

Top Tech Trends for Small Business with Cara Turano

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SPEAKERS

Cara Turano, Halie Morris

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- H** Halie Morris 00:12
Hello, everyone, and welcome back to Everyday Business Solutions. My name is Halie Morris, I'm your podcast coordinator and hosts. Today we have a special guest. Her name is Cara. I'm going to let her introduce herself more and tell you more about what she does before we jump in to our subject for the day. Well,
- C** Cara Turano 00:29
Well, good morning or afternoon, and thanks so much for having me. Yep, my name is Cara Turano. I work for the Technology Association of Oregon. I'm based in Portland and I'm the Chief Operating Officer, I have a background of 15 years in private sector technology, including working with a variety of businesses to build custom solutions. And I also then have five, almost six, years now in tech association work. So I spend time working with technology companies, technology enabled companies, and what we refer to as technology adjacent companies and in the last 15 months have had a lot of opportunity to explore business resources that are great for non-tech companies, as we've automated the entire world and gone digital.
- H** Halie Morris 01:26

It's one quick way to like forward the tech agenda, I guess, is to not give a choice.



Cara Turano 01:35

There is a lot of research about like the nine industries that will really be affected by this and the pandemic, basically forced them to have to start adopting technology sooner.



Halie Morris 01:51

I've noticed that a lot. We're a software company. So for us, it was just "Okay, we have the solutions, let's just everybody go home," but then for our customers, it was a bit of a different story. We had to teach them how to go mobile with the stuff they were already using or we saw an influx of people seeking mobile options when they never had to use them before.



Cara Turano 02:14

Completely, yeah.



Halie Morris 02:17

It's kind of cool. A couple of our customer success stories centered around that, like the VOIP phone systems because obviously if your your employees are locked into a landline at the office, and they're not in the office, like they have to be able to call so a couple of our small businesses locally looked at VOIP or looked at or the CRM or both, and things like that.



Cara Turano 02:42

Yeah, we've seen people at small businesses that, you know, as they've had fewer folks in the office, like, how do you get timesheets completed if you've been doing that by hand? You know, how do you quickly set up an e commerce site? And then I think the one thing that we've been talking about a lot here is, how do you then protect all that information that's now moved online? And I think that even though I never see it on any of the trend lists when I look at what's trending for small businesses, cyber is crucially important, whether you're running an insurance firm, a landscaping company, or a restaurant, like there is information and data being stored and like you have to protect it to keep yourself and your customer safe. So like, that's gonna be my number one trend. I will repeat that probably eight times over the course of this podcast, but cybersecurity is really critical for a small businesses.

H

Halie Morris 03:50

You know, I've heard about that a lot in the personal space. Like you see, I don't know, I've seen an uptake on like, ads for personal methods to protect our data and stuff. But, you're right, I haven't heard about it, unlike any of the trending list, or people talking about or asking questions. But I have heard a lot of like data leaks or companies that sell data, and people are being concerned with that. So it's just as important if not more so in the business sphere. And that should be a big topic of conversation.

C

Cara Turano 04:24

Yeah, 100%. And like, you don't think about it. Our I didn't. But you know, that data is really valuable. And I do some work in some of the rural parts of the state. And like, we are constantly asking farmers and agricultural leaders, "What data are you willing to share?" They're like, "We don't want to share any of our data. Our data is how we, you know, make great products and it's our proprietary information." And so then when you hear that you're like, "Okay, well, then where is it stored? Where are you keeping it if it's proprietary, and how is it being protected?" And I think those are just some questions that, you know, folks don't think are important as a small business, but they can be held for ransom, just like Colonial Pipe, or the food manufacturing processing company that was held hostage from a ransomware perspective earlier this week. It happens to everybody. It's happening to everybody, it will continue happening. And there are some easy, inexpensive steps you can take to fix these things.

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Halie Morris 05:28

And I don't think that stuff is making it- like I haven't heard about that stuff in the news, it doesn't make it to the mainstream media probably as much as it should. Because that's a huge deal. I feel like a smaller business has less bandwidth to handle a situation like that, than a bigger one that has more resources and more funding to come back and figure out how to combat something like that when it happens.

C

Cara Turano 05:50

I mean, a cyber attack ring would generally put about 70% of small businesses out of business. So it's really difficult to come back from.

H

Halie Morris 06:01

Yeah, that's a huge thing. And yeah, I am shocked more people aren't talking about that.

And I guess I'm from marketing perspective, so I think about my niche, but if you are running a small business, that is so important, and especially when you've not been virtual before and now you've embraced it with COVID. And everything was chaotic. I know there was a lot of moving parts. It seemed hard to keep up with prioritizing that safety of your information first, and then working out the rest. That's gonna help people a lot.

C

Cara Turano 06:32

When I think one of the things we're going to talk about is like, how can people make their companies more tech savvy or what does that look like? And where should they invest? And where do they see that return on investment? One thing to always consider is, our fancy terminology is your cyber security posture? What's your cyber security posture? And that's just fancy terminology for how are you protecting yourself, your customers, and your information at your business? And so any tool you implement, you should consider what is the cyber risk associated with this? And how do we then mitigate that. So I think it's important to do simultaneously and not just as an afterthought.

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Halie Morris 07:20

It's one of those things like if you try to adopt all the systems and then retrofit them and make them secure, you're going to probably run into a lot more difficulties than trying to find systems that are secure and fit your business at the same time.

C

Cara Turano 07:36

Exactly. And a lot of things that you might be use to make your business more digitally savvy, tend to come with some security already built in. I can give the example of our association. We're small. I mean, we're seven employees and we don't have an IT staff. So we used a division of MasterCard to do an assessment of our cyber security landscape. And I was like, oh, man, we are going to be on the struggle bus, because we don't, we don't, we don't have any IT support. And we don't pay for a lot of things. But we actually had like an A minus, which was so surprising to me. And it's because the tools that we use are secure. So again, like something that popped into my brain is like, okay, I didn't think about that when we selected these tools. Thank God, they are secure. Like that's a surprise blessing. And like, if we're not thinking about it, and we talk to tech companies all day, every day, is anybody else thinking about it when they're like, what should I use for my accounting software or what should I use for my CRM? So like, that's probably where you all come in to help consult on that. But yeah, how safe are the tools that you're selecting?

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Halie Morris 09:02

I think you might see it pop up more if it comes to employee databases, or, you know, payrolls, because the information is obviously something that employees are very hesitant to volunteer in the first place. So there's a large outreach to protect it. But then like, if you're talking about your client information, and other things in your company ... Is that protected as much as your employee databases or is it as protected as you think it is. That kind of thing.

C

Cara Turano 09:34

Yeah, exactly.

H

Halie Morris 09:37

That could be a large thing. I mean, I can imagine some of our listeners are like, Well, how do I tell like? What questions do I ask to make sure it's secure and safe if I'm talking to the sales rep for the software, whatever?

C

Cara Turano 09:51

You know, I would actually just ask those like very simple questions like what cyber protections are built into your platform for your customers in the event of a breach? You know, is that on us or is that on our provider? And for the most part, it's on the it's on the business. It's not on the provider. You know, what do you recommend in terms of updates and patching. And I think one thing, that can be a little scary; so you implement a new tool. And we've all seen it, like, I upgraded my iPhone this morning. And I'm like, great, what's going to look different. But there's a hesitation when people get used to using a tool the way it looks and feels to then go into the upgrade, but part of the upgrade isn't just features and functionality. It's also the this security component. And so, you know, what does your upgrade path look like? How often does it occur? And then you have to think like, what else is this system touching? I mean, I know that I have a nest at my house and so I don't know how to work my heat and air if I don't use my app. Same thing with my sprinkler system, but those are places that are also on the same Wi Fi as my work computer. And I just have your average at home security. So like, am I, through any of those systems, connecting in to my work data and could I be the source of a breach? So I think that like those are questions to like, what is everything connected to? Is it on a separate network? How do you ensure that your employees know, this is the constant one that's hard, about business email compromised scams? scams? If I work for a company of 20 people, and the CFO says, Oh, I need this, I need you to, you know, email me this

information. It's always like, Okay, sure. And then all sudden, it's like, your screen has gone black. And your computer's been taken over by a hacker. And it's so it's like the human component too. That's, I think, easier to navigate through, because you can do some trainings, but there are a lot of cyber companies that focus on employees of companies that are 10, and less. So they understand that there is a price barrier and, actually, through most of the Small Business Development Centers (SBA or SBDC), which are a federal program, and part of the Small Business Administration, are placing a huge emphasis on cybersecurity. And they have some great classes. I know, I teach them in Oregon. So they have some really great checklists that small businesses can be using pretty regularly to make sure that they can ask the right questions.

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Halie Morris 12:52

Firstly, we actually brought on somebody from our local SBA to talk about some of the things they offer. So it's good to see that, you know, what their offerings for small businesses also ties into the cybersecurity and the technology aspect, because it's huge. It's one of those sides of businesses that has grown in importance, more and more, especially in the last year.

C

Cara Turano 13:15

100%.

H

Halie Morris 13:17

think we're verging on a year and a half. Isn't that crazy, but we're just about there.

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Cara Turano 13:22

We're almost there.

H

Halie Morris 13:23

We're almost there. I know around here it's like weird. I walked in to pick up lunch somewhere and their dividers were down. Nobody was wearing a mask. And I was like, should I be here? But yeah, there's so much concern about it at the like I said, at the personal level, I've seen a lot. Then there's a lot of concern with Okay, your cell phone providers, obviously selling your information. And Apple now has a lot of pop ups every time you open a new app or something like that, like, do you want them to share this information, you can decline it, but that's the cellphone providers sell where you've been

and things like that. So you're right. If I access a lot of work stuff on my phone- I access for design purposes, our phone system, things like that. I do that all on my cell phone. And if I'm hopping on wi-fi's periodically throughout the day, whether it's home or work or a random cafe one, what's secure? Because generally, if you're paying attention to like the ads and other things popping up, and then occasionally like the news report, it seems like nothing's secure.



Cara Turano 14:38

Yeah. And generally, the tools and systems that you're using are secure. It's your people.



Halie Morris 14:47

Yeah, we definitely get those emails that pop up from like the CEO that hey, give me a call or send me a message real quick. I need you to do this or buy these gift cards or whatever.



Cara Turano 14:57

Yeah, we joke all the time that our CEO is constantly sends us emails telling us to send him a Apple gift cards and let him know what the codes are.



Halie Morris 15:09

Yeah. I think every time we get a new hire some people get those emails. And we're like, Here we go again.



Cara Turano 15:19

Ours, we must be doing really well cuz I haven't seen one in like a year.



Halie Morris 15:23

Yeah, I'm trying to think so it's been a couple months since I saw one. But it had been a while since I saw them. And then it popped up. And I was like, Oh, there it is. So they find their ways in. But yeah, you're right, like the people aspect and employees don't know how to be secure. Especially, if you're not a tech based company. Sometimes even if you are, a lot of times you're hiring people without strong backgrounds in it, or people who don't know, the cyber sides. They just go about things like they always would with their personal stuff, they will all gain all over the place. And you know, they're very trusting of random emails that come from the CEO and things like that so...



Cara Turano 16:07

Well, and I've had the opportunity to do some cyber crime training with the FBI. And it doesn't matter who it is, like everything is constantly evolving. And so you can be savvy one year and completely behind on the trends the next one. Because bad guys are always evolving and bad girls. I mean, they're not all guys, the bad people.



Halie Morris 16:34

Yeah, I would agree with that. I work in a software company. And I my generation is considered like, so tech savvy. And I'm like, 1) I grew up on the same toys my grandmother did without technology. And then I was introduced, so not entirely accurate. But I can learn quickly. I was like, but no, Nana, I don't know how to work live TV on Hulu, because I never used that feature. So I was like, I did it the one time but I have no idea what you're talking about. She'll be like, well, this one channel was on there. And I'm just searching and hopes it pops up. I don't know what else to do.



Cara Turano 17:13

That's so funny.



Halie Morris 17:14

Yeah, sometimes you're like really well versed in one area, but not in another area. You know, you have the things that you need to know. And the things that you get to if you have time, and it's there's so much to it.



Cara Turano 17:29

It is a large landscape for sure.



Halie Morris 17:34

And then, you know, for the small businesses, a lot of times you have people of various age demographics and various backgrounds and things like that. So that experience is so diverse across your team, even a small team that training people on it. I'm curious from your side, if you're training people on it. Do you train groups or how do you do that?



Cara Turano 18:00

We do train groups. And so now like the big thing is because obviously we can record so much. And you can create a YouTube pledge playlist and you can do all these things. So now we're like, okay, but if we record this and share it, like, what are we putting out into the world for cybercriminals to know what companies are potentially in the risk? So that's like, the next hurdle is how can you have this evergreen content to teach people these basics because it's the basics, like the building blocks. And so we are trying to figure out how to do password protected cyber training for individuals that's in a learning management system (LMS). And there are some of those, there's great resources online. And there really are like, again, through the SBA, companies that support small business in this journey, this ever evolving journey. But I would say there are lots of groups that do what we do and provide that group training. So our series is like five parts. The first one last week was literally about learning what cybercrime is and how it affects your everyday life.

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Halie Morris 19:26

Now I'm curious. Are you often teaching like all types of employees or are you typically teaching the leaders? Who are you reaching with these groups?

C

Cara Turano 19:37

In this one specifically, it is small business leaders. So, it's the owners for the most part that are there to learn. We have some examples where we work with security folks, so like a Chief Information Security Officer, or a Chief Information Officer or Director of Security. That is more for in like hospitals financial services, universities, but about 50 percent of the work that we do is interacting with small businesses. Because a big part of what we do is look at like how the concept of a digital transformation is affecting everyone, not just the tech industry, but affecting all business. And how can you lean into that digital transformation to remain economically competitive.

H

Halie Morris 20:31

And that's the thing is a lot of it this last year, it's been a lot of survival based. But now some businesses are starting to see like the potential and the possibilities, what they can do, what reach they have, as things shift, again, back to what's considered like the new normal, because obviously, when you go out in public, it might look the same, but some business are taking and learning from this and doing new things they hadn't before. These technology systems aren't just gonna vanish that they adapted.



Cara Turano 21:04

I'm referring to it as the next normal.



Halie Morris 21:06

The next normal. Yeah, there'll be a lot of new normals over time.



Cara Turano 21:12

A lot of new normals.



Halie Morris 21:15

We just embrace it. There's some exciting things to come. Our community is getting excited, because we've got some really cool summer events coming up and people feel a lot more comfortable and safe now that vaccination rates are up.



Cara Turano 21:28

We are definitely seeing the same thing on the west coast.



Halie Morris 21:32

That's great to hear. I like that people feel comfortable. I mean, sometimes people drive me crazy, but I like that our communities feel safe, and they can interact and do stuff again. My big thing was, if we can't get out as individuals, then charity stops, aid to businesses and people, that all slows down, because we're not getting out until you could make it virtual, or you could find contactless ways to manage it. All right. So curious, though, because you say cybersecurity is the top thing. It's the thing we should be really putting at the top. It should be the number one trending thing on all of these lists that we're seeing. What is the next thing that you would say is like a big trending topic within the tech side of small businesses?



Cara Turano 22:29

I think that we've heard a lot about artificial intelligence, and machine learning, and they sound like big, scary terms. They're really not, but what I'm seeing is that's really more of like the automation of business, and using some tools that can help you move your business forward without having to invest in people. So like, for instance, there's I mean, I

think you all do some CRM work. And there are some AI tools built into CRM to help you figure out who is going to be your most likely convertible customer. That seems like a whole lot better of a way to approach business than the spray and pray, to use a really terrible gun analogy. But yeah, it's I think that's really interesting. I'm going to talk some from our perspective as a small business. We've installed an AI chat bot, on our website. Because we weren't in the office, and the calls that we were getting for help to register for an event, or sign up to be a member were not all being answered. And so we installed a chat bot, which has been really interesting. And I think that we'll see other businesses do that. I think about the streamlining of some of the data entry, the streamlining of some of like the really manual processes. One thing that we've done, and this sounds so silly, but it is a step forward. It now takes us probably six weeks to process a check over the course of people having to go in, having to get the right signatures, and then somebody sending out the mail, and that is done a certain way because it's a general accounting practice. That's what has to happen. So we've shifted as many as we can, where there's no additional charge to paying online. We've also allowed folks to pay us online for the first time, understanding that there is a fee and just kind of navigating around that. I think that is another way like I think of timesheet automation and what that looks like for restaurants how you can do that more touchless, I think that you're going to see AI and automation really focus on what can be touchless processes, as we try to figure out what that next normal looks like in terms of, are we in person? Are we not in person? I think that all the all the rage is, when are we getting 5G? And I think that in some parts of the country, and different parts of every state, there's this fear that 5G is the enemy, but it's actually going to allow you to use more robust technology. I don't know- I've seen some things from a small business standpoint about an augmented or virtual reality experience. I don't personally see that for a lot of small businesses, but I think it is a possibility. I think what's really interesting, and that I am going to be a super pusher of is more influencer marketing. And you're like, how is that a tech trend? Well, it's like the blogging or YouTube channel, or really investing in your Instagram account and then with that more social media advertising, I had the opportunity to interview a small manufacturer here in Oregon, maybe 175 employees, and they manufacture gourmet fruit. So it's really for folks that make pies. The recipes are actually delicious and they did this. They invested in influencer marketing, set up Instagram account, have been doing blogs have a recipe page, and this is a company that's 75 years old. So the investment was a little bit different last year in a social media expert, but like those are trends that small businesses are going to have to continue following. I can speak to the social media advertising. We've really worked on some targeted outreach that we have done through LinkedIn and we've seen some good traction with it. It's not cost prohibitive. I mean, I think you can start a LinkedIn campaign at \$100. Like that's the minimum that you can go with and we've been able to convert some members that way. So \$100 investment for something that's considered a tech tool is not bad.

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Halie Morris 27:39

Yeah, that was one of the questions, our employees had. It tied into that, but they said, what are some of your tips for the smaller businesses to kind of stand out and get noticed amongst all of the noise of bigger businesses with such small budgets, because obviously, they can run these campaigns, and they can be present on social media, but they can't spend millions of dollars getting their name as far as Coca Cola or McDonald's goes.

C

Cara Turano 28:05

I think that like there's a lot to be said for focus. I worry that there's too much trying to imitate this big brands and that's not realistic, because they just have size, scale, and resources that you just can't compare. So again, like I can use us as a frame of reference, like we thought, three years ago, okay, well, we need a Facebook page for all of the cities where we have an office, and we need an Instagram account. And we need an overall Facebook page. And we need four separate Twitter's. And what we realized is they weren't really doing anything. There was too much to engage. There was too many places for us to create content. So we streamlined all those down. We have- no I think we even got rid of Instagram. I think we've just got Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. And then we started looking at well, we have a platform for our event registration that allows you to create individual links to share per event on all three of those platforms. So now we're in this iteration where it's like, Okay, well, does that actually drive any attendance or clicks? And I think in the four weeks that we've been trying it, we've had one person register via Facebook. So now it's allowing us to rethink our strategy, because why are we paying to boost these things when it's not, it's not delivering any results. And so some of it is, like some trial and error, but I think a lot of the tools that you have, find somebody who's savvy and understands them and knows how to make the data parts work, because I think you can get a lot of information with very minimal investment. And then like as you learn those things like refine, what's our best approach? Where can we have the largest impact, the best voice and create that brand story. And it's not going to be the same for everybody. Like for us, we've seen that it is all LinkedIn. And so that's where we've decided to focus our efforts. And we do see a lot of traction from a revenue standpoint by being single threaded in our LinkedIn, influencer marketing, and our LinkedIn social media advertising.

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Halie Morris 30:37

Yeah, I think that we've noticed an uptick in LinkedIn recently for our engagement. And then Facebook's kind of been a long standing friend, when it comes to it. We've been pretty consistent, though the Facebook algorithm is starting to try to push businesses down further, and then we're starting to see an uptick on Instagram for some of our stuff,

too. But you're right, like, you're not gonna reach everybody. Not everybody's your customer. So being intentional and then targeting in small amounts your experimental pushes, and seeing what works so much more effective than just trying to cast a wide net and trying everything at once. And then you don't know what's going on.

C Cara Turano 31:21

And like LinkedIn has some really great classes to talk you through and teach you how to do this. And then we've started using some Google advertising and some Google Data Studio to really like visualize what the impact is. And I think that what is compelling about some of these tools for a small business is you don't have to necessarily invest a huge amount of money, because you're not purchasing something that's got a recurring licensing fee. Because that can get expensive. Like if you're doing all all marketing automation through a tool like that, that costs money. And so we've seen that using the G-Suite is helpful. Again, like caveat, there are some technical components that can be difficult. So like your investment may be in a person, and less in a in a tool. So just some trade offs.

H Halie Morris 32:19

But the nice thing is, it's usually like one or two people that are dedicated to it, versus having to train your entire team on how to use it, and what to look for, and things like that. Exactly. And I get to learn text, or while like social media side, and I find it very fascinating. And that, as far as technology that's an ever evolving world to because what works now might not work in a month. And so it's just bakley Yeah. But once you find your audience and you can identify with your audience, it gets a little easier to watch what trends they're following, and where they're engaging, and trying to be present in those conversations. And on those platforms.

C Cara Turano 33:02

That manufacturer that I mentioned, they'd never really done direct like B to C outreach like that. And because I've been following them for about six months, like I've seen their followers go up. So they've made an effort. And they've been really consistent. And I think that's, that's it like, you have to figure out what that message is, you're going to get out there and create your niche and just keep repeating it.

H Halie Morris 33:31

That's awesome. It's really cool to see like the the growth too, because it can be a little

slow at first. But once you start to start to find your groove, so to speak, it goes pretty far. Yeah, it's pretty amazing. But I know swinging back around you were talking about the AI previously, and just kind of want to kind of come back to that topic and think a little bit further. because like you said, it's a hugely intimidating thing. People think of AI as you know, like those humanoid robots from the future, or things like that. It's they think, super, super advanced. But the truth is, we have a lot of AI already. And I know we booked this appointment through AI. Yeah, because we use calendly and now has automated. Mm hmm. And then a lot of your software systems, like you said, have it built in, because its target of software is not just to take things online, or to take things virtual, it's also to streamline processes and let people work on people really to task and less on the nitty gritty, at least that's what we do as a software company. We try to take out some of that manual grunt work and make everything a lot more efficient.



Cara Turano 34:46

Yeah, and I mean, I think like that's, that's just it like if you have AI built in to your CRM, then that is going to directly influence where you spend advertising dollars. Because if you know, you have a likely customer that will purchase, if you talk push them a little farther, like that's who you target. And so like, it's, I sometimes think of the artificial intelligence component as like, how do you create a data driven business? And it's, it's, again, my obsession for me personally in our world, like, where does where do you members come from? Like, these are people that pay I once a year to be a part of what we're doing. And so like, if I could figure that out, I would spend a whole heck of a lot more time there. And if those if that's the mean streets of Twitter, then I need to be on Twitter more, but I don't think it is. And so like being able to use the AI built into the tools and figure that out, is super awesome. If you use it, if you don't use it, and you continue making business decisions, then like what's the point of implementing this?



Halie Morris 35:59

I've noticed too, that a reoccurring thing with our customers, and that we're seeing as we're starting to go back to in person trade shows is a lot more people are seeking to validate their decisions with data, they want that data driven business. And it's just learning how to get it. How do the software solution stuff, the question we get? How do our solutions actually provide the data to make what they're doing or direct what they're doing in a more efficient way?



Cara Turano 36:27

I think that that's the question you have to ask the provider of whatever tool you're

buying, like, if it's a if it's an off the shelf product, like, ask about the reporting. And, you know, ask, do you get different levels of reporting if you pay different things. So that's one thing we found to like some of the reporting that you can get out of a system comes with an enterprise license, and some of it doesn't. And so like, then you have to ask yourself, what is it that you're trying to get the data to prove? Or what question Are you trying to answer with the data. And then again, we've, we've thrown a lot of our data into Google Data Studio and had somebody run a little code through to say, hey, like, I can tell you now and I cannot a year ago, we dump the data from our event management registration system, into Google Data Studio. And I can tell you what our most popular events of last year were, and I can tell you what our most popular events are year to date, in 2021, I can tell you what time of day works better for people based on when they're signing up, I can tell you the ethnic and gender diversity of our attendees, I can give you a compilation of all of our survey feedback, or I can break it out by month, or I can break it out by program area. And so like, that is data that we get in one of our systems, that we plug into a Google tool. And it's basically like how we're running our KPIs. And the cost for our event platform we pay for, and it's probably \$1,000 a year. But then the Google Data Studio is just somebody's time. And he's really providing us with some interesting information. And then we have other tools where there is reporting functionality. And so I think it's important to ask, like, what is the reporting functionality look like? And then you as a business have to answer like, are those reports going to prove? Or show us things that are going to actually be relevant to making business decisions?

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Halie Morris 38:37

I think you kind of pointed something out indirectly with talking about using the Google Data studios and things like that as reading the data, like, How easy is it for you to read the data? And like you said, what data are you getting is actually relevant, because some, some businesses need a lot for a lot of different purposes. And they have different people who take and use then read that data. But if you're a small business, you have a handful of people, and you might not need all the different levels, and you might not have the time to sort through it. So how are you going to read it? What are you actually looking for? That's a huge thing, because if they have all this reporting, but you can't read it, you're not gonna be able to use that data at the end of the day. It does nothing for you.

C

Cara Turano 39:20

Yeah. Or if it's just a big CSV file, then it's like, Okay, great. Like what do I get out of?

H

Halie Morris 39:29

Yeah, readability. is so important. tTat is a popular thing for us is asking about our reporting. How does our reporting work? What do we report on? Usually it's, it's that what kind of reports can they pull but asking, how is how are the charts like given to you What are you giving charts? Are you just given random strings of data like, how are those reports polled, and you format them in different ways.

C

Cara Turano 39:56

And we talk about it as data analytics and strategically So how do you analyze the data to make those strategic business decisions? Because you are so correct, like small businesses do not have unlimited resources and funds. And when I say resources, I also mean time that people spend doing stuff. So like, back to our earlier point, like, if you're gonna invest in, you know, marketing influencers and a social media strategy, then you have to know what you're trying to achieve out of that. And you have to be willing to make pivots if you don't hit those goals, you know. And that's why I think a lot of the benefits that you see long term come from like really small, incremental changes. And then you know, something else, as I say that, like you make a small incremental change, and you get one tool. So then like, maybe you want to do an additional tool, like a question I wish I had asked. It's like, how do these integrate together? And is there a way to make that happen? because not everything has Zapier and some some companies have API's that are they don't have an API that can be embedded somewhere else? Like, I think that's really critical, because like, we live in a world of some siloed data systems, and it's challenging. And so like, how do you eliminate that or avoid that? I think that's a really astute question to ask, too.

H

Halie Morris 41:28

Oh, that's something we've noticed too, is we are constantly pushing new integrations, exploring new integrations, we make sure all of our products integrate together. Because sometimes, like if you just have the products, but they don't talk to each other, then how and then on the flip side, if you have all these different systems, who's using them how many people have to learn various things? Sometimes an integration can put one system or access to one system into another system if it's done. Mainly, that's one thing that we seek to do with our power dialers when it integrates with our CRM, you can just go into the CRM and access everything there versus having to pull up all this stuff. And absolutely. So there's so much to consider with, with the integration side to do it is what are you using now? If you get the system where where might you be in a couple months or a year? And what would you need, then if you are to grow? There's a lot of forethought that needs to come into that as well. Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's something too, like, you know, we talked about employee databases and having some form of an hrs or some

component from one hrs with a LMS system, for example, those are becoming more popular with more more remote employees, employees are staying remote. And sometimes the odd hands on presentation or whatever, doesn't always cut it, you want more engaging, or you have to deliver a training. Once every year or so like people are adopting ways to do that through systems, but then they have to be able to talk to the employee database so that the supervisor can pull it up or payroll, because that might be a separate system entirely to ask. It's a lot of interesting stuff. And we've got to do some of that too. But kind of with that, the one thing with the data and stuff that I've noticed from our team, because we are a smaller company as well, is that when our marketing team is pulling data and doing all of this stuff, my boss pulls a lot of great reports. And then we go to a marketing meeting, and we've got our upper management in there as well is if they see all that data, and they don't see just why it's relevant to them, it could be very overwhelming, and you can't really communicate what you're going to communicating. So we might know that, based on this data, we should go this route. But if we can't communicate that, it comes back to how you read the data, how you present the data, because sometimes you have to share it with other team members or team leaders and things like that. Are you able to do that? Can you can you pull that in a cohesive way? And you have a lot of times it's nice little pie chart and stuff like that. Yeah, like they don't care about all the nuances. If you're talking about how we've improved on social media and where we're going to be directing our ad efforts and where we'd like to pull the budget for. They just want to see the overall stuff. They don't want to see all the little nitty gritty, like click throughs and stuff like that. And so they might ask for it, but they don't want to see it.



Cara Turano 44:36

And then it goes back to like what are you trying to achieve? Like, yeah, we get 100,000 impressions a month, but like, What does those impressions do? This is, I don't know, but we're trying to figure that out.



Halie Morris 44:47

That's um, I went to a podcast marketing conference last year, and I can't remember who put it on off the top my head right now but that was one of the big presentations that they did as affinity for His awareness and the impressions are like awareness where you're seeing and how many times you've left an impression, right. But that doesn't always convert to sexual interactions or sales or things like that, that benefit your business. And so affinity is like that brand loyalty and the actual understanding and communication. And that if you have a smaller group, that you develop a stronger relationship, it's a lot more impactful than that just spreads out touches a lot of people. And they don't do anything like a giant billboard sign, or something like that might not be the best way for

your business. Because the scene, it might not be enough for people to come back around to you later. Exactly. So that's one of the one of the things you kind of have to learn because it's different for every business. But yeah, and kind of going off of that. Well, I guess transitioning to the next that is, what are some of the other things we're seeing, as far as trends are? What major things are people talking about right now in the small business space?

C

Cara Turano 46:09

I mean, is small business going to come back? Yes. 100%. I think there's this concept around a digital transformation, what that looks like, but also like, what the investment in that is going to be and how much you should invest to make these changes now versus waiting. Um, I don't know that I fully have an answer for that or a thought. But you know, you talked about it, like, if we're working remote forever. Does every small business have the ability to support staff at home? You know, and does that then become a challenge for equity? Like do people have access to the same levels of systems and can their computers even do that? Do they have the right bandwidth? And so I think that some of the trends that we're talking about, that aren't as effective, that don't affect big companies as much like Microsoft can send everybody home indefinitely for till the end of time with the latest and greatest, like hardware and software. But is that really the case for small business? And like, what is the onus on them? And are they going to be able to compete in the marketplace for employees that they may want in person versus online? So just a couple of things like be thinking about as a small business owner, like, it's not specifically a tech trend, but tech is driving it, like, Where are your people going to be based? And what is that going to look like every day?

H

Halie Morris 47:54

Well, one thing I noticed, because I used to hire for a call center, we had a couple team members that hired for remote workers, as well as that we always tested their internet speeds. And there was a way to do that. I didn't know the ins and outs of it, but they would be able to test it. And they would have to either speeds up to a certain level or otherwise they would be able to do the job. And it begs the question, then that could have been a really great employee, and sometimes they're just in a spotty area, or they just can't personally afford it because they might be unemployed, or they need a little extra money. That's why they're seeking the part time job, but they can't afford the more expensive faster internet thing. Then are you disqualifying that person because you're forcing them to provide faster internet speed to accommodate your systems that you use? And that is one thing you know, bigger businesses, they can recruit further they can either just just regard those applicants and go seek somebody else. Or sometimes like their big company

like Microsoft, they can pay back basically expensive the more expensive internet or and you know, what's the equality if somebody has is paying for a nicer internet and somebody is not you're helping them accommodate that? Well, then the compensations not quite there across the board because somebody else is paying for their own internet while somebody is not, right. There's so many questions with that remote workup, definitely opens up a can of worms, doesn't it?



Cara Turano 49:29

Yeah, totally, and that's a trend.



Halie Morris 49:33

And that was one of the things too, like when we would be hiring and they would be measuring the internet speed like you obviously have to make sure it's there but I was like what are they don't have it because the location or something and they just can't get this job. That's not something they can really affect right now. How's that fair?



Cara Turano 49:50

Oh and I think the competition to hire folks is changing and can small business afford that? Do they need to our small business owners going to be forced to think about things like equity or giving partial ownership stakes? And I don't know the answer to these questions, I'm just thinking that, you know, I have read that it is going to be a job seekers market for the next 12 to 48 months, and employers are going to have to figure out how to navigate that.



Halie Morris 50:26

I've definitely heard locally that the the applicant pool is extremely dry, and you have like, all of these businesses big and little fighting for the same applicants. And they just been up there, you know. So it is, it's crazy. And it's in technologies. Also another way you reach them, what platforms are you reaching them on? Somebody asked me the other day about monster and I was like most people are in Indeed, indeed is a nice free platform. It's easy to access. I was like, but people are on LinkedIn, and Facebook. And you know, sometimes you've seen ads for a company hiring on Instagram. So like, companies are using the same methods that they do to sell product or to sell their services to learn applicants now, so absolutely. But with coming back around to just the technology in general, there's so much that is out there. And there's so much that is available to small businesses, whatever employees said, With so many providers out there tailored

specifically to small businesses, like we mentioned before, how should a small business start to evaluate and identify what technology is best suited for them? I mean, it's such a big question, but

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Cara Turano 51:45

it's a big question. Definitely. You know, I always go back, like, What are you trying to achieve? And like, what is the tool that's gonna get you there? And then I think you and I talked about this a little bit before we started recording, like, is the tool even affordable? And is it going to do what it says it's going to do? So I think one, one thing that I've seen actually recently is like, Oh, well, here's the fabulous sales demo. And then you get it, you're like, Ah, this is not quite what I saw. So like, I think there's a lot of due diligence on a, on a business owners plate to like, really, truly say, Okay, what are we trying to achieve? Like no tool is going to solve that completely. So do the evaluation. A lot with like, the licensing model is how many people are going to be using it. So like, if it's all number of folks, like, they should probably be involved in that process. And that can get painful. But like, I've heard of numerous situations where a tool is purchased by executive leadership that doesn't actually have to use it, and you're making this smiley face because I know you've heard this too. And then the folks on the ground, they're using it or like this has nothing to do with our business processes, or it doesn't relate or I'm trying to fit a round peg into a square hole. And it doesn't work. And so I think that the input of your team is pretty critical. And then just like realistically, what that tool is going to do in terms of, of time saving or increased sales. You know, I, we implemented a tool this year from a prospecting standpoint, because we did not have anybody in like a sales role. And it's expensive. But the reality is, like, if I, if we convert to new customers, then we've paid for it for the year. And so like, and like, but we did that math, like that was a very calculated, um, like how we thought about it. And then, you know, I think I said it before, but I'll repeat it like, is, is something you're evaluating supposed to be part of a larger process? And if it is, do those tools work well together? And even within one product set, if it's grown by acquisition and things have been bolted together? Like is it really the experience you're looking for? So I think there's a lot to evaluate. But if it is going to support your mission, and help you achieve a revenue goal, which is what I assume most businesses are trying to do, then you should go through a pretty extensive evaluation process. One thing that I will say that I have really enjoyed is working with companies that have a customer success team. Because they then are there to work with you so that when it's time to upgrade or add the next plugin like you are willing to do that, but Like it also affords you an opportunity to really like work with somebody that understands the tool. Well.

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Halie Morris 55:07

That's one thing I always I love to brag about our customer support team, because we have account managers and our support team that takes care of after the onboarding process. And like, they're all stars, they know those systems Better Than Anyone Else, except maybe the developers. And that ability to help walk people through at any point. And ownership of the system is sometimes the big difference between it reaching your goals, not reaching your goals, but kind of going along with that one of our team members, our supervisor for our customer support team actually said, How can businesses, business owners implementing changes tech tech technology support their decision confidently to employees and supervisors who are reluctant to to change their current processes or adopt new things. And we kind of tried to touch on that, but I kind of want to delve in deeper.

C

Cara Turano 56:02

One thing that I've seen that's really effective is like a customer reference, like if somebody is willing to provide a reference customer that will talk to you. I know when we do that, for several of the tools that we use, and part of why we do it is we're considered like innovative in our association space. And so we want other associations to understand like our digital transformation, so that they can do something similar for us. And what's been really effective is like, I don't just go and say, Yeah, they're great. We love working with them, like I bring the people on my team that actually have to use the tool every day. And we're very honest, like, here's what's hard. Here's what works really well, here's what we're achieving. And I think that asking that, like, what, where, where is there an opportunity for improvement, or what has been like the biggest challenge that you've encountered? Like, if you can have that level of vulnerability, and hear that from somebody that's actually using it. Like, again, it's that really thoughtful process of is this the right tool for us. And if you ask for a reference customer, and a company is not willing to give you one or two, then I would highly consider using somebody else.

H

Halie Morris 57:15

And that's something that I don't think people have thought of is, besides just going to the review pages and combing through being able to talk to somebody and ask the questions that are relevant to your company and your people. Because ultimately, those are the ones that we'll be using the system. And it's like you said, a lot of a lot of people see a really great system, it looks really shiny, they see all the opportunity. But if the team doesn't get a board, you're never you're never going to reach it because they're not going they're not intentionally probably going to sabotage it. But you do need their their work to get there. So



Cara Turano 57:53

agreed. 100%. And I think that that's, I don't know, I'm a big fan of supervisors needing to learn some of the tools or at least understanding like, the process that goes into them. I think we all have a blind spot for how long things take to accomplish. Like understanding like, Okay, so this tool is going to provide x, how once we get good at using it, how much time does it actually take, and if the staff time to do it is the same as it was as an as a non automated process? Like, do you really need to be using that tool, like it should provide some sort of benefit. And I know that like that's been a part of what I spend a lot of time doing this year is like understanding how our tools work, and how much time it takes people to do stuff in them.



Halie Morris 58:51

Well, that's some things that we get asked a lot that our team member mentioned, is the training inflammation implementation time to get the system integrated into your company to get your teams comfortable with it, and then just actually measuring the efficiency of Okay, after implementing it. Well, and where do you measure your ROI? Like, where do you start to see that kicked in? How do you start to calculate this? And you kind of mentioned it before, when you talked about looking at how many customers? Do you need to sign up using this system to get it to pay for itself? And you mentioned two or Okay, so, you know, how many do you bring on in a year with your current processes? And what are you looking to like? Are you looking to improve that with the new system? Or are you looking to free up time to do other things? like where is that ROI actually at and how do you you calculate it? Yeah, especially fast question and it's gonna be a question business. Yeah.



Cara Turano 59:56

That's such a good question. Because like we've never really thought about like prospecting before, like, because any company can join us. And so like, we really do have a very wide market. And you know, what we're seeing is like, gosh, now that we've got some of this other data and other tools, we may actually have been able to build a prospect list without investing in something. And that's a good, that's a good learning experience for everybody.



Halie Morris 1:00:26

Yeah, and it's one thing to one of the big things coming into technology and seeing it is just, okay, well, I don't know if it's worth my value and things like that. And there's always

that where to start point. But like you said, you started with data, just understanding what you had first. And then understanding what the systems that you're considering are, can go a long way and starting to figure out what your end goals are and how to get there. And then what can help you get there. And sometimes, like you said, it might be just changing your current processes and not introducing something new.

C

Cara Turano 1:01:04

And I realized that like taking the time to look at the data in involves time, like, and like, you have to commit to that. And so I'm a big fan of like, plan the work and work the plan. It's like, again, like what are you trying to achieve? And what are the things you need to do to get there and like, we can't just try stuff anecdotally anymore, like we have enough information, if we're willing to extract it and any of your processes, now, you may be able to draw some conclusions out of them. So okay, like, track that for 90 days. And, like, use that to make a thoughtful decision. Like we all have, again, limited time limited resources, limited funding, like don't just make decisions in a vacuum, like use the information you have. And if all that you have right now is anecdotal. That's okay. So like, see whether it proves itself out? And if it doesn't, then like you either invest in something or you haven't figured out how to maximize your investment?

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Halie Morris 1:02:05

Like you said, time is the biggest commitment I hear a lot of times like, I don't have time for that. I don't have time for that. And my flip side would be like, as a business owner, do you have time to not do it? Or do you have like the finances and ability to like, throw away some opportunity or to continue working in an efficient manner. If you are like, the big thing with a lot of like the adopting technology or the using data to actually know what makes sense for your business as far as your efforts and your processes and stuff like that, is that other companies are already doing it. And you're competing in the same space as them. There are they know, somebody out there that you're competing against, or many, or maybe all of them already know, where the target market is where people are coming from, because they're looking at the data, and they're watching it. So you really don't have time, a lot of times to skimp and to drag your feet on doing it.

C

Cara Turano 1:03:06

Yeah. But I'm like you're saying, also think about like highest and best use of time? Like if, if you're trying to grow revenue, or increase efficiency? Like those should be priorities? And you have to figure out how to make them a priority. Does that make sense? Like, yeah, I needed yesterday, somebody asked me, How much do you spend per person per month

on? Like, that's a really good question. I don't know. So I went to our accountant. And I was like, Can you pull this for me? And she said, Yeah, it'll take me about five hours. I'm like, Yeah, I don't need five hours worth of your work for this. I need like, the big system. So don't worry about like our domain names. I was like, I just want to get a rough estimate, started in 15. Had she not told me how long it was going to take her, I would have, she would have just done it. And like that would have not been the highest value time for her. So like, I often think like, driving your mission forward, is the highest and best use of your time. So that means you research 15 different tools to arrive at one that is going to improve your business year over year after an initial investment. Like that's probably highest and best use of time.

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Halie Morris 1:04:35

You mentioned that before with just really understanding your priorities and what's important and what data you actually need versus just pulling it all. So yeah, exactly. Yeah, it makes sense. So I know one of our one of our team just when it comes to technology in general. There's the idea that has been around for a while that small businesses are already foot, like always floating in the stone age when it comes to technology, that they're really behind. And that's not always been a problem. Like sometimes it just doesn't make sense to jump on the bandwagon when it comes to some of the bigger technology shifts, because it's not where your business is that but after this year, do you feel that that's completely true anymore?

C

Cara Turano 1:05:25

Um, I think it's unfair to say small business is behind. I disagree with that. I think that we have all had to do way more online than we ever thought we would. And I don't see that going backwards. I think this moment in time has pushed us forward, where companies have to sort of think about that strategy. Things that used to be like AI tools used to be super cost prohibitive. And now they're not, like, small and we talk a lot about like automation and outsourcing. And it's like, well, then I'm, I'm firing people to pay for tools. And I don't know that that's the reality either, like, you're going to re train a workforce to do different things. So I don't know that we will see the rush. I think we'll see a small steady drip from small business. And I think it will depend like what business sector you're in. Like, I think about restaurants and how hard it's been for them, and how there's such an expense associated with doordash. And, and grubhub. And those deliveries that both consumers and restaurants are paying. And I had the opportunity to see an app here that was developed that is hyper localized, where you like a company in a small a restaurant that's not a big chain, can afford to use them, because they want people supporting they want people in their community supporting their community restaurants. And so like, I

think you'll start to see tech, maybe perhaps become a little bit more democratized for the smaller companies. And I think there are actually some really good businesses that support small business like you all are wanting. And like I often say that it is small businesses supporting small businesses that you will see the change come from, like I've worked in, in companies, where we service really big businesses, and so like, we would not be the right organization for a small and medium business to work with. Like find people that intimately understand that, because the changes are going to be nuanced, they're going to be a little slower. And they're going to look a little different. But I don't think that small businesses in the Stone Age.

H

Halie Morris 1:08:01

It's good to hear though, because I mean, obviously from I think the consumer standpoint, shopping local and small business is I want to say trending again, like I see a lot of stuff, people are starting to develop their own small businesses out of COVID. And things are shifting, and there's a lot more appreciation for the struggles that they've had to face. But you know that this technology looks a bit different because it is catered to a different business unit, there's their smaller size. So it's just cool to hear that perspective. And that was one of the things that one of the, I would say, misconceptions that people often hear or that, you know, if you're an employee looking up more solutions to handle a problem internally, like, we looked at hrs, and it just sometimes feels like, oh, like we can't afford these big systems. Are we going to get the same, you know, use and everything. And it took a little digging to find the smaller businesses that were catering to ones like us.

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Cara Turano 1:09:06

Yeah, I mean, I'll give my example is we did a website redo, which was a big capital investment for us that we had already planned pre COVID. And one thing so like as a as an organization, I represent 483 companies around the state. So I'm responsible for 483 members. And it's like working for 483 bosses. We do things like share their events and publish their press releases. And it was like I was a bottleneck. My co workers were bottlenecks because someone would reach out say, Hey, can you get this published? So when we redid our website, and this was all it was like, we're like, how do we get out of the way of having to do that? So we created by using a small business partner who works with small businesses. places on our website that integrate with our, our event calendar that integrate with our social media feeds. So members can do that themselves. So just by automating that process, we've probably saved ourselves hundreds of hours a year. And like, it's then impacted our retention of our members, because it's easier for them to have those self serve options. And so like, I wouldn't have thought about that as part of a digital transformation last year, but it's definitely proven itself as a way to grow and retain

members, which are our main source of business. So like, and I've saved people a ton of time, so that they can do other things like review all the data from the tools that we implemented, and like, then figure out the next thing. So we think you can look at it that way. We did it to save time, we had no idea that it would result in a revenue change.

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Halie Morris 1:11:02

And that's, and that's one of those little nuance things that you mentioned. Like, it wasn't a huge thing on your radar. You, you went through with it. And it, like revolutionized the user experience on both sides of your website.

C

Cara Turano 1:11:15

I mean, automate a couple of processes this year, be the restaurant that ditches menus in favor of a QR code. And have the honor, I mean, like, these things are, we take them for granted. But they are steps in an overall digital transformation for a business.

H

Halie Morris 1:11:33

And the ninth day, I think about being a small business versus a big business, some of these big businesses are expected to put out the innovation or to drive them. And so when you like apple, it'll be it'll be doing something but the rest of the world hasn't caught up. So like the user struggles, because they don't have all the supporting elements. So by the time you're it gets to you and you're the restaurant use a QR codes, while people are used to it, they're going to use to attend the more restaurants that have access to those. It's built into the phone cameras now. So like the adoption across the board, I want to say the learning curve of just the public has to be a little lower like it's already an introduced idea somewhere. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. All right. Well, I am going to ask one last question from one of our employees. And one of our players, Joe said, What would you say are the top five most important or most interesting technology solutions available to small businesses?

C

Cara Turano 1:12:41

There's a time app, one that I think is interesting, but I cannot think of it off the top of my head. And I wish I could, for the last year like automate your timesheet check ins. And I think it's like, totally fascinating. Because you don't think about that as being like a toy you need. But it is. I think that's really, really, really interesting. I think and this is, again, like within that cyber realm, not super trendy, but just some kind of multi factor authentication from a signing standpoint, whether that's for your customer, or your employees, like, I think

that's super critical. Number three, I think there is opportunities for website enhancements. And I don't know that anyone would say that that is a trend. But I'm speaking from our experience and what we've seen and how much that's changed our business, literally, just by letting people pay online, which we had never done before. That's game changing for a small business. I think anything that you can incorporate whether it's like that's a time saving tool, so a calendly, or a virtual assistant, or a chatbot. Like what's great about the chat bots is those are your FA cues as your frequently asked questions. So like, Great timesavers there's a company based out of Portland, also with an office in Kansas City. So there's your Midwest component called Ruby, and they do virtual receptionists for small businesses. And I think that's super cool. So then my fifth one was my fifth one. Um, I'm going with it. I'm going with the Google Data Studio, like yeah, you need somebody with some chops, but like, you can take any information you have even if you're storing it on a spreadsheet and create some really cool graphics so like those would be my top five hitless?

H

Halie Morris 1:14:41

Oh, they're awesome. It's exciting. We use the chat bots now with our systems and it helps you because you reach another demographic of customer. The ones who like to do it themselves, like to read up and learn it themselves. They don't want somebody else to tell them. You reach those people to ask, as well as you know, cutting back on the amount of people that have to call in, wait until your hours of operation or you know, you have to have available reps to attend to them. It helps so much like it's so cool to see. And then there's like levels of chatbots, too, I think as far as what kind of ask and q&a is and how much information you can put in and how they direct people. So

C

Cara Turano 1:15:24

yeah, absolutely.

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Halie Morris 1:15:26

I'm excited. I'm excited, I think for all of them, but just to see kind of what stuff starts to really take root and where businesses start to go with all of these resources and things in their market. So

C

Cara Turano 1:15:39

Me too.



Halie Morris 1:15:40

Alright, well, I want to say thank you, Cara, for joining us. And thank you everybody else for tuning in. Thank you.