

# Digital Culture Podcast - Episode 27 – Making change together with Black Country Living Museum and English National Ballet

## Sam Davies and Kam Downing

**Co-host: James Akers**

**Co-host: Jack Roscoe**

**Producer: Mike Glenton**

**Guest: Kam Downing**

**Guest: Sam Davies**

**James Akers:** Hi, everybody, and welcome to this episode of the Digital Culture Podcast. I'm James, one of the tech champions at the Digital Culture Network. I'm a white man, brown hair. It's getting longer, down to my chin now. Um, and I've got a dark gray T-shirt on. And behind me I've got a special guest, which is Sammy Whiskers, my cat, who's sitting on the bed behind me.

So if you do watch any of the footage of this, you'll be able to see him. He's very cute.

My co-host today is the wonderful Jack Roscoe!

**Jack Roscoe:** Hi, I'm Jack. I am the Tech Champion for Audience Data Collection and Evaluation. I'm a white man in my mid-30s. I've got brown hair, glasses, chunky headphones, and a sort of patterned top today

**James Akers:** How has your summer been, Jack?

**Jack Roscoe:** So I had a newborn baby about two months ago, So I kind of, I sleep at random times. I, can't really plan anything, but also I have a life that is now filled with a, a wonderful little baby.

**James Akers:** It's nice, isn't it? I'm way further down that, um, journey. I've got a five-year-old and a seven-year-old, so those days are gone. But you know, it does improve. You will sleep again, Jack.

**Jack Roscoe:** Oh, fingers crossed one day.

**James Akers:** One day, and you will be able to go out in an evening

**Jack Roscoe:** Oh, what? No. And how, was your summer, James?

**James Akers:** It was very nice. Yeah, we went to Wales for a bit. Went to St. Davids, which is the smallest city in the UK.

**Jack Roscoe:** Ooh, I love St David's. The, the cathedral with the, um, angled floor.

**James Akers:** Yeah, it's very beautiful down there, isn't it? It's like a, a mini Cornwall. It's really nice. So, your household has got a brand new person in it, and you've got two cats, haven't you, in yours?

**Jack Roscoe:** We do

**James Akers:** How's that going?

**Jack Roscoe:** Well, everyone's very civil. Um, the cats avoid the baby. The baby avoids the cats. Um, it's, it's a lot of feeding. There's a lot of feeding, and there's a lot of things to take care of, but, um, otherwise pretty harmonious, yeah

**James Akers:** Nice. And Mike, our producer, would love to have a cat, but he's not allowed one

**Mike Glenton:** No, banned. can't be trusted to take care of them

**James Akers:** One day, Mike, One day maybe.

**Mike Glenton:** One day maybe I'll have the kids and the cat

**James Akers:** So it sounds like there's some big changes going on in your life, Jack

Talking of change, two organizations have gone through massive changes, they've gone through huge projects to implement new technology. And we're gonna talk to them today.

So our guests today for the episode are Sam Davies, from the Black Country Living Museum, And Kam Downing from English National Ballet

Let's go. What, we need something to, we need to transition into it, don't we?

**James Akers:** Hi. so my name's Kam. I am the head of digital at English National Ballet. I'm a white woman in my 40s. I have blonde hair. I'm wearing a black top and sitting in front of a large blue and gold painting

**Sam Davies:** Hiya, and I'm Sam. I am the systems and processes business partner at the Black Country Living Museum. I am also a white woman in my 40s. I have got blonde hair and glasses on, and I'm wearing a white and blue stripey top, and I am sat in front of somebody else's notice board.

**James Akers:** We've got two very different organizations here. One which is a living museum, so actors playing of that time in that region, and one about ballet. So very, very different. So it'll be really interesting to hear your takes about the process you've been through with the projects, and how it's affected your, your teams, and what stage you're at at the moment.

So, um, I was looking at our notes earlier on. I can see Sam with the Black Country Living Museum, you've implemented. You're already further down the line, and you're going through different phases. And with you, Kam, you're still working through it. You're... Have you started implementing yet with yours?

**Kam Downing:** We are actually speaking two days post go live. So yes, we just went go live two days ago, so yeah

**James Akers:** So for your different stages of your projects, it'll be really interesting to see what those insights are. So I thought we could start with a question around just introducing what is the project that you've

gone through, um, and some of the, the, the key points that you'd maybe like to highlight as part of that.

So if we could go to Sam, just to talk about what your project was for the Black Country Living Museum.

**Sam Davies:** Sure, yeah. So we're, as you said, we're an open air living museum, so our site is 31 acres, and we tell stories about the Black Country from the Industrial Revolution right through to the 1960s, 'cause we've just had quite a large development taking us through from the '40s to '60s, a new street with that.

And our transformation project was about, you know, we're growing, we're adding on new buildings. and over time, though our system was sort of still working, for ticketing, it just wasn't giving us what we needed, and we've recognized for a long time now that, things are changing, what visitor expectations, staff expectations on the tools that they use.

And our capacity, the resources that we have sort of in-house had all changed. So the project was about looking at what we're trying to achieve currently. Um, we're an educational charity, we're a museum, we're a, we're a visitor attraction. And trying to find systems and processes that would actually fit with where we are now and where we want to go in the future.

so encompassed in that, we have done CRM and ticketing system and a new website,

**James Akers:** Yeah, big project then. And then, yeah. And over to you, Kam. What was your project?

**Kam Downing:** So, English National Ballet, we are a touring ballet company. Uh, we perform in London and around the UK and internationally. our project, put simply, was about improving our tech stack so that it's not hindering what we're trying to do, but actually enhancing our mission. We're actually rather a diverse organization.

We also have a really large engagement, uh, program of activity that includes dance for health programs around the country, in-person dance classes at our center in Canning Town, Mulryan Centre for Dance, and the tech stack was not fitting all those business use cases and different verticals. Uh, so really the process was about simplifying everything,

kind of deconstructing what our actual, uh, use cases were, and then redesigning and reimagining really the, the, the tech stack and what we could do with it

**James Akers:** Amazing. And where, like for both of you, where did that come from? Did you identify a need to change?

**Sam Davies:** So we had, we, we'd 10 years ago picked a system for reasons I'm not sure on, but it, it you know, there were some good systems and, and the process working. We'd slowly were realizing that we couldn't achieve the things commercially and strategically that we actually wanted to achieve anymore, and that meant, as, as Kam said, you know, uh, the, the tech stack didn't fit what we needed and where we want to go.

And we just began looking at what was out there, talking to lots and lots of different other venues, you know, see what they were doing. We knew we were gonna make compromises. There's always compromises, but our old system made compromises in completely the wrong place.

You know, key for us is actually selling general admission tickets, and we had a system that didn't really do that particularly well. And so we were like, right, first and foremost about matching where, where we are and where we're going with a product and a process that can actually, make that work

**Kam Downing:** Yeah, uh, similar for us. I joined English National Ballet four years ago, so prior to that I was in the US. I was with, um, Orlando Ballet and then, uh, had my own agency, and when I moved to English National Ballet, it became apparent quite quickly actually that the-- there was a lot of frustration. I was coming to a situation where the majority of the teams were really frustrated with the tools that we had.

we have no shortage of ideas. We're a really creative organization, and the teams have lots of great ideas of what we could do and a really good understanding of how to do it, but we just didn't have the tools in place to do those things. Um, similarly to Sam, it was the result of, um, uh, a procurement of a, a really great platform which works really well, for example, for large venues, uh, that perhaps have a, a large box office function. Which sounds like a natural fit, but actually being a touring organization, ticketing is not our main activity.

So we had to... Again, it really, the process had to start with, with looking at what are we actually trying to achieve here and what, what are the most important parts of that, and do we need a one-size-fits-all platform that tries to do everything, or can we deconstruct it, bring in platforms that work for those use cases, and then fit them back together with bespoke APIs, which is essentially what we ended up doing.

**Jack Roscoe:** Kam, can I ask what platforms you found actually aided you in that mission, like that, that transformed how you worked?

**Kam Downing:** So, when I joined, we were on Tessitura. We were a Tessitura organization. Um, again, I've used Tessitura for a long time in the US and also in the UK. Uh, like I say, this is-- it's an excellent platform for what it does. It's a brilliant box office, platform.

And for the venues where I've seen it work really well, it has the power that's needed for that kind of, uh, activity. For us, what had happened is that we were trying to make this, really powerful tool work for really simple workflows for example, selling a class, uh, at our building. The two things didn't fit well, and so, uh, I think our CEO described it as, you know, using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Like, it really was. It was over-engineered. Uh, it was complicated. The customizations that we had to put in place were expensive, not just to set up, but to maintain. Um, and we had actually reached a point when I joined where it was hindering growth in those business areas. We could not, for example, put on more classes.

We just did not have the tools to manage that, area of activity because it was so complicated. So we moved to a new tech stack that I describe as the sunflower. Um, I'm very visual, so as part of this project, we have a beautiful little diagram of this. And in the middle is our new CRM, which is BeaconCRM.

And then around the periphery of the, uh, center of the sunflower are all the smaller platforms that we've procured. So for example, the classes example that I just gave, we're now using Mindbody. Uh, we switched over to that a year ago. And then as of two days ago, we've now, like I say, just switched over from Tessitura to Beacon, and the, integrations have, have all been built to bring just the minimum data, just the data that we need into the CRM for cross-matching our audiences, reporting,

et cetera, whereas all the functionalities are remaining in those peripherals, and working really well.

**Sam Davies:** It's a really similar story here 'cause we were previously on Tessitura too, again, amazing product, but we're not a theater. Didn't need a seating map, all those things, and, and really great at donors, patrons, development side of things. So we've gone down a s- a slightly different route. We've gone, "What do we need to do?

Sell tickets. Right." And we started off there, so we started off with a really good selling platform, and then we're building around that. But we've decided on a, a non-integrated route. We wanted something that would do the things that we needed it to do really well, really well, and then we'll make the compromises because we don't have the resource, we don't have the capacity.

We're a small museum with a small team, and we've had a lot of the time was taken up, as you say, trying to work out stuff that was well above our skill set. Can't write SQL. And I, you know, and I can't afford to pay somebody to write that. So we were about matching what we needed with something that fitted far more with who we are and where we're at right now as well.

So we've gone from a real- as you say, a really powerful platform that we could never leverage half of, well, even probably a 10th of what it could manage, to something that actually day to day our team can roll something out, put something on sale really quickly. It's really agile.

It's just easy, easy to do. So you know, someone say, "Oh, I want to do afternoon teas this weekend." Great. Okay. I can do that. Whereas previously, that would've been really tricky.

**James Akers:** Talk me through the systems that you're now using at the end of this project

**Sam Davies:** Okay. So, when we went out, part of the procurement phase, we were sort of looking for both the key features that a ticketing system would give us, um, and we also realized we'd had enough funding if we did it right to get a new website. So we We looked at things that worked well together as through our journey, obviously th- talking to lots of other people and what they were using.

We feel like we've been talking to people at conferences for the last five years, so we already knew what was around and on the market, and who used what with what and things like that. And we landed with, um, a company called FuseMetrix who, it's actually, mainly for us at the moment it's ticketing / CRM, but it actually does do lots of other little bits and pieces as well that we want to, as we move forward, probably put our events management into there, things like that, that sits really nicely with a product called Loop by Semantic. Um, And Loop is, it's like, it's a website that's... they've designed it, and they continue to develop it. So you just put your skin on it for your museum, and then all the functionality's there, and then your team can just concentrate on content.

You know, we, we don't have the team to then be building web pages and wanting to create that, but they can just literally go, "Right, well, this is the new event. I'm putting that in." And because all of your, your colors, your fonts, your overlays are already there, it's really simple, and it works really well with FuseMetrix.

And we really see the relationship with FuseMetrix as being a partnership, and we're gonna grow. They're, they're in a period of growth, and we just feel like we've joined them at the right time. Um, we've been building together an education package builder. It, it wasn't something that probably already existed on the market, so we knew we needed to find somebody who wanted, uh, to develop, um, and , were up for that sort of, um, that project and, and they've been so far like a really, really good partner.

**James Akers:** Great. So you mentioned before about identifying that Tessitura as a system wasn't the right fit for the organization. How did you go from then identifying that you needed something different that's gonna help, but all your team members, they are busy all day long, and then you're talking about implementing a new system.

That can be quite scary to some people. So how did you manage that and, and go, "Actually, we're gonna take you on this journey. We're gonna, um, explain to you the benefits of doing this, and hopefully improvements in the future if we go through this process"?

**Kam Downing:** So, um, actually in my case, I came into a situation where there was already frustration across the organization. So there was no lack of willingness for the concept of change. Everybody wanted

change. They wanted something new, and they could see that the current systems were not working.

This project has been three years in the making actually. And so I started the journey, if you wanna describe it that way, as, uh, more of a listening exercise. So I, I s- met with all the individual teams, um, some individuals within those teams and sometimes in group settings. And to be honest, we, I, the, those first sessions kind of turned into counseling/therapy sessions, if I'm honest.

Um, we kind of aired out all of those frustrations, and I think one of the things that surprised me the most about that stage was actually that there's a really emotional layer behind a lot of that. We're talking about technology. It sounds really dry, but the kind of things that I was hearing or that was coming back to me were things like, "I know I could do better in my role, but I can't do it because I'm spending so much time on the how and not the why."

Those kind of sentiments. And I think the one that really got me was somebody said to me, "Oh, I, I'm just not a digital person." And that really struck me 'cause it really went to their kind of self-identity that they just, they said they felt embarrassed and that they weren't a digital person. So we really started in that kind of mindset.

Um, like I said, everyone was willing for change, looking for it. What happened is we were kind of staying in that little negative cycle for a little while, and so I ... One day I asked them all to come into the next, uh, workshop or, or meeting, um, and I had designed a imaginary CRM that I called Jeté, uh, which is a ballet term for leap, uplifting.

I designed a logo. I put it up on the big screen and I said, "Today we're not talking about what we're doing right now. We're gonna, design together this bespoke CRM for English National Ballet, and the rules are that nothing is impossible and everybody's workflow is important." And what was really interesting is that the energy in the room shifted immediately.

So even the body language, everyone was smiling. They could switch from that kind of, uh, place of frustration to more of an imaginative state and what was really interesting is what everything that came out, actually none, none of them were impossible or outlandish things, and

they were all really rooted in collaboration and better ways of working with other teams.

Everybody wanted the same thing. Um, and we went right down to the detail of even, you know, I'm a front desk building operations person. I open Jeté. What is the first thing I see? This is what I see. When I click on this, this is what I can do. And then we followed it through to this is how I can work with this other team.

This is how I can report up, um, for reporting purposes. And we kind of went through this exercise multiple times with all the different teams, different mixes of teams, different individuals, and we ended up with a really thick document of what Jeté can do. And then I had to break the news that Jeté is not real.

And I would say that in the majority of cases, the platforms that we took through to the second round met about eighty to ninety percent of those functionalities anyway, actually. But what the exercise really did was two things.

It changed the energy in the room, so we all started looking forward instead of struggling to look through the weeds in the moment.

And I found that because everybody had had that input at the beginning, that really kept people motivated on that journey kind of all the way through.

**Sam Davies:** I love that approach. That sort of that, yeah, trying to imagine what you could have

Or what, what would be the the actual ideal solution. That's, that's fab.

We're really similar to Kam, and obviously they're ... They certainly weren't that negative to the thought of change because we were in a position where there were that many blockers to being able to do your day job, you know, sort of frontline easily,

So I think the buy-in was there. Um, it's been a hard process. We sat down the same with well, a virtual sort of whiteboard, captured every sort of every item on the wish list. Asked them to also grade them as to priorities. Obviously, everything came through as absolutely top priority, so I was like, "We can't, they can't all be top."

So we had to sort of reimagine that, and then we very much, because of our timeframes, we probably are doing some of the work that you did in advance, we're doing it afterwards. So we went live quite quickly. Even though this has been a long time coming, the funding made it happen a lot sooner.

I promised them we would not have to do another summer where Tesco Clubcard was not an integrated solution. That was my ... That was their, that was their biggest thing, and I was like, "Right, you won't have to..." So we knew we wanted to go live quite early on, so we- which is why it's a phased approach.

So, you know, you could, you could spend forever trying to get every little bit of the system right, and actually we've gone the other way. We've gone, "Right, I wanna sell the tickets." So we, we got them online, and we got them on the door. That was it. And then I was still scrambling it, right, and now we need to put a membership on there, and what does that look like?

So we, you know, we got that core functionality over the line really quickly, and now we're going back through, going, "Right, how do we now optimize? What's the next phase? What's the next piece of work we need to concentrate on?" Sort of my mantra has very much been, you know, th- they, they had things that worked, and they've done a lot of things manually.

So I've just been saying, "We'll do things manually and we ... till we can do them properly." So I haven't let them rush to, to just put something in the system because they can see that it's there or it should be there, you know, and try and shoehorn it in and then get that wrong. So every time we're looking at something, they'll know we're taking, take a step back.

What is it we're trying to achieve? Back to that, what Kam said, it's always what are we trying to achieve, not, oh, look, shall I just use that 'cause that looks like that'll do the job? What is it? What information, what data do you need to get out of it? What does the visitor need to see? And, and actually I always make them start, it's a visitor experience first, so, you know, what's- no barriers to that booking?

We had a lot of barriers to booking before. The payment choices at checkout, you know, now we've got Google and Apple Pay. You can do

your Tesco Clubcard online. All of the things that we absolutely knew that our visitors needed and wanted, expected, they weren't getting that.

So that's always top, then my frontline team, their needs are second. And then the reporting bit, we'll build that. We'll build that. We've got the basics, but as we carry on through this journey, we can build and curate that because the data will be there 'cause we've set it up in the way that works for that flow.

So I'd say we're sort of a little bit back to front, cause we're, I now feel we're playing catch-up in some ways in trying to, like, make sure we've got the next piece of work always rolling forwards.

**Jack Roscoe:** I like that you've given yourself kind of time and space for some of those things, Sam. So, you know, for instance, in your case, there's a busy summer season. You don't want systems to fail or to break or to rush things to, in order to kind of meet that challenge. Um, so you kind of find the times when, okay, we will have some time to build that out properly.

We'll, we'll do it in the right way when it suits us.

**Sam Davies:** I can say they did not have to do another summer with Tesco Clubcard. Non-integrated. It was up, it was live, 99% online.

**James Akers:** Nice. And h- have you seen an impact of that change yet since you've gone live?

**Sam Davies:** Yes, we have, yes. Conversion of sales, that's up. Online booking percentage, I think ... We, we want to achieve 80. I think we were at 50, and we're up to, I want to say, 74% last month. You know, so that reduction of admissions processing time, reduction of queuing times.

Gift aid conversion is up because we know if somebody books online, they're more likely to convert their purchase into a gift aid because we're not having to ask those additional questions, on the desk. And I wanted to have more time for the visitors that need, to still come in and ask the questions at the admissions desk.

They still, you know, they, they c- they can't book online, so they want to come in and talk to us. So the, the aim is if you can book online, and

there's benefits to booking online and we get the gift aid conversion, do that. But then, if you can't, that's fine. We've now got more time because we're not doing manual Tesco's and manual upgrading passes from a day ticket to an annual pass.

So trying to really separate the audiences and make sure that we've got solutions for all the audiences, not just take everything digitally, as it were. So we're definitely seeing some positive metrics and KPIs, from some of the changes that we've implemented. Yeah.

**Kam Downing:** I'd say the same. We are, like I say, we're only two days post, go live for Beacon, but other parts of our tech stack have already gone live, so we kind of phased the go live dates. We went live with Mindbody last year and most of the impact is on time saved, so we've certainly seen that, and we c- continue to revisit that as a KPI.

But actually, I get the most satisfaction from the kind of anecdotal stories that we hear, which is, for example, we had no digital check-in system at the front desk. That's something that we've now been able to implement. So, I mean, you know, it's 2026, we should be able to check in digitally here. So I mean, we just feel like we're where we should be as an organization and as a building there.

We then rolled out Monad as our ticketing system, which is an excellent platform. We rolled that out in February, and as a result of that, we'll be able to offer self-serve to certain, audiences of ours, so that's our members and our friends. So that's all coming, very soon. And so, like I say, we're kind of right in the middle of it. But yeah, we've really seen the impact, I would say, on the staff morale as well. People log into these new systems, they log into Monad, and they'll say to me, "Oh, this is so easy. Uh, this is like, you know, checking out online shopping." and so those stories just, yeah, they make me really happy, keep us on track.

**James Akers:** And I think there's a real power, isn't there, about getting systems to talk to each other, so removing those manual tasks that you had in the past. So like you said, Sam, about Tesco Clubcards or, like checking people in in this way, 'cause if you can get systems to can do that hard work for you, that's the best use of it, you know?

And then we can do the interesting stuff, more creative things. I hope anyway.

So it looks like you both are prioritizing getting really good foundations right, with your data and everything like that. So is that something that's changed? Or has it always been a priority

**Sam Davies:** My background's finance and I've sort of moved more into sort of the, the tech world. So I've always been happy around data and things like that, but I think obviously finance and a lot of teams are historic data. Um, whereas we're definitely moving into that forward-looking data.

A- and that's, that's our next sort of big project. You know, we, we've always been able to report on what has happened, but trying to get into a position where we might, bearing like, you know, you can't account for the weather, but some sort of trends, some sort of projections going forwards that are, you know, that our teams can use on site.

So I think how we want to use data is definitely changing. Um, you know, when do people book? How far in advance do they book? How do they book? How does that reflect on what we need to give them to do what they want to do? And we saw that through you know, we know people want to pay Apple and Google Pay.

You know, they're dropping out the baskets at different times. You know, it's that behaviors which we've seen the need for a CRM and digital growth manager, so that's a new role that we've had at the museum, which is really, really encouraging.

So, um, we've got a leadership team who strongly believe how important data is for us and our growth going forwards. And how that's the marginal gains around, you know, staffing some of our units at the right level 'cause we know we, we can better predict how many people are gonna come in at any one time.

We haven't really got to that point yet, but that's, that's the journey that we're on at the moment to actually see how much can we use data as a projection to really start thinking operationally about how we staff our huge site and our different units to really optimize, the charity's income to get the most out of it.

So I'd say that's where we're going.

**Kam Downing:** Yes, I'd say similar for us. English National Ballet was already collecting good data. Now, don't forget we are a touring organization, so we don't sell our tickets to the public in the majority of cases, meaning that what data we do have is very important to us, and we need to be able to leverage that properly.

What was happening is that we were collecting good data and, we had great ideas of how to collect and where to collect a- a- along the journeys, for the various audiences. Uh, but because the tech stack was cumbersome, there was not the time to then take that next step and actually use that data for turning it into something actionable or something useful.

So really kind of in parallel with the procurement of the new tech, we've really looked at what data we need that we can actually then turn into a useful action point for our audiences to improve their experience or to improve our reporting or whatever the objective is. And on a granular level, I'll give you an example.

Going back to the check-in system that I was talking about. Previously, we had no way of knowing if somebody had actually, arrived early, if they'd arrived late, if they had booked a class but then not come at all. Now we have all of that data, and we can automate communications. For example, "How was your class?

Do you want to try this class next?" Um, we can send out surveys based on their attendance. All of those things which seem really obvious, but unless you have the tools to have the-- to, to do those things, um, it's not possible. So I think that's where we're in a really exciting place now. And for the next few weeks, we're gonna embed all of this new tech, and all the data is gonna start flowing through these new integrations.

And then we can get a bit more sophisticated with the way we kind of communicate with our audiences.

**James Akers:** Thanks for explaining your projects, it was really interesting. I thought we'd kind of wrap things up with some top tips.

What's a lesson that you've learned the hard way through your projects?

**Sam Davies:** Uh, f- for me, I think if I was going back again, I, I feel if I could've cloned myself, that would be amazing. I think just recognizing I

have definitely got project fatigue. Um, just whether or not a, having a separate project manager to someone that's actually doing the implementation part of it, separate those roles out a little bit more.

It's definitely been a huge learning curve for me, and the run-up phase to procurement was definitely in the project management space, gathering facts, data, going out and things like that. And then I'm knee-deep in implementation, and that side of things has definitely fallen by the wayside.

So I just think being really realistic, um, on how much time and energy it actually takes. A- and the fact that, you know, I, I have gone live with other systems, like a finance system we've done in the past, and they're so small in comparison to these. You know, the, the scope of this project is so big, and I don't think we fully appreciated actually the impact it would have, on day-to-day, on people's sort of time and availability and their, their, uh mental health.

**Kam Downing:** I think probably a similar answer to you. Again, I love a diagram. So one of my favorite diagrams is, um, the expectations versus reality one, where you've got, you know, your little guy on his bike, and he's cycling up the smooth trajectory uphill, and that's how we all think that this project is gonna go.

Whereas in reality, there are peaks and troughs, and at some points he's fallen off entirely, and we need to all get back on again. Um, and I think, that was a lesson for me, but also, um, if I could rewind to a couple of years ago, I think I would have managed expectations a little bit better, that we all are gonna have to pivot here.

We're all gonna have moments where, you know, perhaps the tech isn't working the way we thought it was, or we're gonna have to pivot our idea or even backtrack and undo some of the work that we've already done, which none of us ever want to do. But we-- To get us back on that path towards that North Star, sometimes you've got to do that.

So I think, yeah, that's the lesson I learned the hard way is that things always go slightly left at some times. So, uh, you've got to manage expectations from the beginning.

**James Akers:** Brilliant. Well, thank you so much for being with us today and talking through your projects. There's quite a few different learnings there I think that our listeners will take away.

I'm just gonna pass back over to Jack for the final question. You ready, Jack?

**Jack Roscoe:** So what is one digital, cultural, or network recommendation that you'd like to leave our audience with?

**Kam Downing:** Slightly unconnected to what we're talking about, but not so much these days, is I absolutely love The Hard Fork podcast from New York Times. So if anybody hasn't listened to that, please do, because not only are they really fun to listen to, but actually those are the latest stories in AI and Tech.

And, you know, we haven't really touched on AI in this conversation, but actually it's been a reasonably big part of this because it's been embedded within the CRM that we've ended up choosing. And so my next project after this is going to be about AI adoption and creating an imagineering team of what we could do with these new AI technologies.

So yeah, that's my recommendation. Check out The Hard Fork podcast.

**Sam Davies:** And I think mine is just talk to as many people as possible. Useful people, but, um, We've made loads of great networking connections with similar organizations to us, finding out what they're doing, talking to your internal teams, talking to your external stakeholders, just, just really having those conversations at the right time and, and making the most of relationships that you gain going out to conferences and visiting other venues and seeing, you know, what's best practice, what's working for them, what's not working for them.

I think that's been the most valuable thing for us

**Jack Roscoe:** I think people don't anticipate how much that will help them. Just someone who's been on the same journey you have or has embarked on a massive transformation, just being able to hear how it went and what they should have done differently or what they learned is, is so valuable.

**Kam Downing:** Yeah, definitely. And we always find such similarities when we do have these conversations. We're all facing such similar struggles, so

**Sam Davies:** Yeah. Even though completely different organizations. Yeah, absolutely.

**James Akers:** Brilliant. That's the end. Thanks so much

**Kam Downing:** Well thank you so much for having us. This was a lot of fun.

**Sam Davies:** Thank you!

**Jack Roscoe:** Two amazing guests who've achieved so much and have had to work so hard.

**James Akers:** And it's really interesting to see their different approaches to those projects. I think Kam's, imagining what a dream system would look like and giving it a name and a logo can really help people get on board about what, the end product could be.

**Jack Roscoe:** People get so frustrated with the things that annoy them at work, and it, it can be really hard to have a constructive conversation and to i-imagine something better. I think that was such a nice way of kind of getting everyone on board and, and being positive.

**James Akers:** Yeah. And I think Sam's approach to it with that phased approach, like we're gonna do some of it now, we're gonna continue doing some manual tasks, we're gonna ease ourselves in. So instead of just a full on switch over from one legacy way of doing things to this brand new digital way, I think it just makes that transition much easier.

**Jack Roscoe:** I think it, it takes the pressure off because things will go wrong, as they both identified. Things, you know, don't work, things don't connect, things aren't ready in time. So if you try and do it all at once, it's just gonna be an absolute nightmare. But if you can separate things out, really give yourself some time, really make sure it works for your schedule.

And, you know, working in the arts and, and culture, for a lot of organizations they'll have huge peaks of activity, you know, big summer festivals, school holidays, Um, huge exhibitions or, shows that do really well that take so much time and energy for the team, and then there'll be kind of quiet and fallow periods.

So it's sort of working around that and, and working within that can be really helpful.

**James Akers:** Brilliant. What have we got coming up next with the Digital Culture Network, Jack?

**Jack Roscoe:** So on the 15th of September, we have a webinar for social media SEO made simple, reaching audiences, algorithms, and AI. So our wonderful social media twins, Nicola Barratt and Katy Farrell, are gonna be talking about the role of social media in search engines and AI, the, the results that you get when you type a question into an AI large language model, and how social media is actually a huge part of that.

So really valuable I think, for a lot of organizations to think about their social content and how that might help users find them and help reach new audiences.

**James Akers:** I've seen the rehearsal for it, and it is really good. Lots of top tips. So if you didn't watch the actual webinar, you can just go to our Knowledge Hub on the website, and you can see the recording there.

See you next month everybody! Bye!

**Jack Roscoe:** See you later!