**An Interview with Matt Mullenweg, CEO & Founder of WordPress**

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, published by John Wiley & Sons, the largest book every written on the subject of Social Media. And today we are here with Matt Mullenweg, the Founder and CEO of *WordPress*. Can you believe that! How cool is that! And we'll be speaking about Social Media and *WordPress* and what Matt's up to right now, so let just get started!
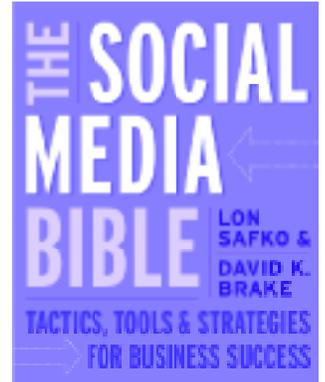
Could you start off my telling the listeners a little bit about yourself and your background?

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

MM: Sure, I'm Matt Mullenweg. I got started with *WordPress* about five years ago. I guess I was 19. I was in Huston at the time. There's not a lot to do in Huston; it was hot and so I started blogging out of the house. And eventually I was very frustrated with the software so I began working on improving software, and the improvements eventually became *WordPress*.

LS: Wow. And that's the exciting end of it. You say it so nonchalantly but it changed the way world actually blogs. That's kind of exciting.

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MM: (Laughter)….

LS: You can probably hear my enthusiasm because I'm an old HTML programmer going all the way back to mid to early 90's and when I was looking at the different platforms I actually switched my website over to *Juma* but then I heard about this thing called..

MM: *Juma*!!!

LS: Oh, I know…I said it…I said the "J" word, I'm sorry. But there's a happy ending to this story, even though I converted almost 100 pages into *Juma*, the moment that I saw *WordPress* it was like, "Oh my Gosh!" and believe it or not I actually erased my server and redesigned my 100 pages using *WordPress*.

MM: Wow.

LS: (Laughter) that's another one of…

MM: Actually, *Juma* and *Joobala* and all those things are all open source, and we don't really compete with each other. I consider anything open source kind of like a brother.

LS: And that's a nice way of looking at it, and it is kind of true, Open Source. It's just that, I find your product a lot easier to use and a lot more powerful. Personal preference.

MM: Yeah, oh thank you.

LS: So, talk to me a little bit about blogs. So you must have been blogging really for quite a long time. How do you feel about blogging in general; I mean enough to create a company?

MM: (Laughter) for me it was always that I wanted to have the means of personal expression. I always enjoyed writing and so, publishing. It was pretty exciting. #2. I would say it was really the interaction from the readers. So although blogging is great, for me I blog for the comments, because I know if I say something that's wrong or anything like that, the readers will let me know.

LS: And that's really true. I mean I've blogged and had an error and it was kind of cool how people came right out, and they were really polite about it and they just said, "This information is inaccurate." And it keeps everything honest; keeps us all honest, basically.

MM: It's access to people all over the world that you would never meet otherwise, so what's cool is that sense, because my blog's very personal it's people who are interested in the same things that I am. Maybe it's jazz or economics or photography or *WordPress*. So the answer to why I started blogging is I find it very, very rewarding.

LS: And that's one of the things that excited me about Social Media, and in particular about blogging, is that we are in a global community. It's not just U.S.-centric, and that people all over the world actually will read you blog and comment on it. So you're interacting with people that, 10 years ago, you never would have the opportunity to meet.

MM: Exactly.

LS: And to that end, weren't your just recently in South Africa.

MM: Yeah. So I got back from South Africa just yesterday, I guess, the day's kind of blend together. There's a great *WordCamp* there. *WordCamp*'s are sort of, *WordPress* Conferences. The first one I organized, literally overnight in San Francisco and we still do that one once a year. During this year there has really been [04:12.0] which is users of *WordPress* in Africa which carried the conference. We had people from everywhere [04:19.0] and then [04:24.1] where it was actually bigger than the one in San Francisco [04:26.1] talking to people.

LS: Really! Four to five hundred people came out for a *WordPress WordCamp*?

MM: Which I would expect for the San Francisco one, but you know, it's really big in these countries that you would never, never think about. [04:40.6] *WordCamp* would be great.

LS: Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow!!!! How many *WordCamp*'s are there across the world right now? Are they popping up everywhere?

MM: I think this year there's going to be between 15 and 20. So more than I'm even able to go to.

LS: (Laughter) yeah, that's a lot of commitment, which by the way, I also want to thank you joining us for our third annual Entrepreneur Conference that's coming up here in November. Thank you!

MM: I'm looking forward to it.

LS: Having a conversation with Amanda Vega, one of the things that she pointed out which I wasn't really aware of, was that a lot of Third World countries really cannot afford computers and a lot of them are blogging and microblogging; actually taking place on mobile phones as opposed to computers. Have you been exposed to that?

MM: Yeah, in South Africa there's [05:31.8] and six million computers in the country. And you have [05:36.3] to computers and there are 50 million cell phones. [05:44.1] I think for the large majority the mobile experience is still too much [05:49.3] they can call the [05:51.1] so really, what I consider blogging you need a little more space, or at least a [05:56.2] place than a cell phone.

LS: Yeah, so you can fully develop a thought.

MM: Yeah, exactly!

LS: Well, the nice thing at least, what I'm doing with my website is I incorporate my *Tweets*, my blogs become *Tweets*, so there seems to be a little bit of cross-over between the two where they are feeding off one another.

MM: Another thing is that a really important part of blogging is just reading other blogs, and it's [06:22.0] to do that on a cell phone.

LS: True. Yeah, and reading other blogs, too, is listening to other people in the blogosphere and what they're having to say and connecting with them.

MM: Absolutely!

LS: One of the things I often notice; earlier I had mentioned that I converted 100% of my website, which was originally HTML coding, over to *WordPress* platform. Can you address a little bit about how the search engine's, whether it's *MSN* or *Google* or *Yahoo*, kind of treats the *WordPress* platform a little bit differently than HTML?

MM: Well, we probably do super-well on the search engines, and actually there're not too many tricks or anything specific to target us at *WordPress*, but just to create a really great user experience. Have the content well organized well organized, have a permanent place for blogposts, which are often called a "*permalink*". Just to use proper HTML headings, tags, or the titles to the [07:26.3] Some of these things get a little bit "geeky" but if you create semantic, well structured frequently updated content, I think with search engines, there's just trying to serve their use and by being one of the better resources on the web, for connecting people [07:39.8]

LS: And that is one of the things that I found particularly exciting about *WordPress*. Over the last couple of years I taught SEO/SEM and I do about 100 cities a year and you know the questions are, "What are the shortcuts, what can we do?" And really the two things that I heard you just say is, "Content is King". The better your content is the better you're going to be read. But also important is the freshness of the information and, by definition a blog is as fresh as it gets. So blogs get preferential treatment in the search engines.

MM: They seemed to index incredibly quickly and the good part of that is *WordPress* is one of the new [08:17.4] and then Google and Yahoo are one of the ones that index pretty quickly.

LS: Yeah I've actually had blogs indexed and alerts coming back to me in 15 to 30 minutes.

MM: Wow.

LS: See, that's amazing! And again that's the power of *WordPress* that most people use and is what everybody recognizes, but the preferential treatment it gets from the major search engines, is awesome. Wow. So I definitely noticed that you just had an upgrade on your *WordPress* because I just installed it. What kind of changes have you been making, what's coming down the road, what kind of secret surprises can you throw at us about the actually development of *WordPress*?

MM: Well, the development is, you know, 95% user-different, so from release to release we have a time schedule that we plan on a year in advance. But in terms of features for release, it's really defined by our users and what they are asking for. So, for example, in the last release we had, sort of, a *wiki*-like tracking feature, so every version of every post is saved forever. So if you make a mistake or if [09:26.8] edit approach, you can go and see exactly what changed. Things like that are just sort of there and some of our users don't even know it's there. But *BlogPublishers* is a really powerful tool. So powerful that your competitors haven't thought about yet. So we were able to get it early because we listened very closely to our community.

LS: Ahh, you listened to your community! Hence, the term Social Media.

MM: (Laughter)

LS: …and I think that's really where people have been missing the boat in previous marketing and public relations, and I think that's really were the power of *WordPress* and blogs are and that is to be able to listen to what the customers want.

MM: We've never bought an [10:06.2] of advertising. All the "go-to's" in *WordPress* over the years has been through making a great product and making it easy for people to tell their friends about it.

LS: That is cool! How do you manage, or the term I always use is, "herd cats", when it's open source and you have people all over the world just digging into the code, how do you actually manage a control and do quality control on that?

MM: Sometimes that's a couple of things that work in spite of me. (Laughter) That is that from the very beginning it wasn't ever a solo operation [10:37.5] the co-founder of *WordPress*; and so our philosophy got people involved. And so I think you try to think back to [10:45.9] so [10:51.0] that's one of the recent releases where 190 people contributed.

I think what you really have to do if you're a leader of an open source process is start something that inspires people, something that people can coalesce around and get them excited to work on it even though they are not getting paid. On the carrot stick, all you really have is the carrot! So (Laughter) you really have to make it fun and engaging and I think people will come, especially since they will control it in such an amazing way that has impact.

The only reason I got started was I contributed a patch to *MeTube* and I was just in <u>utter awe</u> that there were 100's of people from all over the world, literally 100's, writing a piece that told me, "I agree!"

LS: Wow.

MM: Everything previously had just been something for myself and my clients, so that's a real rush. It was fantastic and addictive [11:41.2] So, you know, the process just makes it easy to experience that rush. [11:50.6] will come.

LS: Yeah, definitely. I definitely believe in that. Jack Herrick from *WikiHow*…I asked him a similar question, because how to you run a public wiki? He's got 40,000 articles that he manages. And it was, kind of, the same answer as you, and that's people really believe in what you're your doing. I mean, Matt, you changed the world. (Laughter) whether you want to believe it or not, you did! Cool! So when you have that kind of vision do you see that people buy that vision and believe in it? It is altruistic and is that why some many people rally around it?

MM: Well, in the beginning the vision was just me alone. I don't mean to sound so grand, but it started to pick up speed and it became obvious that we could actually have an impact and make a mark on democratized publishing and make it more accessible. And those types of things are really inspiring.

LS: I love the idea of democratizing publishing. I just interviewed John Blossom of *ContentNation* and that's kind of what his theme was, is democratizing and giving everybody the power.

The business model. When you and I talked a couple of months ago we talked a little bit about,I guess the best term would be, "freemium". I mean really..

MM: …that's good…

LS: …the majority is actually free, but there are some kind of upgrades that you can purchase. I mean, how does that work?

MM: So, well our *WordPress* was and always will be a non-profit. So there are no attempts to monetize open source out of it.

LS: Right!

MM: So, when I started my business a few years ago, in order to make it sustainable so it would be around for many, many years to come so it could support the contribution factor of open source, like you said we charge…we have a free service where people can sign up and blog and really, they should stay "free" forever and [13:45.1] 99.9% of them do, but if you [13:46.1] that just some extra features, like maybe extra space for you to upload video, or the ability to customize your design or tweak it a little bit. And we charge sort of, ala carte for those. So for example a domain name, so you go to www.createyourblogs.com instead of, you know, [14:01.1] .com is $15 a year. And so that's very, very accessible to folks. But sill, I think there's a [14:10.0] to raise your online presence even more which is even more professional [14:12.2]

LS: I think that's great to be able to have those kinds of services, and there's really nothing wrong with actually getting paid for you time. And the prices that you just quoted are more than reasonable.

MM: And if you provide something of value and you are a part of people's every-day life, I think they're willing to pay for it. And I like that sort of premise because it keeps you honest. The day that you're not really providing something in your service to your users is the day they stop paying you, and you're out of business. So it keeps things in perspective and, I think, good for business.

LS: I totally agree and the two words that keep reoccurring that I hear from everybody; Scoble and Heuer and the others are, sincerity and integrity..

MM: Sure.

LS: …and that's what you guys are about and that's what blogging is about, is sincerity and integrity.

MM: So actually it's not something that we've explicitly said, but I think, you know, the only way you can prove this is by actually going the course for a long period of time.

LS: And of course when you're blogging and pouring your heart out, you are transparent to your readers.

MM: I try to be, yeah!

LS: I love that. Can you, just for fun because it is brain-candy, can you do a little name dropping of some of the people, Fortune 500's or other companies or organizations that have actually adopted *WordPress*?

MM: Sure! So its everything from Ford Motor Company, several departments of the government including the CIA, FBI, Homeland Security, all use *WordPress*. Other media companies including The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Fox News, CNN, all of them use *WordPress*. It is very exciting, to me, because this is just like "your blog" on *WordPress.com*, is literally next door to [16:02.1] currently [16:04.2] this election. So you have access to the same tools, same path, and same sort of medium that they do. And we see where everyday there's bloggers out there who have as good or better coverage than some of the mainstream traditional medium. And I think that we are really converging, because mainstream media, or whatever you want to call it, is really understanding it and embracing it and the transparency is just awesome. It's the greatest thing for them, and it was pretty cool at the same time.

And at the same time, you know, as bloggers get better and become more professional and have more and more confidence it's just the 1% rule, you know. It takes something like 152,000-200,000 posts a day! So if you get 1% of that, than that's several newspaper's worth of content.

LS: It's huge.

MM: So it's going to be a critical vehicle eventually even for main-stream media as well. Whether putting it in a blog is more[17:01.7] I'm quoting them here, including their articles; that's to me, really cool.

LS: I think it awesome. And again, it gets back to trusted network. Once you build a relationship with your readers they're loyal because they trust in your integrety and the information that you're bringing.

MM: I've always been fascinated with the media, because of just the idea of having the responsibility and the weight of educating the world on current events. Now everything is sort of on our shoulders, and that's a great opportunity as well as a great responsibility.

LS: Yeah, that is. Is there any kind of estimates about how many people, how many blogs, how many people are actually using *WordPress* right now?

MM: Our current estimate is 6.8 million.

LS: Oh, God…Matt! (Laughter) that's amazing!

MM: (Laughter) I know, I would have never, we only recently started to get some some more accurate numbers, and it was much higher than I expected.

LS: Oh, gosh, truly….congratulations on that number! That's totally great!

MM: Thank you, thank you.

LS: So where do you want to take WordPress? I mean, where do you actually see it in five or 10 years or 15 years?

MM: My dream is for it to be around and relevant in five or 15 years, right? It's not common that generational software is created. There are a lot of "flashes-in-the-pan" blog things [18:23.3] a lot of what I do these days is sort of laying down the foundation for five or 10 years down the road and perhaps even a time when I'm not personally involved anymore. It will still be able to thrive and grow and do everything just like it has before.

And I think that it will get to a point where *WordPress.com* is really like a press club. Just like all these [18:45.5] or Firefox or even Windows, where it's sort of a framework that will set up a basic site and blog for you. But the really exciting stuff would be to plug in at the beach, which is true today but I think there's a few more things we could do to just make that easier for folks. And it's feeds or plug-ins that will transform your blogs into, really, anything you can imagine and that sort of flexibility, I think, will open up a lot of creative themes for folks. Because now they have access and the tools that can really capture imagination. I still think that today, the [19:21.2] are too hard. The [19:21.9] in management is too hard and people are still constrained.

At the point when maybe five or 10 years when it becomes completely effortless and you never think about the software and you never think about HTML and you never think about any of that stuff, it's just based on your passion, be it writing, photography, video, whatever, and the rest just happens automatically.

LS: Yeah. It just becomes intuitive and transparent to the user.

MM: Yeah, invisible.

LS: Invisible, yeah, absolutely! And that's actually one of the things that I really like about *WordPress* when I consult with companies and I set them up, I know that if I set them up on a *WordPress* platform that using it is going to be easy. Just about anybody can learn it without technical background. That's the power I'd love in it.

MM: So if I had a dream, 10 years down the road I'd say I helped 80% of the world to use *WordPress*, but no one knows its name.

LS: (Laughter) that's pretty altruistic. I love that! And I think you're well on your way to doing that.

MM: We'll see, we'll see. There's a lot more way to go.

LS: Well, please, any support I can give you I'm here for you. Is there anything else that you can share with out listeners about *WordPress*, where they can find out more about it, read your blog, can you give us more information on that?

MM: Sure, sure. So that's www.wordpress.org which is, of you're technically savvy you can dial up find and set it up yourself. There's www.wordpress.com where you can go and just literally one or two clicks to have a blog fully featured with *WordPressBlog*. My personal site is matt.tv. That's it. No dotcom or anything, matt.tv, and on that blog I post a lot of photographs because since I travel I like to take the opportunity to get 5 to 10 views where I capture some of the things that I've seen and you know we're at *WordPressNews*. My blog has taken over my life.

LS: Yeah, you have a pretty cool blog. It was fun watching you travel around the world and some of the photographs that you've taken. And that's the cool thing that you can share all that information and you can do it instantly from anywhere in the world. And we can participate in your life and exchange ideas.

MM: (Laughter) well I'm just trying and I want to be a good example, so pretty much everyone that works on *WordPressAutomatic* is a good blogger. I think that's really crucial. It's one of the reasons why the software is as it is, because all of us are using it every single day.

LS: True, true. Well I love it! Congratulations! I would really like to thank Matt Mullenweg, Founder and CEO of *WordPress*, for being here today and sharing those insights about *WordPress* and where it is and where it's going and why he did it. And support *WordPress*, also. And Matt, thank you, really, from the bottom of our hearts for not only doing this interview but coming out in November to visit us in Arizona. So thank you!

MM: Cool! My pleasure, my pleasure.

LS: That's great. This has been Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out our other valuable Social Media tactics, tools and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book and the companion website, www.thesocialmediabible.com. And for more information about me, Lon Safko, please visit my *WordPress* website at www.lonsafko.com.

And again Matt, truly thank you for being here today.

MM: It was fun. I look forward to talking again.

LS: Take care; enjoy.