

# 083-creating-your-own-productivity-tools-productivitycast

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tools, productivity, system, notebook, create, planner, important, paper, circa, page, digital, build, called, zapier, talking, understand, workflows, people, analog, calendar

## SPEAKERS

Art Gelwicks, Voiceover Artist, Raymond Sidney-Smith, Francis Wade, Augusto Pinaud



Voiceover Artist 00:00

Are you ready to manage your work and personal world better to live a fulfilling productive life? Then you've come to the right place, productivity cast, the weekly show about all things productivity. Here are your hosts, Ray Sidney-Smith and a gousto been out with Francis Wade and art gal Wix.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:17

Welcome back, everybody to ProductivityCast the weekly show about all things personal productivity. I'm Ray Sidney-Smith.



Augusto Pinaud 00:22

I'm Augusto Pinaud.



Francis Wade 00:23

I'm Francis Wade.



Art Gelwicks 00:24

I'm Art Gelwicks.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:25

Welcome, gentlemen, welcome one and all who are listening to us today, what we're going to do is we're going to have a conversation on this episode about the topic of creating your own productivity tools. And the the topic came about from considering the idea that today with the proliferation of so many different ways in which you can create your own X or Y, whether that be in the analog world, to creating things in the digital space. We now have all of these tools at our fingertips, and I will wanted us to talk about the the wide range of these services and tools available to us, for us to make our own tools. And I think maybe some of the principles first would be the underpinning for the conversation, and then making our way into some of the analog and then digital aspects of available resources to create your own tools. So let's let's start at the, at the kind of foundational level, what are the fundamental elements that you want in a productivity tool? And I'm going to I'm gonna pick on gousto with these two, how about you? How about you start us off with what are what are what's maybe, you know, two or three things that you think are absolutely important to have in any productivity tool that you would create, whether that be analog paper or digital



Augusto Pinaud 01:53

good isn't an interesting discussion, and you and I have discussed this offline and I believe there is. One of the issues you find on all these things is what? Some people grow up what I call the basics of productivity. They are not present for most people, there are newer, younger people who come into the need for productivity. Begin discovering devices that didn't have what I call the basics. So the task then notes, the calendar and the context. You know, if you go back in time, you know, when paper was a big thing and digital organizers were not any digital organizer you bought in paper had those four things and I still believe they are the basic four things, you know, you need to have a place to have your task. You need to have a place to have your notes a place to have your calendar and a place to have your context. And what happened with the evolution of the smartphone is data Took the prominent front place and then went someplace in the back. And people simply came to devices that didn't have it. And what happened now is as they need or they are in the need to get more productive, or discovering, okay, what I need to do when they come in and are recreating the wheel instead of making the wheel, in many cases a little bit more efficient. I

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Art Gelwicks 03:25

definitely agree with a gousto on this. I think one of the parallels to this if you want to use an analogy, it's kind of like getting a driver's license. Before you get your driver's license, you're looking at cars, these are neat cars, you want to go drive. Imagine if you just went ahead and jumped in one and drove off something bad is very likely to happen. You need to go through the process of learning the basic steps, getting the mechanics down, getting comfortable with it before you can go through and jump in a car and drive away. Now take it to the next step. Now you want to not only drive That car but you want to customize it, you want to make changes to the car that are not standard, but fit your personality and how you work. You can see how far down that path that actually is. But yet, with tools like analog notebooks and many of the digital apps, we start at customizing, we don't start at the basics of learning what's in the box, and then going from there. And that's, I think, one of the biggest hang ups with this.

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Francis Wade 04:26

I think I would only add that most people sort of fail them fail into or use use tools like the ones that I was to describe because they had a failure. I think the failure comes from not being able to remember all the stuff that they thought they should be able to or could and when you know when they were younger and adolescence or a little bit older, or actually they're even some adults who To this day, won't write anything down, won't keep won't put anything in their smartphone and won't have a planner because they're still trying to use memory. I think it's Important to start with the sort of accepting that people try to use memory first for all these functions, and it's only when they fail that they look for replacements and they look for something better and they start to copy other people or they buy take a course or buy a book or get a planner, but it all starts with a failure of memory as the common denominator,

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Augusto Pinaud 05:27

I agree with you, Francis, but but also I love the analogy that art brought to the table because yes, it is true people go because of the failure, but also people go first into customizing so it is the you know, using arts analogy, I just put the car into the tree. And now let me take it to the shop. Okay, and let's now fix it fix the problem, but we are going to make it even more let's put blank let's put rims, let's put new Your paint job and not looking to the problem that is one what I'm trying to accomplish with this system doesn't matter if it's analog digital num, what you're trying to accomplish number two, how you work better because there is people who would love to to stay on paper and they go digital because they will people everybody's going digital. So I guess I also need to go digital where paper will work much better for them. And exactly the opposite. You know,

your people will, but I can do it pretty Yeah, you have a really pretty blink thing that is completely dysfunctional. So I have seen both things because, yes, they come to a problem but they they are trying to fix a symptom more than understanding what the problem really is.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 06:51

Okay, so I'm going to come at this from yet even a different angle. And let me see what you gentlemen have to kind of say about this. Which is on productive flourishing. And I'll put a link to this in the show notes. Charlie Gilkey, back in 2008, had put together two different perspectives two paradigms, he called them the the general theory of productivity, and the special theory of productivity, kind of a play on Einstein there. But what he tried to do with the general theory of productivity was to outline the perspective that a productivity system, in essence was supposed to encompass several specific pieces of the pie. basics of the two of them kind of mashed together is that a productivity system should help you with planning, with execution and with evaluation, and then a a tool or a system and I guess he would probably say a system but I'm gonna corollary this to just the tool right now is that the tool itself should have some these five fundamental components simplicity, usefulness be statically pleasing. So have some kind of aesthetics, connectedness, and cohesiveness. And so over time, the tool itself should be able to help you in each of these capacities as well. That is that in a in a kind of an iterative perspective, it should be continuing to help you with simplifying, continuing to create more use and more utility, continuing to become more pleasing to you over time. The idea here is that we use these fundamental principles to kind of, you know, identify the tool that you're looking for. Now, he talks about connectedness. I actually think that there's some other pieces here that are really important. Maybe this fits under cohesiveness inside the theory, but I need it to be explicitly stated that there is a hierarchy, that is that there are containers and the ability to create a taxonomy and I've talked about this and You know, all over the internet before, but the idea is is that whether they are called folders or notebooks or whatever you want to call them, there needs to be a way to containerize to organize the material that you want, whether that be in your calendar, whether that being your tasks or projects, or otherwise, you need to be able to containerize things. But I also need to create a an ability in an ontology to be able to filter and then to be able to find things as I need them. So I need to be able to filter things out of view, to get to the core essence of something. And then I also need to surface something at the time in which I need it. And that can include a reminder system, but just generally a very strong search functionality. I need to be able to do those and kind of the same thing but maybe a little bit different Is this the ability to link to other things. And under like the connectedness perspective, it would be for me integrations primarily with

Zapier. Or if or some other kind of workflow automation tool, the iOS shortcuts, you know, the ability for you to be able to, to manifest a, an interconnectedness between tools is also really important.

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Art Gelwicks 10:13

Well, just listening to you outline that I do have an issue with it. And it's not your issue. It's how they've defined it. And this is by saying that the system should improve creates a false understanding of what a system can actually do. And I'll use the bullet journal is a perfect example. If I go through and I take an analog notebook, and I set up a bullet journal in my notebook, and then I close that notebook and I put the pen down and I go leave, come back four hours later, that system has not improved. It's not self self improving. It doesn't have that capability, no system unless it has some form of artificial intelligence behind it has the ability to self improve. It may have the capability to be modified to be tuned and changed. But that still requires the conscious effort of the person utilizing the system. It's, it's the old, and I'm gonna get this wrong but you know, the the observer changes the observed? Well, that's exactly what we're talking about here. We're looking at these types of tools and this list of functionality that you just rattled off, right? That's all incredibly powerful capabilities to tie together. But none of that's going to tie itself together. I mean, I look at tools like, you know, if door or Zapier or Microsoft Flow, a huge capabilities, but they're not going to stand up on their own. We have to be responsible for that. And we have to understand that the success and failure of these systems is primarily on us, not on the systems themselves, because it's how we look at and adapt and work with those systems and recognize their compatibility with us as individuals to reach that level of productivity that we have mentally created as our unit. Enzo.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 12:01

Yeah, and I don't want to I don't want to get Charlie Gilkey wrong. So I, I'm putting a link to these in the show notes, I recommend listeners to check it out. And I did miss one piece that I wanted to put in here, which is that the general theory of productivity that he puts forth is, is actually different than perhaps what I said. And so I just want to clarify here, just very briefly, so he says, productivity equals parenthetical, meaning that it's connected together, because it's kind of a mathematical equation here. So creative energy, plus focus, plus motivation. Plus aptitude. Plus ideal time, is divided by difficulty and distractions. So that's creative energy, focus, motivation, aptitude and ideal time, over difficulty. And distractions is the little, you know, a mathematical equation he's created here. So so that was that's the that's the general theory of productivity. And then the special theory was the one that includes execution planning and evaluation. And this what

he calls the time management loop, and the five included, you know, elements of it. And so the general theory of productivity includes productivity enablers, and productivity disables or detractors, he calls them. I've called them disables for years. But he calls them detractors. And so anyway, I'll put links to these in the show notes, folks can look at it and kind of get a better idea about what we're talking about here. And in terms of that, you know,

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Art Gelwicks 13:32

I'll just touch back on the fact that the feature set that you outlined, this is a feature set that is basically transferable analog versus digital. Yeah, sometimes it works better digital, sometimes it works better analog. But this is a core set of requirement capabilities that are needed to be able to execute on the things that we need to execute. So I think taking time to make that list for yourself is the most important thing. First step, before we get into the next part, because if you, if you have a requirement to do date driven task scheduling, then whatever automation tools you're going to put into play,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 14:13

that's a key requirement. If that tool can't handle that capability, you're not going to be able to reach the end goal you want. And you need to know that up front, rather than saying, hey, this tool out here does all these kinds of crazy connections and triggers, how can I put it to use? guaranteed you're going to hit the ceiling of what he can do for you very quickly, and then get frustrated? Unless you go into it with open eyes and say, Okay, I know it can take me this far, but not any further. And thank you for explicitly saying what I was implicitly describing, which is to restate it. It's so important for the individual to decide on what the requirements are. It's kind of like project requirements. If you're a project manager, you have to decide on what the project requirements are. What are the boundaries of the tool. And that really helps, I think, also lower expectations, because so many times when we go on the tool hunt, and this is for maybe some of you out there who embrace the idea of changing tools more often than I am, since, since I don't change tools very often, I play with a lot of tools, but I do not change tools. Often, I see people changing tools all the time around me. And what I what I always see is the frustration that some marginal component of the tool is not there, when in reality, it fits the fundamentals, the core things that the core functions that the person needs to do. And so the bells and whistles become the deciding factors behind choosing a competent tool or not choosing a competent tool. And the problem I have with that is is most often than not you make bad choices, because you say okay, well for example, no offense against those screens. of professionals who might be listening. But then aesthetics becomes the more important

factor than function. And while aesthetics is very important, if it doesn't do what it needs to do, then that's just not going to work that's not tenable. But yet, sometimes I see people saying, Oh, well, this is a really beautiful, gorgeous tool. And I say, well, it doesn't do one of the core things you need it to do. And yet, you're choosing that tool over the others because of aesthetics, and aesthetics can only take you so far. And and again, like I said, I think that there needs to be aesthetics, you need to be able to, to need to be palatable, for you to be able to get things done, and to be able to help it manage, you know, that is, you know, track and maintain the things that need to be done. But in reality, a personal productivity tool, one that's going to become a part of your productivity system needs to be able to satisfy functions that are most important to you and Not these marginal ones I think sometimes the marginal ones get in the way the good stuff.

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Augusto Pinaud 17:04

But that's you know, that you're describing is exactly what we're discussing at the beginning. You know, people go they don't know what are the core things interesting for me when you know from the productivity perspective the people that I most of the people that I know you know who are really involved into this they keep on their system for years I'm not saying they don't change it but it's the changes are so far in between mostly because exactly what you said the system may not be perfect can be improved all that always true, but what they have one works second works well third meets the important or the core requirements, you know, I was listening to and this will date this this episode, but I was listening to the Getting Things Done summit and it was surprised when David out And mentioned that he is still use Lotus Notes I think I started you know, interacting with getting things done and David Allen teachings around 2004 and he was using a lot to sow at the time so it is really interesting to see how he's been a stain on that platform from that long and when you see you know, you I've been on only focus seen only focus came 2008 so that is part is really really interesting to see that consistency you know, it's not that is perfect, he's not gonna do everything and it's not that the things doesn't evolve it is that he does most of the core functions well enough that he's not good enough to. To play unlike you. I have played with many other things and installed him on this installed him but more on the terms of being able to understand the platform when I talk to my clients, not because I'm the Looking to move? And so that part of understand what are the core components of the system, and how they're going to work and you know, and that is stability or the core, it I believe is really, really important for what you want to do. It doesn't matter. If you go paper or you go digital or you go, any other kind of planner, what matters is how consistent is that part on the core, and how it's allowing you to move forward.



Francis Wade 19:32

It's, it's really important for developers to know the difference. And I my impression is a lot of them don't, in that they they pick up on a couple of cool features that they want to put into, say, say a task management app. And they maximize those two features, but they don't match map to features into the core functions that the user needs necessarily. They think that that those two features are enough and they actually don't do the question well enough to displace whoever the market leader is. So the app doesn't work. I don't think many of them understand the core behaviors. Let's say for example, task management when enough and make big, big mistakes to make bets bets on bets on the wrong things. put it that way.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 20:19

So that takes us on to let's go to the kind of the analog and paper world. And the most Stark example of, of this is the idea of creating your own paper based system. since the days of what feels like, you know, yesteryear, we've had the, the levenger circa system, which was the disk based system built by levenger that allowed you to be able to basically punch small little divots in the end of a page and you could create your own system, your own planner, in essence, by connecting together all kinds of different print materials, whether that be paper or plastic dividers, or you name it, if you could, if you could punch those little holes in it, you could at essence use the little, you know, disks to connect them in all kinds of sizes, lengths and whatnot. And I was actually a big fan of the love interest circuit brand. And I think I still have a circa you know, puncher, whatever they call them, the circuit machine sitting around here in my office somewhere and, and so we've come from that to staples recently put out their own Ark system very similar to the levenger system. And and so that's been out for several years now. And does anybody know if it's, I only have known it for maybe four or five years? I'm not sure whether it's been out for longer than that. But But the idea then is that you have these tools on one end where you can create your own planner in essence and so those of you who are listening and don't know These systems do exist, you can create your own planner just from from that. And what I like to do is actually, I would have the planner, that little circle system, and then I actually enveloped it inside of a portfolio so that the circles didn't kind of stick out, I wanted something to kind of hold all the papers together, or the whatever it was that I was combining together. So that was in a little bit more substantial inside of cover, in essence, and that was very, very helpful. I liked the idea of having it in a space where I had control over it and the little circles weren't capable of popping off and going somewhere else although they were pretty, pretty good at being stuck in there.



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Augusto Pinaud 22:38

Yeah, in addition of that, of that, you know, of staples come in with their, their version of that Office Depot. officemax. also came with a version they call it tool. And I think part of it is all this customization build your own thing I know. I don't remember now it was staples, horse. officemax Office Depot who partner with Martha Stewart, to create the pretty version of this, you know, a more, more something more close to what 11 year was, you know, for that market but the problem and I, I was I, I was a user of circa for many, many years. That was my plan my my notebook, okay, that was what I used to bring to meetings. It was great for that also, because I can add paper, remove paper print stuff that I needed to have in there and having an unlike you, I have you know, a couple of those circa hole punchers now everything goes digital, but but at that time, it was fantastic and but he get back to the same thing it gets back to, in order to, to build that system to really that system to be effective to you need to understand what are what are the core and if there's anything, I will our listeners to get out of this is to spend the time even before they go and play an install, and put all the apps understanding what are those issues? What are those core elements that they need? Hey, do I need a place to manage task? Well, maybe you don't. Okay, I do. So that's that's critical for me will do, do I have calendars? Do I manage multiple calendars? Okay, if you will have told me you know, before before the kids, okay, how complex, you know, managing calendars is I will have laughed at you. I mean, we were you know, my wife and I manage our calendars, no problem until the kids start having activities and now I need to manage not only where I'm going to be at work, but how much my commute time and take consideration of traffic and how much it's going to take me to go there. Let's talk about let's get that calendar managing really now. Challenging, okay, same thing was a task. Okay? Not only are managing My own projects my next actions, okay, I need to pay attention to what things crawl into the kids world and make sure that somebody is managing that. And and obviously, I'm not the only one in doubt anybody who has kids for that matter will will have that. But then how those elements that pop in and pop out are affecting your system and what are the core elements that you need to make sure your system can stand and not only that can extend on an effective way. Can you do it in a pen or paper? Yes, but in my case, the calendars for example, are so dynamic that will never work. If I put them in a paper, it will require so much time for me to manage so so what are the pieces that you need? And how can you really make them effective so you can get the most out of that you can go pretty you can go effective. You can go both, but you need to understand why Are those elements that will make a difference when you do this?

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Art Gelwicks 26:05

Alright, here's something that bothered me a little bit about this conversation of planners and things and don't get me wrong I, I own like 90% of the stuff, I have cabinets full of it.

But let's take it, take a basic look at it. If we look at something like the ring based planners, the tool the the arc, whatever, we can do the exact same thing with a three ring binder and college ruled notebook paper and regular inserts. So why is this better? And I think that's one of the core things we have to ask ourselves as we start to look not only at physical tools, but digital tools. What makes this better than what I have what makes this better than a simpler version of the same thing. I mean, if you go back to the 80s, we had Trapper keepers, Trapper keepers were basically what we're talking about here, they're three ring binders with dividers in them. They had folders in them sectioned out content you could organize that way it worked. It was a closed system, but it's no different than a standard three ring binder with dividers. So we have to think about, what are we wanting the system to provide to us. And I think if we look at things like the tool and the arc and the ledger, what we're looking at is the pages themselves, the structure that's already setting up set up on the page and saying, I'm going to use that structure. Why? Because it's laid out in a month grid, and I can fill in the month grid, and that means I don't have to create my own month grid. I don't have to spend five minutes, eight minutes, 10 minutes to create a month layout. Okay. To be practical. Yeah, it does save you that that amount of time. The question I have is, is it really worth spending to save that?



Raymond Sidney-Smith 27:40

This is where I struggle with this a little bit, but I do like what we're talking about here, the fact that we're going you look at these tool pieces, and especially on the analog side things like moleskin planners and travel notebooks and there are tons of different things but just just remember at its most basic, is it accomplishing what you need it to do, or are you setting your expectations too high and if we Fast forward from the idea of the leverger, circa staples arc, and now the Office Max tool, thank you for bringing that to my attention at gousto. I'm going to be making a purchase later on that one, just to play around. And so the the idea behind those is that you're making your own notebooks. Then you have methodologies that are paired with a notebook, whether that be a notebook that's made for it or not. But we have a whole wide variety of notebooks that are out there. I won't belabor everybody with with the very many of them that I'm keeping track of today, because there's lots of Kickstarters and other kinds of products out there. But there's the panda planner in the monk manual. I mean, there are so many of them. I'll put a link to these in the show notes. But there are so many of these planners that are out there that you then can kind of manifest into your own. I was actually thinking just now you could actually take some of those planners and kind of rip the pages out or whatever you want to do make copies of them and then use leverage. circa two foot, you know, make your own kind of Frankenstein version of it. And, and so we have, we have the ability to manifest in paper, a lot of different things, I do want to kind of take the digital hybrid, or the analog digital hybrid sort of bridge, which is that I use the everlast rocket

book notebooks, and they are these, for better or worse, they're, they're kind of plasticky types of paper and use special pens. And then there's an application and it helps you to write on paper. You capture it digitally into wherever you want to, you can send an image to or PDF to, to email, you can send it to Evernote, you know, One Drive, Dropbox, and so on and so forth. Google Drive, and then you can just then take a little bit of, you know, wet rag and wipe the page off and now it's a blank page again, and there are lots of ways in which you can then tie them To automation, because the page itself creates a specific file name that you control. So you can actually put specific tags or words into the file name. And it actually OCR is the first line of the page. So whatever you write in that first page line, it's actually reading that first line for you. So you can then go ahead and push that into the title of the page, which then Zapier can pick up and do all kinds of really fun interesting things with that particular image. So there's there are ways in which we can now bridge the digital divide with things like that. Plus we have the Livescribe smart pen system moleskin created their own and and so the idea behind the moleskin smart writing set is that it is a real time writing tool. So your as you're writing it has a little camera just like the Livescribe smart pen is embedded inside the pen itself. As you're writing, it's capturing what you're writing. And you can use different colors. And you have this real strong control and mastery of writing in the notebook as it's capturing what you're writing. And, and, and I think similar to the to the Livescribe pen, you can print your own paper, you know, if you it's specialized paper, so you know, because the pen has to be able to read the little micro coding on the page. But anyway, the the smart writing set for moleskin there are several others of these types of pens that are in essence capturing what you're writing, there's even a highlighter pen, there's like a smart highlighter, so that as your highlighting lines in a book, or or lines on a page that you've written, it can scan that OCR it and pull it into your system in different ways. And I'll put a link to that in the show notes as well. But the idea here is that you have all of these amazing tools to be able to bridge doing things in paper, while still for me at least creating a backup of that data so that if my notebook has Lost my, my, my resident data doesn't get lost with it. But the other side to that, then is how can I How can I reduce the friction that we talked about earlier, which is when when we're in a paper based system, it's really difficult to make a paper based system fungible, you know, the individual units can't be moved around so easily and manipulated. And I like the idea of using these types of tools to be able to bridge bridge that divide, then we fast forward into now, the fully digital world of building your own digital tools. And I think this is where we have the most flexibility today. Because we are in a kind of a period of proliferation of what we call a no code movement. Or what I've heard is that's called the no code movement, which is the ability to build tools without knowing programming. And while I think everybody everybody should be learning a little bit about Programming today, not so that you can become a programmer but so that you can diversify your skill sets and make yourself have a, you know, a marketable, you know, employee in the, in the in the modern world. And it's also just really quite, I don't know just

if you're if you're into personal productivity like you are, because you're listening to productivity cast.



33:24

You know,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 33:24

the, the the goal to being more productive in so many ways today is being able to understand all the ways in which your data is being used, and being able to then embrace the technology so that you have greater control over that or at least understanding where and how it's being used. And you can only do that by understanding a little bit more about programming, actually, lynda.com which is now LinkedIn learning, but I still call it Lynda. They have this great program of course, called programming fundamentals or AI Maybe the foundations of programming, whatever, I'll put a link to that also in the show notes. But the idea here is that it just covers the, the, you know, the fundamentals, like what is programming, and why is it important and what things kind of look like and under the hood. And that's, that's going to, that's going to help flash forward so much of what these no code tools are doing. And that will help you better use them and make them more useful for you. And so I'll give two examples. And then we can we can kind of go from there. But one of the more user friendly examples that I've seen come across my desk is the idea of is the tool called air table. And so air table is, in essence, a very powerful version of Microsoft Excel, if you want to kind of think of it that way. But it it's table based, and so you have rows and columns and therefore in you know, cells that make up the the table and the Then you're able to manipulate the data with with more rich functionality based on that table. Has anybody used air table experiences with it? Thoughts?



Art Gelwicks 35:10

Yeah, I've used it a little bit. It's definitely powerful. And it's definitely targeted. I want to say more towards that turnkey application type of approach, where you're, you're doing exactly what you've described. It's not something that I would run in use as like my daily task manager, because I think it would require quite a bit of Setup and Maintenance to do that. And they have templates and things. But again, you're still going to go down that path of tuning, but it's definitely it has come into its own over the past. I want to say a year to two years from when I first started looking at it. If you have a group that you're working with to it's exceptionally powerful for organizing data, and but it's not something that you're going to flip a switch and all of a sudden it's going to change the world. It's got

a fair amount of overhead



Francis Wade 35:56

and there's a learning curve on it too. I used it for project that was on and tried to try to use it for another but the additional functionality, the learning curve, learning curve and didn't and it required some premium features, but the combination of the two made me switch over the try and find something different just because. But it was, it was tricky to learn.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 36:18

When I first started practicing getting things done when I just came across the material in 2001, I used first a Microsoft Word document. And then I quickly transitioned over to Microsoft Excel, because I wanted to build my own Microsoft Access application. So yes, hashtag geek. And the the air table concept really appeals to me because it's in essence, everything that Excel could do way back when with a cloud based interface. And several years ago, I had uploaded and recorded a tutorial on how to implement a GTD based system using Google Sheets, and Microsoft Excel. I'll put a link to that in the show notes. And the and the idea was was that that system worked for me for years and years and years. I mean, it wasn't until I came across, remember the milk that I thought, Okay, this is time to make that transition to a tool that's really solid, mobile friendly, and I can really utilize it well. And so the the idea of air table and its flexibility, yes, there is a learning curve. But there are lots of templates in the system. And it looks really, really powerful on a on a project tracking level really interesting there. Plus, I feel like there are specific projects that this would be really good for like event planning, or if you wanted to create some kind of really specific type of tool they have. I'm looking here at the template gallery here they have a content calendar, digital video production, a product catalog, bug tracker, simple applicant tracker, marketing, campaign tracking, so they have some really good Interesting templates here that I think could be really useful for individual projects within your system. And so I just yeah, I think I think it's worth kind of checking out in that regard. That takes me over to the other tool, which is called Kota. Kota is a document on steroids. So it allows you to create this document that has all of this other functionality built on top of it. I have two things about this one, I've seen it implemented really well. And it's these are beautiful documents and very interesting. On the flip side to that, I don't feel like it's anything that I can't personally do in Google Docs, or in a in an Microsoft Word Online document. So it's, it's because I know how the tools work. And I've been working in those two environments for so long that the idea of coda doesn't necessarily excite me because if I need to get underlying data will I know how to pull a Google Sheets workbook into Google Doc. So or likewise, a Microsoft Excel document into a online document. So

something like with coda, I don't see as much the benefit. But that's purely because I am super geeky and know how to use those tools already to such an effect that embedding a checklist in a document. embedding images that are dynamic, those things don't, don't appeal to me, because I already can do that in the tools that I already have, which kind of goes back to your point art earlier, which is simplify. Even you were talking about that in the paper, analog space. But I think that that same thing applies here in the digital space, which is if the tools you currently have can already do it, maybe just learning how to use the current tools better, which is one of my fundamental principles, then you don't necessarily need these tools. But if you don't have the requisite skills, and you're looking for a new tool, something like coda could really become a really interesting new, you know tool in your toolkit and it can then blend together like my big issue right now is is as we've talked about in past episodes is the fact that I want my tools more integrated than not I want more and more integration I want them to feel like a cohesive system. I want them to feel like outlook feels as it relates to things but more functional because for me outlook does lack functionality that I absolutely need in my system for me to be productive, yet at the same time. The beauty of something like an all in one productivity system, which is what outlook is has all of the pieces bundled into it's like having your agenda planner. it you know your diary. In a digital format. You have your calendar, you have your email, you have your your tasks, you have your notes, all of that is embedded inside of this one vehicle.

A

Art Gelwicks 40:56

I have to I want to throw into the pile. One I've talked talked about in the past, but it's actually much more applicable in this discussion than in the previous. And that's the tool called notion notion for lack of a better term as a information manager. But it's designed to work not only for individuals, but also teams. The reason why it's more applicable here is because some of its capabilities are programmable, it can do calculated columns within certain table layouts. So you can have values dynamically adjust based on other columns, you can actually build structures, build templates, and really take a much deeper level control over the tool as compared to other tools out there like a OneNote, like an Evernote and those types of things where there's more of a higher end structure. So if you're gonna look at something like an air table, you might also want to look take a look at something like a notion and see if the functionality that's offered in there is comparable for your needs. The other one is something that probably nobody thinks of in this kind of context. And when Hear the name often they'll go Yeah. It's at Microsoft SharePoint, SharePoint, it's a very corporate focused thing. But because you can get, you can sign up for office 365. Now, you can get access to SharePoint. SharePoint gives you all of these capabilities that we're talking about document management, task management, dynamic lists, libraries connection to things like Microsoft Flow, and with the improved interfaces

that they put into place. I think it's a viable contender. If you need something that you really want to build custom from the ground up. Now when I say custom, I mean, configure, not writing code, but actually going in and just, you know, putting this part here in this part here to build out the tools that you need. I'm slightly biased for it because I build or I configure things in it all the time. Intake systems, workflow management systems, build business process, optimization, you name it, I've done it in SharePoint, but part of that idea is it's a set of tools that give you flexibility. So those are two that I just want to throw out there. And I think it's when you look at AIR table, you look at notion you look at SharePoint, these types of things. They are tools that have a lot of Legos in their box that give you the opportunity to snap those together and turn it into the solution that you need.

A

Augusto Pinaud 43:13

If people have no use workflows for the iOS, I live on iOS, I understand. But there is integration of workflows to certain things. For example, I was traveling this weekend this past weekend. So I have a whole checklist that populate my OmniFocus before the trip so that way I can go there open trip planner, and He will give me the options on everything is in there and then after I finish, it will populate automatically everything correctly into OmniFocus. So that way, I don't need to go and retype everything. I just need to go to the master instructions of what this plan is and what are the elements of this plan and everything will populate like that same thing. When I Get coaching client, there are certain things that I do. So when I get the coaching client, I just go to workflows open in a new client and then he will populate everything automatically that is really efficient and fast for for people who wants to start playing with those things without necessarily adding new elements or new software to their system.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 44:23

Yes, there are so many platform based automation tools today, beyond IFTTT and Zapier, which are web based tools, you know, where where anything that is a web service that can connect to these API driven automation tools are then capable of being connected together. That's very, very powerful. And I think Microsoft Flow fits more into that even though Microsoft Flow is much more geared toward the Microsoft ecosystem. It still has connections to the external tools like Twitter and and other tools like that. And then you then you have platform based tools. Okay, so you're talking about iOS shortcuts, which used to be workflow, and Apple bought them and now has bundled it into the operating system, which is super powerful. And I think probably the most powerful on the platform today, those of you who are on the Android system, we don't get as good of a system like that Google has developed routines, which is the supposed to be the answer

to that which ties in with the Google Home and other other parts of the Google Assistant. But the reality is, is that if you want an application based automation functionality, you'd have to go to applications like Tasker or automate and those are much you need to really understand more programming than you should have to to be able to make Tasker and automate work. So there are things like if you when you leave the house, it'll, you know, turn on, turn off your Wi Fi or things of that nature. That you can do inside of Tasker and automate. But it is, I think, still way too complex to to manifest for the average user. So while I use those tools, I say that you need to probably learn a bit more about coding to be able to make those kinds of things work some, I'm hoping that somebody builds an Android based version of workflow, which has become iOS shortcuts, because to simplify that process is really key. And tie what I really want is that that then for it to be able to tie into if door Zapier so that you can really have a strong implementation on on that level.



Augusto Pinaud 46:40

And that is exactly what makes shortcuts so powerful is that you don't need to know anything about Cody. I mean, you can go click basically open file, you know, there he will tell you the applications he will tell you everything you need to understand Syrah coding, in order to be able to create Those shortcuts or those workflows,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 47:02

I do want to spend just a brief moment before we close out to say that 3d printing is a thing. And and so if you really needed to build your own analog tool, whatever that might be, you wanted a specialized type of tool in your system, maybe you want to build your own kind of levenger circa system. So you want to want to print your own style of disk. For example, instead of them being circular. Maybe you want them to be square, triangular, whatever you want to do, or maybe you want to print your own notebook cover, you name it. And in the print on demand world, you can start to build some really unique planners and other kinds of physical tools. And this kind of the sky's the limit, but you don't have to own a 3d printer. In order to make that happen. There are actually services online I'll put a link to these in the show notes. But there are links to these online where you can upload design what you want to design, and then upload it if you can't design yourself, you can find someone who will For very inexpensive cost, and then upload those designs, have them printed and shipped to your house for a very nominal cost, because you know, they're printing hundreds of things a day. And so they can, they can aggregate those costs to bring them down to a normal fee for you. And so you can now start to print things that you can then use. You can get creative with building these tools in your productivity system. And I would be curious from listeners, if you've done anything like this, feel free to



let us know I'm very curious about using 3d printing in the analog productivity space, and how that might be useful in Frankenstein in the monster making your own hybrid tool out of different parts over time. Wonderful. Well, thank you very much for this conversation. Do you have a question or comment about this cast or something we discussed? If you're listening from anywhere, other than the podcast website, we invite you to jump Over to productivity cast dotnet they're at the bottom of the episode page, feel free to leave a comment or question, one of us will be glad to respond. Here. Also on productivity cast net, you'll find the show notes. So when I said you'll find links in the show notes, that's where the show notes are. And that's where you can easily jump to any of the particular items that we discussed here in this episode, and you can also learn how to subscribe or follow us on the website. I just recently updated the subscribe page so it gives better instructions in terms of all the various platforms. So if this is your first time listening to us, go over to productivitycast.net forward slash subscribe, and you can find all the ways in which you can then subscribe in your preferred podcast application. If you have a question, other than what we discussed here on this episode just about personal productivity, in a more general perspective, or maybe a specific topic but in personal productivity, feel free to visit productivity cast dotnet forward slash Contact, and you can record a message which we can then play here on the podcast episode and answer. Or you can write the message, you know, type it out and send it to us as well. And we'll be happy to engage with you. However we can. Thanks to Augusto, Francis and Art for joining me here on this cast. Also, if you can please jump over to Apple podcasts or Stitcher and leave a rating a review that helps us to grow the personal productivity listening community. And so thank you. That brings us to the close of this episode of ProductivityCast the weekly show about all things productivity, I'm Ray Sidney-Smith, and here's to productive life. Take care, everybody.



#### Voiceover Artist 50:36

And that's it for this productivity cast, the weekly show about all things productivity with your hosts, Ray Sidney-Smith and Augusto Pinaud with Francis Wade and Art Gelwicks.