

Ken Albers: It's June 28th and if you could please state your name.

Paul Kim: Sure, it's Paul Kim.

Ken Albers: And Paul, when did you first begin using computers?

Paul Kim: Oh, wow. Interesting question. I first started using computers when I was 13 years old, so that was back in 1983. I remember very distinctly getting an Apple IIe with my parents, setting it up and immediately trying to track down as many games for it as I could. So that was my first exposure to computers.

Ken Albers: And what was the first sort of programming project you remember working on?

Paul Kim: Well, you know, I'm not a programmer, I should clarify that up front. But I did take like, a basic class. Must have been for summer school in junior high, and learned how to just do some real basic programming at that stage.

Ken Albers: So, what is your educational background? Like, have you had computer training or--?

Paul Kim: You know, I'm a—my undergraduate degree was in English and then I went back to grad school and got an MBA, graduated in 2001, but in the intervening years, both after undergrad and after grad school, I worked in the technology industry pretty much continuously. First job after undergrad was at a computer game company where I worked as a writer and then a product manager. And then post-business school I worked for four years as a product marketing manager at a company called the Adobe Systems. So, that's the background there.

Ken Albers: And how did you first connect with the open source community?

Paul Kim: Well, initially as a user of Firefox, I started using Firefox I think around version 0.7, before the release of 1.0. Was immediately enamored of Firefox and sort of the degree of control that it gave me over the web browsing experience. And really the kind of immersion into the open source community only came about for me once I started working for Mozilla Corporation, which began for me in October of 2005.

Ken Albers: And can you talk about what it is you do here?

Paul Kim: Yeah. I'm the Director of Product Marketing, so I focus on, I guess what you would classify as outreach efforts, communication efforts that are really primarily designed to gain new users for Firefox. And there are a number of traditional and non-traditional methods to do that, that we employ here. But I'm really focused

on things like coming up with the messaging for Firefox; what are the key messages that we want to get out during a launch. Developing all the content that we release on our website. Handling things like public relations—sort of the whole set of activities that are related to promoting and educating users about Firefox.

Ken Albers: And you mentioned there's sort of traditional and non-traditional.

Paul Kim: Yeah.

Ken Albers: Could you expand on that a little bit—

Paul Kim: Sure. I think, I think one of the ways that Mozilla is very different and the effort to increase the user base of Firefox is different from what you might term traditional marketing efforts, is that it's really relied primarily on the actions of millions of people outside of Mozilla and we think the predominate way that people have learned about Firefox and have more importantly been motivated to try it out is through recommendations from people who are satisfied users.

And that's something that is really one of the, I think, key distinctions between traditional and non-traditional marketing is that in the traditional set of activities, they're really driven by a company and they're within a company's control. So if you want an advertising campaign, for example, the company that is funding it will typically have very tight control over the types of messages that are in the ads, the media where you place the ads, the duration of the campaign.

You contrast that with the grassroots marketing effort like the one that Firefox has enjoyed and that's really something where people who are first and foremost really satisfied with the product are kind of driving the conversation themselves with other people. And in that instance, we really have no control over what people say. All we have control over in that case is that we deliver a product that people really love, and we foster an environment where people can engage with each other.

So one of the main ways that we do that is through a community called Spread Firefox, which I'm sure you guys have both checked out. And the primary purpose of that site is really to allow people who are passionate about Firefox and want to connect, to be able to talk to each other, to be able to write about their experiences and to get the word out.

Ken Albers: So would you say that sites like Spread Firefox and your marketing techniques in some ways parallel the open source techniques that they—to produce software as well?

Paul Kim: Hmm. We're trying. We're trying to do that. I think that on the—so the way that I think about it is that on the development side of the organization, in other

words, the engineering part of the organization, there's a very clearly established process and method for becoming a contributor.

Oh, sorry, am I too far away?

So, on the development side of the organization there's a very established process and a set of ways for you to come in as someone who has no experience working on the code base, establish, you know, your ability and talents, and then if you're good enough in the meritocratic system that we have there, you're able to progress up the ranks.

On the marketing side there's nothing nearly as formal. The Spread Firefox community is probably the closest analog to a community, if you will, that exists to try and do things around marketing, but it's not nearly as formal. And I think a big part of that is that unlike on the programming side, if people aren't meeting milestones on the marketing side, we'll still continue to be effective and to continue on. On the programming side if we aren't meeting milestones, we don't ship the product. So, does that make sense?

And I think one of the things we're really interested in exploring is, even though we may not have a perfect fit between the meritocratic system that we have on the programming side, and fostering a similar sort of system on the marketing side, I think the value of open source that applies to thinking about marketing, is really around reaching out and giving people the tools and access to content, and then letting them come up with creative ways to actually take action and to put marketing programs out there that will benefit Firefox.

Ken Albers: So would you say that the market is somewhat, or fairly reliant on the work of volunteers then? People at Spread Firefox or you know, how much—what sort of balance is there between you know, the professionals like yourself and—

Paul Kim: Right. I think that the way that we've been approaching this is that as much as possible we want to try to open up and provide ways for people who are users of Firefox, who are interested in supporting Firefox's growth, to participate in meaningful ways with the marketing that we do. I don't know if you guys have spoken with Asa or Chris Beard but, the Firefox Flicks campaign is, I think, a really prime example of trying to reach out to people in our community and it delivered results that we couldn't have predicted, but which were, I think, far superior to what we would have gotten had we say, hired an ad agency to produce an ad for us.

Ken Albers: What do you think it is about Mozilla, particularly Firefox, that's it's been able to attract such a large number of users? You know, it's sort of become—it's become the base of open source in some ways, you know, set apart from other open source projects in that way. So what do you think it is about Firefox that—

Paul Kim: Yeah, you know, with the caveat that this is just my opinion, and I think there are people who have a lot longer of a history with the project who may have a different perspective, but you know, in my opinion it all starts with the product itself, first and foremost. Firefox is really just—it was a great application that came on the market at the perfect time when the web was starting to morph from its initial orientation of being a fairly static medium to being something much more dynamic.

And I think as a product it really reflected the philosophy and orientation of the people who created it. So, it was really about giving people choice again, and about respecting the person who is using the product and giving them as much control as possible over the web experience. I think that what continued that on is that the sort of, at the next level, beyond the product when you, as a user, start to get familiar with how the product is made, I think it's a very appealing story to millions and millions of people out there. It's a fresh sort of perspective on building a product that everyone uses on a day-to-day basis.

And I think, again, this is just my opinion, I think that for some set of people, all that matters is that the product seems to be better. I think there's a large and growing number of people who are really attracted to the fact that Mozilla is an organization that's not motivated by a hundred percent—that's not motivated by a profit motive, or a desire to go public, but is really motivated to deliver something for the public good. And I think that that's probably pretty resonant for a lot of people as they start to learn more about Mozilla.

Ken Albers: You just mentioned the public good. Do you think open source software projects are a public service?

Paul Kim: I think they can be. I think certainly this notion of delivering software or code that is unencumbered with respect to having to pay a licensing fee or to you know, sign up for some sort of contract. I think this notion of providing these very useful pieces of software and then allowing people to leverage them in the ways that they want to, it can't help but be a benefit to society. I think you see that all over the place on the web, particularly. Whether it's the Apache server software that powers over half of the websites out there, to backend technologies like PHP and SQL. What they do is they provide a jumpstart for people who can then take those building blocks and then be more creative on top of them. I think that whether you're doing something on that foundation that's designed to turn a profit, or you say, work for a non-profit and want to build a web presence and you're able to do it more easily because of these building blocks, I think the net is that we're moving society forward, at least in this particular sphere, in the sphere of technology.

Olivia Ryan: I have a question; if I can go back to the Spread Firefox for a minute. Do you know, or you weren't here when Spread Firefox first launched?

Paul Kim: No, I was not.

Olivia Ryan: But do you know why Firefox is stressed as the product and, like, why not a Spread Mozilla, or a Spread other products? Do you think it's just mainly because of the user, because you're trying to attract such a large base and Firefox already kind of started—

Paul Kim: Well, certainly at the beginning when Spread Firefox first came about, I don't think the idea was that—so let me phrase this correctly. When Spread Firefox was first conceived by the folks here who came up with the concept, Firefox was not the phenomenon that it became over time. So, there was not this sense of like, let's do something because Firefox is already huge. It was more something that helped to make Firefox a phenomenon.

Why are there not other products listed there? That's a good question. I think that we started with Spread Firefox and I think that for a variety of reasons, but I think the main one being around the mass appeal of Firefox and the fact that we are reaching out to individual consumers in a way that you can't for example, with an email application like Thunderbird. It's much harder to, I think, make that case, or get people really in a grassroots way lined up behind something like an email app. Which isn't to say we haven't tried, but I think Firefox just because of its nature, lends itself much more to a large scale community effort like Spread Firefox.

Ken Albers: You mentioned that you had worked at Adobe, I think.

Paul Kim: Yep.

Ken Albers: If you could talk about sort of the different experiences you had working in commercial software companies and then an open source company like Mozilla.

Paul Kim: Sure. I think without a doubt the number one difference that I've seen is the degree of openness and transparency in our day-to-day business dealings here at Mozilla. I think that's a huge sort of a result of the fact that we are an open source software project that has very clearly outlined methods for encouraging debate, for allowing people who are not necessarily employed by Mozilla to have a huge influence and to drive the creation of the product itself. In a traditional software company environment, a lot of the decisions—most decisions, I would say for product, for marketing, etcetera, are made behind closed doors by a small group of people. As much as possible here—we're not always successful all the time, we do try to bring the discussion out to the people who make up our community. So, we try and be as open as possible, we try and explain very publicly why we're doing what we're doing and try to demonstrate through our actions that we are pretty serious about maintaining that transparency as we continue to grow and be successful.

Ken Albers: Have you just found it different on a personal level, the way that you're allowed to perform your job, you know, with the management structures, or the communication or things like that?

Paul Kim: Yes. It's a hard question because I don't know to what degree—well, okay, let me think here for a second. I think part of it is a function of the size. Adobe was like a 5,000 person company when I left it, so by necessity you have lots of layers of management. Mozilla was about 35 people, 40 people, when I joined, so it's inevitable that it's going to be much flatter and much easier to make decisions and to move things forward.

But beyond that, beyond like, just the stuff that happens organizationally, based on scale, I think here there's a real commitment by people who are, like Mitchell, who are effectively the senior management of the company, to try and create an environment that's very different from a traditional business regardless of the size. So, really fostering an environment where there's an open and honest dialog regardless of you know, your title or your position. People are encouraged to speak their minds. And the intent is really to foster an environment where people are honest with each other, they look out each other, but we're trying to do the right thing. And we sort of have to be different because we don't have the same end goal as a typical software startup our size would have.

Other questions?

Ken Albers: What do you think defines a successful open source project? Both in terms of product and also, you know, what elements and practices go into that.

Paul Kim: Yeah, you know, I can't speak holistically for an entire project simply because I don't have the expertise but you know, I would say from my perspective, like what would constitute successful marketing for an open source software project—I think the thing that I'm trying to work towards and really trying to have happen here is that to the fullest extent possible what we do is we, at the same time that we're planning and executing and measuring marketing campaigns, all along the way we are also bringing in input from people who are committed members of the Firefox community. So, sharing with them our plans, getting their input, reporting back to the community on the effectiveness of our campaigns. And then you know, using that knowledge to continue to improve the way that we represent ourselves.

I'd also love to see it where we're able to take traditional marketing techniques and programs and really turn them on their head so it doesn't feel as someone receiving—on the receiving end of that marketing program, like you're a 'monetizable unit'—it's a little term that Mitchell shared with us yesterday. In other words, like, trying to deliver marketing that is respectful of the user and the person that is getting the message and really try as hard as possible to be much more educational than designed to sell you something.

My job is a little bit easier because we don't actually have to sell the product, we just have to get people to try it.

Ken Albers: Right. Yeah, it's interesting.

Olivia Ryan: What kind of focus is there on market share? From interviewing different people, some people are concerned that they wouldn't want market share to sort of surpass a certain amount because they're kind of comfortable being in a medium position. I don't know—I'm just curious what your thoughts were on that.

Paul Kim: Well, you know, from my perspective, what I understand to be our organizational goals, are really to, you know, we don't want to—I've never heard anyone here say anything about defeating Microsoft or dethroning Internet Explorer. Our goal is not to become the next Internet Explorer. At the same time, we think that it's important—the goal that I've heard that really resonates for me is that, where we are right now in terms of market share is not a sustainable position. So, the idea is that if we don't continue to accelerate our growth it is conceivable that very quickly we would become irrelevant, or we would start to dwindle and as a result we'd basically hand back over the space to Microsoft. And that's not a situation we want to be in.

So, it seems reasonable to me to think that if we were to get up to, like around 25%, 30% market share, that's a much more sustainable position and one that we would want to achieve so that we could continue to, you know, basically by the size of our user base, ensure that the web remains an open and equitable place for all content authors, regardless of the browser that they're supporting.

I base that not any research that I've done, but just from discussions with the folks here who have spent a lot of time thinking about what trajectory our growth ought to take and what our—what's a meaningful market share for us to achieve over the next year or so.

Olivia Ryan: And what do you think the success of Firefox might do for, or maybe already has done, for open source as a whole?

Paul Kim: Sure. I think, you know, and it's not just Firefox, obviously. Linux has been tremendously successful as has, on the backend, Apache. But the success of Firefox as really the first truly mass market, open source consumer piece of software—I mean, I think what it does and what it validates is that it's possible to deliver great, really user-friendly software and have it come out of an environment that's structured around open source principles. So, I think the knock on open source applications, at least consumer apps—have you guys heard of this thing called the GIMP?

Ken Albers: No.

Paul Kim: Okay, so you've heard of PhotoShop, right? So, the GIMP is an open source alternative to PhotoShop, but the knock on the GIMP is that the user interface is horrifically complicated for a non-technical person to sit down and figure out how to use. I think what the success of Firefox within the narrow confines of the open source space does, is it validates that a group of open source hackers can pull together an application that, you know, your mom or your dad can use and that was one of the stated goals behind the original folks who created the first version of Firefox. And Blake Ross was one of the guys who was a lead engineer on that. And he specifically was looking to create a browser that would help his mom out and allow her to have a great Internet experience, one that was free of pop-ups, viruses, spyware, that kind of thing.

So I think it's an interesting test case because it sort of stands the notion on its head that you need an army of MBAs like myself to produce consumer friendly software. I think what it takes, I think what we're showing is that it takes vision and philosophy and a commitment to the needs of users. And that you can take that and harness the energies of really talented engineers, operating in a different structure than a traditional corporation and still make something that people love.