

Alan Wilson – Point of Pride Transcript

[00:00:00] **Alan:** 2020 was a memorable year for me, but not because of the pandemic. I got to work on a project for my first big event. Even though it was riddled with challenges, many of which were beyond our control, the experience was a defining moment for me. I was so proud of what we were able to accomplish by collaborating across teams and knew then that Simantel was the right place for me.

[00:00:31] **Misty:** Hey there friends. Thanks so much for checking out our Point of Pride series. In celebration of our 40ish anniversary, Simantelites are sharing stories about the work they're most proud of that made a difference for Simantel, the client and perhaps most importantly, themselves. I'm excited to share this story with you from someone whose work behind the scenes you don't often see, but the output you do see.

[00:00:52] It's Senior Web Developer, Alan Wilson. His story makes me proud as an agency owner. It's so fulfilling to hear Simantelites talk about ways their work brings our company values to life. We're a curious, passionate bunch. We live for the challenge and know we're better together than by working independently.

[00:01:09] Have a listen as Alan shares his point of pride that resulted from a massive undertaking for CONEXPO, the largest construction trade show in North America.

[00:01:26] **Alan:** My moment of pride at Simantel was creating a game to engage attendees at the largest construction show in North America called CONEXPO. This event is so big, it's only held every three years, and I had the privilege and pleasure of creating an interactive experience to keep attendees engaged while driving a huge data collection effort for our clients.

[00:01:46] I'm Alan Wilson. I'm a senior web developer, and I've been a Simantelite through three and a half years and counting. 2020 turned out to be a pretty memorable year for everyone, thanks to the pandemic, but for me it included a definitive moment in my career. Our Caterpillar client came to us to create an interactive game for participants at the Live CONEXPO event where they could check in to each station via QR codes.

[00:02:09] Upon completion, participants received a prize. The beauty of this is not only were attendees being entertained, but behind the scenes, a stream of first party data and marketing information were flowing in for the client. But getting there was a challenge. We were using Salesforce Marketing Cloud to house the application, which is a relatively new platform at the time, so there was a lot of discovery involved and how this was all coming together.

[00:02:34] At the time, I was a bit green myself, so I heavily relied on the experience and wisdom of the then Senior Developer before me. Everything made sense technologically speaking, but putting it all together, making a final product out of it was a whole other story.

[00:02:48] I wanted this application to be everything that was promised to the client and more. Our creative, content and strategy teams had worked tirelessly to design the look and feel of it, and all that was left was for our part of the team was to finalize it and make it a reality.

[00:03:03] We decided the best approach was to divide and conquer, so we split up the work. While one person worked on the visuals and the things that a user would see, the other would be working on the data and the back-end functions that made the application come to life.

[00:03:15] When we got fatigued, we'd switched roles — that made checking each other's work easier and kept the development process rolling. Of course, every big undertaking has roadblocks, and this was no different.

[00:03:27] We had to coordinate data between three different sources, no name points, all of which required their own different security measures, their own different propriety types of data storage and their own overall data structures.

[00:03:40] So, we had to curate all of this information in a secure location of its own, be able to reference it on demand, even multiple times from minute to accommodate hundreds of people trying to scan QR codes at the same time and do it all in a way that followed all the current best practices.

[00:03:56] As if this wasn't challenging enough, about three quarters of the way through, our primary way to scan the QR codes natively through the application was abruptly deprecated due to a change in nearly every web browser in existence and stricter privacy controls around usage of a device's camera.

[00:04:11] That meant that we could no longer natively grab QR code information inside of our application. We had to last minute change our application structure around this and create new instructions to our users saying, "Hey, you have used your phone's built in camera application to scan this and wait for it to prompt you to follow the link, because that's what all phones do now".

[00:04:29] Once it was finished, we did a smoke test in-house demo to show everyone at Simantel our new and nerved QR scanning abilities. I remember all of the planners and management just seeming underwhelmed at how buggy the experience was due to the camera security issue. We tried to offset that by going to Office Max and making a little mock event participant badges for everyone who braved out our little smoke test.

[00:04:51] When the event actually started live in Las Vegas, there was a live stream that we were watching people walking around the event. We saw our QR codes all over the place and got to see the data pour in our application as people checked in to these stations. It was working; people were completing our challenge. It really was an awesome feeling.

[00:05:10] That's about the time when the pride moment hit for me, just seeing something like that with a finite end and a result. The caveat to this situation was just a few short days, and, even hours later, the Covid pandemic hit the United States in full force and the event was cut short.

[00:05:26] I remember celebrating our victory, but then all of a sudden we weren't going to get our expected data set and participation numbers out of it because of something way beyond our control. Even though the pandemic threw a giant wrench into our plan, it still was a resounding success. The whole event was full of emotion, but everyone was talking about the QR codes, and we were all proud of what we had accomplished together.

[00:05:46] It was pretty surreal to watch the live streams and see Mike Rowe and all these talented operators represent the company and experts from the industry, as well as people who may have not even had an interest in big yellow before that day, all engaging in something I helped create. It hit me pretty deep that I was a part of that.

[00:06:03] I've heard there were rumors of the client wanting this game to make an encore appearance at future events. I'd hope so; I'd love to have the chance to polish it and make it even better.

[00:06:13] This was my first big event with the company, even though it was riddled with situations that made it not our most successful campaign, it was amazing to be a part of it from literal start to finish. From the first Tuesday traffic where CONEXPO was even uttered from someone's mouth, to the time that was done and over with, I knew that this was going to be one of those definitive moments for me. It really was. We all learned a lot during that process and that knowledge helped me propel our future endeavors to where we are today and our much higher ambitions.

[00:06:42] It proved to me personally that Simantel is where I want to be and what I want to be a part of. And when we truly work together as an agency, across all of our lanes, we can accomplish anything.

[00:06:57] *Misty*: Thank you, Alan, for all your hard work bringing to life such a fun, interactive experience. I'm so happy you found your home at Simantel. I appreciate you, the work that you do and look forward to seeing what you come up with next.

[00:07:10] If you liked Alan's story and want to hear more, head over to marketing.sweats.com and check out our very special season six, where you can hear my full interview with him, and other Simantelites, as they share their point of pride in celebration of our 40ish anniversary.