned Jason Snell and Myke Hurley, they have a show, *Upgrade*. I've had, I think, two periods during which I listened to *Upgrade*: so I would listen, I listened to *Upgrade* for a while, I was like, 'Yeah, I think I know what they think about Apple things and not much is changing at the moment, I'm just going to leave that one be'; and then you know, as time passed, I was like, 'Oh, I kind of wonder what they think about some of these new things', so then I subscribe again, listen to some new episodes and be like, 'OK, I now I'm, I'm finished'. And I can imagine the same thing how happening with, with *ATP*, I can imagine that, the same thing happening with Gruber and *The Talk Show*. I did stop listening for a short time and then his, his is the one, it's the hardest to let go of just because like, as I said, I think he actually got me into podcasting, so I kind of feel a sort of a weird connection there. But like the basketball ones, I'll often, you know, rotate around the particular ones I'll listen to, or I'll keep it in Overcast, but I won't have the episodes download automatically. And then when I want to listen to something, I'll just be like, 'Oh, I wonder if they've had like a guest that I recognise or someone that I'm interested in'. And so I'll just look that way,

and maybe just grab like an episode rather than feel an obligation to listen to, you know, the show on a regular basis.

Martin Feld 50:47

I like how you've characterised that kind of emotional connection that you have to letting things go, like it's not necessarily really strong, but it is a consideration because you're dealing with people, even if you—as you said, I think, a number of times earlier—a one-way relationship, or that's how you perceive it. Is there anything that we haven't discussed in your story that I haven't asked you that you would like to mention about your experience on the Web or podcasting experience as a consumer?

Michael Camilleri 51:13

I guess the only thing, maybe, I mean, this just shows the ego I suppose I have, but you haven't asked whether I've been tempted to start my own podcast...

Martin Feld 51:22

That's a great point!

Michael Camilleri 51:23

...which I have. I did. I recorded some episodes, and I was like, not happy with them, so I never released them to anybody. I have a title for a podcast, called *Rant or Rave*, where I would interview someone for 30 minutes and they would have to either rant about something or rave about something. That would be, like an episode would just be on one that whatever they wanted to complain about, or whatever they wanted to sing the praises of, and then that'd be it. I wouldn't talk to that person again or maybe come back to them at some point. But like, the point would be, it'd be a different, different person. And podcasting to me is a bit weird like that, I think. I guess blogging is a bit similar, maybe some of these sort of Internet types of things that are native to the Internet, like, I don't know, maybe it sounds kind of obvious, but I don't think most people watch a TV show... like they watch a lot of TV shows, and they think, 'I should make a TV show'. Even something like writing a book, you know, making a TV show, there's a lot of logistics to it that maybe you'd say, 'Well, of course, people don't think that it's too difficult'. But even reading a book, I don't think a lot of people would necessarily be like, 'Well, I've read a lot of literature, so I'll go write a book now; and not just any book, but like, alright, a great work of literature too!' And yet, with podcasting and maybe to some degree with blogging, it is sort of interesting how it does sort of encourage you, particularly if you are listening to the types of people I'm listening to (who are these amateurs), and then you're like, 'Well, I, I'm an amateur, so how hard could it be?! They told me what microphones they own, I just have to go and buy those!'

Martin Feld 51:29

So it's this feeling of accessibility—is that what you're getting at?

Michael Camilleri 53:01

Yeah, I think accessibility and, and also, I realise I'm sort of maybe drowning at the moment, but I suppose what I'm trying to reach for is, perhaps this is a bit, this sounds just too highfalutin, but like, there is a way in which the mass media of the sort of late 20th century was very much professionally made and unprofessionally consumed, like, you just sat at home, and just listened to the radio or watched television or went to the movies. And it wasn't, you know, people have, have sort of lamented the loss of the piano in the house, where you just sit around and people would play the piano and sing songs together and you didn't create culture anymore, you just sort of consumed it. And I like the fact that, um, the Internet, particularly that sort of Web 1.0, maybe Web 2.0, kind of created this sense of like, you should also be producing it. Like, that's, you almost have an obligation to produce it.

Michael Camilleri 54:03

I suppose, that's what I'm sort of reaching to, I, your question was: is there something that I should have asked you about? And I guess we never, you know, I talk in these fully-formed paragraphs, so maybe it's hard to fit a word in edgewise, but we didn't talk about: how did I go from, I just, not that interested in computers, like, to I program, like, my own RSS filter thing. Well it was, it was the Web that... I got on the Web and you could right-click and view source. I don't think people fully appreciate how powerful that was, especially now when that's just normal that you can do that. But if you grew up, if you're the age that I am or maybe older and you grew up with compiled programs, and there was no accessible way to look at: how did LucasArts make the game do this? Like, you just don't know. But then you would go to a website, and you would look at, I was a... there was a website called glassdog.com that I loved. And I would, how did he do that? Like, how did he make the page do that?

Michael Camilleri 55:20

And you'd right-click, and, you know, you're reading through very, very prehistoric JavaScript trying to understand, like, especially if you don't have a computer programming background, trying to understand what is going on here. What is this language? You'd copy things, and Google doesn't exist yet. So you have to go to AltaVista and paste things into AltaVista and then look things up. But it really kind of, it it just, I guess it's the accessibility but it's also folk, almost, like it's this kind of folk culture. And and I liked that about podcasts. I like that podcasts, as slick as they are and as much money as is in the ecosystem now, there's still a degree to which and maybe it's, this is the RSS element, that they are just, you could do it too. Like, I mean, realistically, probably not, but at least it seems possible. And again, it almost seems like there's an obligation that you should be producing some stuff, you shouldn't just, it's not good, just to listen, it's not good just to look at websites, it's not good just to do these things. You should also be producing things and that the Web, and I think the culture of the Web, creates a sense that not only should you do that, in the sense that there's like an obligation that you don't want to do, but there's an

encouragement like, 'No, no, you should do that!', like, 'It would be cool if you put something on the Internet!'

Michael Camilleri 56:50

Like, why would it be cool? Like, why does anyone need another, another white guy talking about his opinions? I don't know! But I feel like they do, and I feel like they do in a way that I don't feel that way with television, I don't feel that way with movies, I don't feel that way with with books, but I do with podcasts and blogging and kind of the Internet. And I, I guess, I hope that doesn't go away. Part of me worries that this medium is for a particular age group. Now that I'm middle-aged, I am now at a point where I, I'm out of touch with what young people, like, there is a group of people who are young people, they are distinct from me, and they are now in a completely different world. And I worry that the world that they live in, doesn't have some of these attributes. I guess maybe it does, maybe Twitch and YouTube still do encourage people to be like, 'Well, I could record myself playing video games; how hard could that possibly be?' But it doesn't seem as open as podcasting and blogging are, and RSS, I guess, is kind of an HTML... like, markup is sort of at the heart of that: the fact that you can just look at the source, and then you can do things with it.

Martin Feld 58:07

That is an amazing summary of what you think, and I like, I like that you've brought openness into it, not just in the technological framing, but from the standpoint you're saying: open to possibilities, that's, that's really what you're saying.

Michael Camilleri 58:22

Right.

Martin Feld 58:22

So I think that is probably a fantastic point to conclude the episode unless there's anything you'd like to say because there was a lovely round-up. Is there anything else that you'd like to add before we stop?

Michael Camilleri 58:35

No, no, we should probably end it there.

Martin Feld 58:39

Well, look, Michael, this has been a thrill, and I want to thank you for sharing your experience and your opinions, uh, on *Really Specific Stories*. It's been fantastic to have you on.

Michael Camilleri 58:48

Thank you very much Martin, pleasure to be here.