

Building Product in a Pandemic

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Forward

SC Moatti

Products That Count, Founder

Since the COVID-19 crisis hit us, we all have been trying to make sense of the environment we are suddenly finding ourselves in. Put simply, we were building products that (hopefully) made life and business better; then we overnight find that these products make life and business possible. How does that change the way we build products? This eBook and its companion podcast series are a perfect first step into joining the product conversation around Building in a pandemic, and I encourage every product manager to set aside an hour or three to read it. What stood out for me are the insights of the featured product leaders on short-, medium- and long-term impact and their remarkable resilience.

The short-term impact of COVID is personal says **Chris Higgins**, interviewed by **Nikki Ahmadi**. He and his wife joined health workers and other essential businesses to build products enabling emergency responses. On the flip side, **Toni Brooks**, interviewed by **Christina Lucey**, urged all product managers (and everyone in general), to prioritize self-care above all, to protect ourselves against the deeper impact of COVID. The silver lining between these two polarized reactions: we get to practice our PM superpower of empathy daily.

Medium term, COVID deeply changes our work starting with our roadmap priorities, says **Matthew de Jonge**, interviewed by **Samantha Scott**, who builds products that support healthcare workers. New processes and tools need to come to the forefront, says **Danny Carvajal**, interviewed by **Thomas Daly**, to recreate, or at least simulate, real life.

In the long term, the health and social crisis we found ourselves in compels many of us to step up and be ut in our communities as well. I am forever grateful to the Products That Count team, podcast hosts, and chapter heads who transitioned our programming to be 100 percent online overnight and kept our global community of 300,000+ PMs connected and engaged.

More than ever, all of us building products need to remember how much our work matters: product innovation is closely correlated to job creation and a country's GDP. It's our responsibility to be the rock.

What will you do with the opportunity that is being presented?

SC Moatti

Products That Count, Founder

Covid-19 Podcast – Perspective 01

Innovating products for a pandemic

We recently sat down with Give Oxygen Co-founder Chris Higgins, to discuss innovating products for a pandemic. In these times, certain people rise to the occasion. Many in the product world have quickly adapted to meet the current needs and we're honored to share some of their stories with you in our Product Talk podcast series on "The Role of Product in a Pandemic."

At a time when there is so much uncertainty in the world, it's been heartwarming to see people innovating products to help during this pandemic. Give Oxygen Co-founders Chris and Lyndell Higgins took Chris' experience with respiratory issues and designed a Backup Emergency Ventilator Substitute (BEVS) that is open-sourced and can be made by makers anywhere and then paired with places and people in need. You can listen to the full episode of Product Talk or read the highlights below:

On why innovating products for a pandemic was a personal mission

The desire to join this fight and begin innovating products for a pandemic came from a place of understanding what it feels like to have difficulty breathing.

COVID popped up and we learned that it was a virus targeting the respiratory system. I've had a lot of issues in my past dealing with asthma. I've had pneumonia. I actually had a few lung collapses in 2018 and 2019. My surgery was actually just a year ago. And I will say I'm only 34 years old. So, it was pretty weird. Doctors really don't know why it happened. It just happened. And I had to deal with it.

So when this COVID situation popped up, just the ambiguity around that issue in our lives, we needed to prep. We said, 'Well, we're obviously seeing these ventilator issues. We're obviously seeing that you might go to the hospital, but you might not be able to get a ventilator. They might just be fully taken.

SPEAKER

Chris Higgins is the co-founder of Give Oxygen, a company that aims to address the ventilator shortage by helping individuals and makers build backup emergency ventilators and distribute them to places in need. He's also the co-founder of and advisor to VeriToll, LLC, leading R&D and special projects as well as consulting on strategy. Chris is an innovator and leader in the field of engineering and is a perfect fit for the modern competitive marketplace, due to his quick-paced and proactive personality coupled with his thoughtful and thorough work ethic. He is responsible for 10 patents, three successful kickstarters, seven product lines, and 14 products with royalties and worldwide distribution.



Chris Higgins
Give Oxygen,
Co-founder

On the inspiration for Give Oxygen

Who would have thought that those hours put into watching medical dramas would pay off?

“My wife actually dove in and did the innovation on this one. She figured, ‘What about the crash cart? What about those shows?’ We’ve seen those movies where the paramedic or doctor or nurse grabs an Ambu bag. Put one of those bags over your mouth and it breathes for you.”

“We said if it came down to it, we could just have the line of people literally pumping air into my lungs if I was out cold and needed someone to breathe for me if there was no ventilator. There’s some naivete around that idea.

“Then about a week into the COVID crisis, maybe around the 25th of March, 2020, we saw this Spanish project that did the same thing with an empty bag but used a motor. Essentially, rather than having a paramedic, doctor or nurse, use this temporary life-saving device if I was hard up in a hospital bed and there were no ventilators. That was the idea.

“An idea put out there and built into a prototype is just the first step of the process. So the next morning, I said, well, I saw this project, but it’s really not ready for anyone to actually use.

“Just given my familiarity with the FDA process and medical devices, and even any certification in general, you start to realize there’s no way that that product is actually going to make it into a life-saving situation. There are just too many regulations involved. There’s no one to coordinate that effort.”

Innovating products for a pandemic requires some creative thinking

Being an experienced innovator and strategist helped Higgins get from the idea stage to a realized product.

“So I thought to myself, well, there are a couple of issues with that design. There are a couple of things we can do to simplify it. We have all these makers across the country. Given the numbers, if you utilize those makers and give them an opportunity by removing all the roadblocks in their path, they could be used as a last resort.

HOST

As Universal Electronics Director of Product — Cloud & Software, Nikki Ahmadi works with a global team of talented engineers and architects in designing and implementing innovative solutions from product inception to production. After spending over a decade working in product engineering and management for multimillion-dollar technology and start-up companies, Nikki believes what truly drives innovation is not only a commitment to technological breakthroughs, but also people’s passion in improving everyday lives, by building products that leave a lasting impact, disrupt the industry, and are vehicles of change, while providing the best user experience. When Nikki isn’t working on her next big product release or entrepreneurial endeavors she is spending much needed time with friends and family discussing the latest politics or simply the meaning of life. She’s an adventurous traveler who also enjoys capturing moments through photography. Nikki also holds a B.S. in computer engineering, an M.S. in electrical engineering, and has a corporate innovation certificate as part of the lead program.



Nikki Ahmadi
Universal Electronics
Director of Product -
Cloud & Software

So we got hooked up with several organizations and we found that they had already said elderly people are going to start being pulled off and assigned DNR, which is Do Not Resuscitate, which means they die. That's it. The numbers coming down from the age at which they're starting to do that. It's starting to go south because the ventilators are going to be used for people that are younger. That's just the reality of the situation. Nurses and doctors are having to make these decisions.

“So we said, well, I know I would want a fighting chance. So let's, get those roadblocks gone. Let's coordinate the makers across the country and let's get them the ability to deliver these products and get it through the system so that we can give people a fighting chance. That's essentially where Give Oxygen came from and that's what it is at the moment.”

New companies and existing ones alike have innovated to solve a need

We've already seen some areas face ventilator shortages. Product leaders the world over have begun innovating products in this time of need.

“Obviously, don't do harm is the number one goal. We're not looking to just say, 'hey, everybody strap up this ventilator.' You do have to go through the process to say this has been tested in these environments that prove that it works. We're only using this in the Backup Emergency Ventilator Substitute situation—that's the name of the product, BEVS—on patients that literally will die otherwise, and it's just to give them a fighting chance.

“There is absolutely no idea to monetize this or to sell this to an actual organization. We're trying to be a stop-gap. You know, people are trying to build these assets. Tesla's got a ventilator jammed up and everybody's got a ventilator now. But there will be a period of time, if this thing hits hard enough in certain places, that they just don't have enough time to make those production-grade, medical-grade devices. So, just trying to give people a shot.”

COVID-19 Podcast – Perspective 02

Democratizing healthcare products

We recently sat down with Butterfly Network VP of Product Matthew de Jonge, to discuss the democratization of healthcare products and how they're making a difference in the face of a pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful for everyone the world over. It helps, as Mr. Rogers would say to look for the helpers. We're honored to be sharing their stories with you in our Product Talk podcast series on “The Role of Product in a Pandemic.”

Democratizing healthcare products is more important than ever during these trying times. This is the second episode in our podcast series on “The Role of Product in a Pandemic.” In case you missed it, check out the previous episode on “Innovating Products for a Pandemic.” You can listen to the full episode of Product Talk with Matthew de Jonge or check out the highlights below.

On how Butterfly Network is democratizing healthcare products during the pandemic

It's been amazing to see the way various companies have stepped up to help.

"We've released what we've been working on for a long time. We decided to accelerate the release in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. It's been incredibly exciting to see on Twitter. Physicians are using this tool to conserve PPE, their protective equipment, whereby they'll have one person in full PPE holding the Butterfly ultrasound machine scanning patients. Meanwhile, a group of physicians is safely in another room interpreting, guiding, collaborating over the ultrasound. It has been truly fulfilling and exciting for the team to see the technology that we envisioned play a role in the management of this crisis and actually help physicians at the frontlines stay safe and conserve PPE."

Widespread access has always been the goal for Butterfly Network

The focus on democratizing healthcare products was a Day One goal for Butterfly Network.

"It's surprising how little it's changed. The goal is to democratize access to medical imaging. The premise here is that if you think about how much the world has changed in the last 40 years it's been profound. We're talking right now on a Skype call. I've got three super-computers just around me that I can take for granted and use every day to look at pictures of my friends.

"It's that the world is very different than 40 years ago. I don't have a typewriter in my home. That's again, all thanks to the transition to the semiconductor and the billions and billions of dollars over time that has been invested in building denser, more efficient, faster chips and a whole bunch of wonderful software on top of them. However, medicine, in particular, medical imaging, has changed very, very little during the same time."

SPEAKER

Matthew de Jonge studied mechanical engineering at Princeton University and upon graduation, started work at Bridgewater Associates, the world's largest hedge fund. At Bridgewater, Matt served as an assistant to the CEO, and went on to build the company's first AI team with Dave Ferrucci, creator of IBM's Watson. After 5 years at Bridgewater, Matt left to join Butterfly Network, an early-stage startup determined to build the world's first ultrasound machine on a chip. Three years later, Butterfly Network succeeded in releasing the Butterfly IQ - the world's most affordable, portable and versatile ultrasound machine. Today matt is VP of product at Butterfly Network, overseeing a team of product managers and designers focused on making safe medical imaging a ubiquitous and universally-accessible part of healthcare delivery.



Matthew De Jonge
Butterfly Network Inc.
VP of Product

On how he worked his way up to VP of product at Butterfly Network

In his own words, de Jonge sought out “this quirky serial entrepreneur in Connecticut working on trying to get medical imaging, ultrasound onto and semi-conductor platform.” He found his diamond in the rough.

“I joined as one of the first product managers. It was a situation where I was happy to mop the floors. It didn’t matter to me what we were going to do. At the time, you know, there was a basic proof of principle. Possibly that there was a chip and ultrasonic chip that worked. No real product definition, no real notion for what was going to be built and for whom, what it had to do, what it’s gonna look like, what was going to be priced, how it was going to be distributed, what the markets of interest were.

“However, there were important elements. There was a team, there was a founder with a singular vision. They had a lot of resources that had been brought to bear. The company had already raised around \$100 million. And so it was a really cool substrate. Wonderful opportunity for me to dig in and, over time, I worked my way up. I worked my way up to sort of owning the product management function across all the different elements of our technology ecosystem.”

HOST

Samantha Scott has carved an active history in product management, starting with NexJ Systems and moving from Appnexus to Etsy. Samantha is currently pursuing an MBA at Harvard Business School to further enhance her business acumen. Prior to that, she was the director of product management at Capsule, a healthcare technology that provides clinical surveillance and medical device integration. Her career is backed by a B.A.S in systems design engineering from the University of Waterloo. Before delving into products and product management, Samantha served as Toronto Hydro’s compliance and quality analyst and TD’s business analyst.



Samantha Scott
Capsule, Director of
Product Management

COVID-19 Podcast – Perspective 03

The mental health impact of Covid-19 on PMs, everybody

We recently sat down with psychotherapist Toni Brooks, to discuss the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on product managers and everyone else. This has been a difficult time for everyone. That’s why Christina Lucey thought it’d be a good idea to bring in a professional to talk about what we can do to manage. It’s a part of our Product Talk podcast series on “The Role of Product in a Pandemic.”

The mental health impact of COVID-19 cannot be minimized. Everyone has been affected in some way, whether it’s working from home, the loss of a job, or working where you could be in harm’s way. Toni Brooks took the time to share some tips to help manage whether you’re a product manager or just a person. If you’d like to hear the full episode of Product Talk with Toni Brooks, you can listen above. Otherwise, the highlights are listed below.

Also, check out our other episodes from this series. First, we had the Give Oxygen Co-founder on “Innovating Products for a Pandemic.” Then we had Butterfly Network VP of Product on “Democratizing Healthcare Products.”

One potential long-term mental health impact of COVID-19

Hopefully, right now people are understanding the need for self-care and putting a focus on it. Toni Brooks hopes it's for good.

"I'm hoping that one of the things that comes out of this time is that we elevate the place of self-care. That people start to see how critically important it is and how much taking that time actually adds to what we contribute to the world, not detracts from it."

On how to lead in stressful times

Leadership can be hard enough under normal circumstances. Toni suggested one approach during this new normal.

"One of the things I've noticed in the last several years is that people from the business world who I work with are starting to use the word empathy. I think it's fantastic that it's come into the language of business. In order to have *empathy*, we need to be able to really listen to another person."

On what to do if you've lost your job during this pandemic

The mental health impact of COVID-19 can be especially difficult for those who have found themselves out of work.

"Let the people who you trust and who you know have your back, let them be there for you. Let them support you. Take pride and put it on the shelf. Allow yourself to be vulnerable and allow yourself to be seen."

SPEAKER

Toni Brooks has been practicing psychotherapy for 40 years. She's experienced in working with a wide variety of issues, both personal and professional. Brooks is able to go to the depths of clients' experiences, allowing for the release of tangled feelings and breaking open psychological knots. She's skilled at helping people communicate better, shift topics of negative thinking, and solve troubling life concerns. Toni was co-director and teacher in the Psychosynthesis Training Program in San Francisco for 17 years. Additionally, she is on the faculty of the California Institute of Integral Studies, and has led groups at Stanford University Graduate School of Business.



Toni Brooks
Marriage & Family
Therapist, MA, MFT

HOST

Christina Lucey is a product leader with a passion for crafting. After six internships and four years of studying computer science at the University of Waterloo, she found product management. After a few years of building a foundation in execution, she launched her first product at Blackberry in 2011. Christina's been hooked on crafting new digital things ever since. Her efforts on growth and mobile helped propel Yammer toward acquisition. Following that, she twice headed up product at early stage companies. Currently, Christina is at Credit Karma, where she is the leader for new product initiatives. When she's not crafting products or podcasting, you can find her reading, cooking, working on her fitness, or channeling her inner Martha Stewart.



Christina Lucey
Product Management
Leader

Innovating products for a pandemic

We recently sat down with Samsung NEXT Head of Product Enablement, Danny Carvajal, to discuss distributed product teams in a global pandemic and how it might affect how we work together moving forward.

Hear all the lessons learned about distributed product teams during a pandemic from Samsung NEXT Head of Product Enablement, Danny Carvajal, in the full episode of Product Talk above. You can also catch the highlights that are detailed below.

On his initial reaction to the new normal of distributed product teams during a pandemic

Samsung NEXT realized they were able to adapt and overcome in the new normal.

“I was a little bit nervous, to be honest, when we started having to cancel a lot of these events, because I felt that was the gel bringing things together. Once we showed we were able to successfully do it remotely, I felt more comfortable knowing we can do this. We can find creative ways to replicate that.”

How the Samsung NEXT product team has approached work-from-home life

Samsung NEXT was so successful bringing their distributed product teams together that other brands are using them as the template.

“You’ve got to find another way to build rapport and learn about each other. Get to know each other better and build some of those personal connections and relationships and team norms. Those things are really critical to a high performing team that is healthy.

“It forced us to design a virtual workshop that could accomplish that. We designed a two-hour workshop where teams got to basically create personal profiles of themselves with the help of Miro, which is a great tool that we’ve been using now to essentially replace the whiteboard and the posts that you would normally be using in a physical setting all together in a room. We’re now just doing that all online.

“We created this session and spent the first hour basically having everybody create playing cards talking about what are their likes, their dislikes, their favorite foods. Where did they grow up? What’s their family? What cities

SPEAKER

Danny Carvajal is the head of product enablement at Samsung NEXT. He is a product development leader with experience building and delivering new products. Danny has a passion for optimizing team health to ultimately deliver better products and services.



Danny Carvajal
Samsung NEXT, Head
of Product Enablement

that they lived in. Company and just all the background stuff that you would kind of get to know from taking somebody out to coffee.

“We just have to find creative ways to basically recreate those moments that you would have otherwise had in person. I’m really happy to say, Miro just published a template gallery, and that particular template from that workshop is actually featured on it. So, I’d encourage all your listeners to go and check it out. And if they’re interested in using that workshop, by all means, pull that template down. That’s super useful.

“Obviously, the team norms piece too is an interesting one, because especially as newly formed teams are coming online, and maybe you’re adding new team members on again, that in-person thing is tough to replicate. We’re finding ways to substitute it with a lot of these online sessions online workshops.”

On whether COVID-19 has changed how product teams work together moving forward

There is going to be no going back for some distributed product teams.

“Frankly, I think this whole notion of these 48-hour meetings where we fly to the other side of the world to have a session in person, those things are going to become a thing of the past. Between the time it takes on both ends of the trip, the toll it takes on your body, and jet lag and everything else in the middle of that, and your productivity, right? Like there is a hit to that. Checking into hotels and flying and all this stuff. I think that a lot of that is going to come down tremendously. Fortunately or unfortunately. I do enjoy travel. That’s just going to be a reality of the situation.”

On what qualities prepare someone to work well remotely

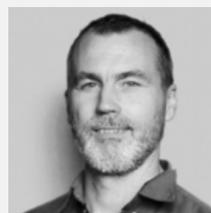
Having an interest in all the teams and people you’re trying to work with goes a long way.

“Have some amount of grit. Be interested and curious about other disciplines. I sort of consider myself as multi-disciplinary. I don’t see myself as engineering or product or design. I’m not a designer, I’m not a product manager, I’m not an engineer. But I’m able to kind of flex and speak the language of those three.

“I think asking the right questions is also super important in these roles as well. And oftentimes, better than an answer where you said something smart, is actually to ask a really, really intelligent question to kind of get to an even better answer.”

HOST

Thomas Daly is Principal Product Manager at Samsung NEXT, leading zero to one initiatives. Prior, he served as the Chief Product Officer for Spacious.com, which was later acquired by the We Company (WeWork). Before that, Daly was at Samsung Electronics by way of an acquisition of Boxee, a TV-connected streaming device. He has worked in various product roles for nearly 15 years.



Thomas Daly
Samsung NEXT
Principal Product
Manager

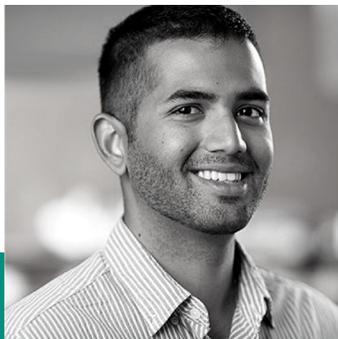
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