

TRG 43 Show Notes

Nichole Stohler

What if you could be doing something smarter with your money that creates income right now? If you're an IT professional who is wanting to get ahead financially and enjoy greater freedom of choice. And if you wonder who else in tech is creating ways to make their money work for them? You want actionable ideas, honest pros and cons and no fluff. Welcome to The Richer Geek Podcast for helping IT professionals find creative ways to build wealth and financial freedom. I'm your host, Nicole Stohler and in this podcast, you'll hear from others who are already doing these things and learn how you can too.

Hey, everyone, welcome back to The Richer Geek Podcast. On this week's episode. If you guys remember one of our very first episodes, actually, we featured Mike Baumann. And Mike works full time in tech and then he wrote and published a science fiction book. Now today's guest is also an author, but his books are more closely aligned, they're not fiction, they're more closely aligned to what he's doing in his full time job, or at least their technology aligned. And if you're passionate about some kind of aspect of your work, and you want to be more engaged in that and more out there with a platform around that, and you've been thinking that maybe you should write a book, this particular episode is for you. Now, I find inspiration from today's guest, because not only is he an author while working full time, but also he has done some amazing things in his career, including creating or working with the original Adobe Acrobat and PDF, which we all use multiple times every day, working with Pixar, to pioneer 3d type generation with render man I don't even know exactly what that is. So I'm sure we can maybe discuss that and being the inventor on over a dozen us patents. Today's guest is Mike PAL and he currently leads design for the micro Soft garage, which is the official outlet for the company's curiosity filled project explorations, which is just so cool. his newest book is titled The age of smart information, and it discusses the fundamental nature of how information is transforming due to a combination of artificial intelligence and extended reality. So welcome, Mike Pell. Welcome to the show.

Mike Pell

Thank you for having me. I really appreciate being here.

Nichole Stohler

So I gave a little bit of a background, I think I cut your bio. So I didn't go into all of the amazing things that you've done. In the background that I just shared, what are some of the gaps that you would like to fill in with the audience?

Mike Pell

I guess I would say that I've been in the tech industry for a very long time, but I started off as an artist, and I have always found a way to combine art and design with my technical stuff. So um, that's something to know about my career. I've been I sort of started off originally, when I was living in Tucson, Arizona, as an entrepreneur, the Mac of just first come out With a friend of mine store, Dave some started a company that was one of the first and earliest Macintosh

software companies. So I went from running my own company to being in Silicon Valley for 10 years and going through, you know, the holes, you know, venture backed startup. And also larger company, I work for Adobe, when I was there, have worked for medium sized companies. And then again, for Microsoft, so one of the largest and best known software companies in the industry. So I really run the gamut of all the different types of experience that you can have in the high tech industry.

Nichole Stohler

You have you've had such a great range, and I didn't know you started off as an artist. So that's interesting. And that maybe explains why picture and some of those things might be interesting to you.

Mike Pell

Yeah, always, you know, we all are creative in our own way, whether it's writing or talking or making things, music, art. And so I found that being able to do that as part of my job is really been fun for me. I can't imagine doing something where I Couldn't, you know do my passion. And I understand that many people don't really have that luxury. But it's been the best possible situation for me and probably many other people in your careers, like, I'm sure you get to bring your passion to work every day. And that's such a big part of it, you know, sort of the spillover into wanting to share your passion and share all the things that you've learned with other people, whether it's through reading books, or speaking or doing a podcast, running workshops, whatever the case may be. That's really where you probably are going to get the most joy out of your work.

Nichole Stohler

Great point. To that, tell us a little bit about your book, the Age of Smart Information.

Mike Pell

Over the last three to four years, there's been a tremendous amount of work done in the field of artificial reality, augmented reality, virtual reality, so things where people are using their phones or headsets, to sort of see digital content digital creatures or characters or information in the real world. You know, that's mixed reality or you know, through the headset and a completely virtual digital world. And so I learned a lot by helping people to both create those experiences and figure out how to design for them. I just wanted to share a bunch of things that I learned along the way. So this most recent book, the age of smart information deals with how people are going to be able to communicate more effectively, by using the combination of artificial intelligence and mixed reality to create a very impactful new medium that we really haven't seen so far. And you can imagine, being able, like, right now, many people have experimented with augmented reality with their phone, you hold your phone up with the camera on and you may see like somebody you know, rendered as a funny face or you actually you know, being applying a filter to yourself. That type of technology, combined with artificial intelligence and machine learning, which is our ability to sort of process what's happening in the world and bring insights to people. When you combine those two things together, the impact on communication, the ability to be clear, to be I would say more impactful than any

other way, is really starting to show up. And I just wanted to share with people what I learned about that so far what they can expect over the next five years.

Nichole Stohler

So it's, it's what's coming, what you've learned. And then are you do you apply to different industries? Do you talk about specific examples that way or?

Mike Pell

I do. With this book, I tried to sort of it was, it was a fun book for me to write. It's the second one I did. The first book I wrote, envisioning holograms, was really more of a guidebook for designers. It's talking a lot about mixed reality, and what we call spatial computing, the ability to put on a headset or a special glasses and see these digital characters in the world moving and reacting to us. And so for the second book, I wanted to do something a little bit different was to show people where we're going through story, I had to be a good storyteller and paint a very clear picture, and then sort of walk backwards and tell people how we got there. And I do make very specific examples for different industries. But mostly, it was is a directional piece to show people what is on the horizon and and how they can best prepare for it.

Nichole Stohler

Wow, that's fascinating. I will have to pick that up. Tell us a little bit about your reason, because you said you wanted to share, and you wanted to share what you've learned and what you see is coming. What are some of the other reasons behind because it's a lot of work, obviously to write a book. Yeah.

Mike Pell

It is. Yeah. I think just about everybody, at some point in their career thinks about maybe writing a book, a few of us actually are dumb enough to do it. And and even fewer do it more than once. And that would be me in that category. But really, the age of making money from books is sort of over as far as I can tell, unless you're one of those people who are lucky enough to somehow you know, have the right you know, exact timing. And if you're self publishing or using a major publisher, you just hit things exactly the right time and the book takes off. The reason to write books these days. is really more to get yourself out there, right is to build Your professional cred, to make sure that people know about your ideas. And to also give you an opportunity to really dig into something because when you start to write a book, you realize even though you may know your subject, back and forward and just really cold, when you have to explain it to someone else, you have to get very clear and concise, and you know, and really have a good structure to work within so many great lessons for authors, you know, first time or second time of having to really get your stuff to be in the right form for people to absorb it. no easy task. I think that the most fun for me, was sort of getting the structure, right. And that's something that I'll share with people. If you are thinking about writing a book, The very first thing that you need to do is be able to organize your thoughts into a very clear outline. And not an outline for the entire book, but an outline, really for the table of contents. Because the I guess the most amazing And most important decision you'll make is the form that you agree on with your publisher for what is it exactly that you're going to cover. And that outline for your

table of contents is it. And you have to do it really early. You know, if you're writing a book, just you know, because you want to start writing, that's great. And I encourage people to do that. But I found it very, very helpful to try to get your thoughts crystallized in a table of contents sort of form of an outline very early on and sort of either because you're your publisher will make you sign in blood. That's exactly what you're going to deliver. But even making a pact with yourself that you're going to try to stick to this structure is very, very helpful.

Nichole Stohler

Excellent tip, like an outline, using your table of contents. Now, you mentioned your publisher making you sign in blood. Tell us a little bit about how you go about writing a book because you have a publisher, who are the other people how does that actually all come together?

Mike Pell

Well, I guess it would back up a colon say you have to ask yourself, why do you want to write the book That really has a lot to do with everything that comes next. If you say, you know, I really want to share what I've learned, or I have this amazing story that I want to tell, or I feel like I have something that needs to be said, those are all great motivators. And you have to understand for yourself, are you doing it for yourself? Are you doing it for your professional development? Are you doing it because your peers, you know, or your co workers or teammates in the field could really benefit from what you've learned. And so as long as you're clear as to the why, that's great. If you're in again, I wouldn't discourage anybody from trying to write a book just to make money. But I think it's a hard go right now, if that's your only objective. So not that you shouldn't try to do that. I mean, we should all try to make money because we're spending our hard earned time and effort on this. But just be clear about you know, first things first, why are you doing it? Once you know why that'll be easier to prepare for the next step, which is, do I choose to go with a publisher or I choose to self publish benefits to both I've done both. And I can tell you a bit about each. In most cases, using an established publisher has a tremendous amount of advantage. They understand the business. They have examples, you know, for you to look at, they have other authors for you to talk to, they have resources in place to assist you at every step process. They can get you into places that you have no idea exists, whether that be stores or online venues, or even trade shows for that matter speaking engagements. The flip side is, if you choose to be a self publisher, you are completely in control of your own destiny, right? You get to pick exactly what the content is your timeframe, how you want it to sort of the voice, you want it to feel when people read it, the cover art mean everything is up to you. And along with that, all the promotion. So you know going back to the publisher model, publishers will constrict what you can do exactly in terms of cover art and audience, no time to go on sale. And so there's a bunch of trade offs. And we should sort of get into the trade offs. But that's the second step. So first step is why am I doing it? Second step is to I want to use a publisher self publishing, he sort of go through your checklist of, you know, why pros and cons. And the third is, when you're actually writing it, are you doing it on a schedule? Or are you doing it when it's convenient. And that's sort of a big deal. Because if you do sign with a publisher, they're going to expect you to deliver on a regular basis. And I can tell you from firsthand experience, I was overly aggressive in my estimates, because I had never written a book before. And so I was essentially trying to write a chapter

every week, which is like crazy. Unless you have the time to do if that's your full time job then then that's great. I did have a full time job. So trying to read chapter week, little challenging. And so that's that's part of the the seriousness of taking project like this is that you are committing to doing this within a schedule, regardless of what else you have going on. They have people depending on you, there are timeframes in mind, you know, you have to pick a date that you want to publish this. You know, the other sort of interesting part of using a publisher is, when you're done writing, that's not when the book comes out. Right? There's always a period where it's being reviewed and readied and laid out and reviewed again, and then someday, it pops out the other end. With self publishing, you can literally finish writing, do all your final edits, get all your ducks in a row, and press the button and it's live. So big trade off between those two.

Nichole Stohler

If you have it published, how long - or does it just depend on the book and what else they have in the pipeline?

Mike Pell

It's really both of those things. You know, you like let's say that you're going to write a book. All right. You know, you have something that you really want to share. You really want to do this book project. We're almost at the end of October of say that being conservative, it'll take You six to nine months to read the book. And then it's probably going to take the publisher, another several months to get it laid out and reviewed and ready to go. And then you are going to want to align it to an industry event or something where it makes sense, right? So in the world of putting books out, just having a book show up on the shelf is not enough. We just like any other marketing type of activity, you want to align it to something where it makes sense that you can really leverage whether that's a conference product coming out some other event happening around the world. That's part of the scheduling, you have to sort of work through your publisher with if you were going to publish your own book, you wouldn't want to rely on it, something that made sense for that particular topic.

Nichole Stohler

Right. Tell us you already talked about that writing a book gives you a calling card helps establish a platform and credibility authority. What have been some of the biggest benefits for you, professionally and personally from writing these books?

Mike Pell

What a great question Nichole. Thank you for asking. For me, believe it or not, there was something that I wanted. There is three books that I wanted to write, there's three different stories I wanted to tell. Finished two, I'm starting on the third. But the reason I wanted to write the book, certainly I wanted to benefit, you know, from having a higher profile in the industry or just having more opportunities than I have before. By having a book. You know, being an author does give you some openings you don't have if you don't have that. But the real reason is that I just wanted to share this the things that I learned in the first book, because I'm in an industry that's moving very quickly. And we all appreciate it when people can put together

examples or published really helpful tips to help you go faster in your work. So that was for the first book that was really my real reason I was wanting to share for the second book, it was really sharing a vision that I knew to be true for many years, but was still a little bit of hope it's time and so writing it as a book, in that storytelling format that narrative. was the best way for me to share what I know to be true. And what I know will be unfolding over the next couple years. And so I just wanted people to read the story to tell you the truth I, I wanted. So my first book, I went through a publisher. And that was a great experience. And I would say press, I would do that again. My second book, I did an experiment where I self published it. And the reason I did that was I wanted to be more in control of the format of the book, but also how I conducted everything around it. So I wanted to have conversations with people about the content in the book. And I felt like I could do a better job of that as an independent author, and structuring all the things in the promotion myself. So that's, that's an ongoing experiment. Third one, we'll see you know, now I'm sort of looking back and seeing if I should get an even larger, more specialized publisher to do the third one, because I have some very key things in mind that I like to do. So yeah, like back to my reason. There were very personal reasons. The first one was to share A second one was wanting to have a conversation actually wrote the book. Second one to be 100 pages shorter than the first because I wanted people to read it. You know, it's like we're all so busy. And we get so absorbed first book was over 300 pages. second book was 200 pages. And I thought, you know, if I make this a bit shorter, maybe people will get through it, and maybe we can get on to the conversation part. And so that was part of my strategy.

Nichole Stohler

What is it you want people to do after reading your second book after the 200 pages? When you say get on to the conversation? What is it? What's the action?

Mike Pell

Well, I was hoping to inspire them and inspire them enough to start talking about it, whether it's with me or with their teammates or with the industry in general, because the topic that we brought up that you mentioned earlier, how artificial intelligence and mixed reality or spatial computing how when you combine those it's really changing the landscape of how we communicate in business, and education and everywhere else. That's a conversation that we need. need to have a pretty quickly because it has really huge implications, privacy, security, impact persuasion, there's all these things that that are coming into into very clear focus now as a result of this happening, and that's, you know, as an industry a conversation, we should be having.

Nichole Stohler

Very cool. So you shared a little bit already about some of the challenges that you experienced. You said a chapter a week, which to me didn't sound that bad. But I, but I haven't written a book. So maybe that is a little bit aggressive. Any other challenges that you would share in getting both of those books out?

Mike Pell

Yeah. So first of all, I love I buy books, just because I feel like I want to own them. You know, like, I don't read every single book that I buy, but I still enjoy books. now working on the Acrobat project, helped me see the very beginnings of electronic books and what that was going to turn into. So I've always enjoyed that medium as far as, you know, getting my information in that way. One of the things you realize When you start to write a book, you know, after you get your outline your structure together, you sort of in your head, you know what you want to say, when you start writing. It's it's an interesting exercise to have someone review and ask you questions about your writing. So a good editor, I, you know, people talk about needing an editor to write a book, you do need an editor. Editors come in lots of different shapes and sizes, and some are very particular. And, you know, some sort of lets you have your voice, but it's that back and forth, you know, working with an editor, someone who's who's literally criticizing the way that you write your punctuation, your wording, the tone, the voice, like, what No, why didn't you say this? Or what if you had said it this way? When you get somebody to start to question, it means First of all, it's very tense. You know, it's like some conflict involved there because you know, you're the author, you're writing it, it's like, of course, it's gonna come out right. But it doesn't. And you know, if I'm sure you do speaking and anybody who's ever done Public Speaking knows you can have everything you want in your head, you can have everything in your PowerPoint slides. But when you actually go up and you start talking, things are different, right? The audience is different, the rooms different, like lots of things come into play. Same exact thing with writing. When you turn in a chapter, or part of the chapter, and you get the comments back, it's always eye opening what other people recognize or don't recognize about your writing in that process. So it's very, very fun to work through, I learned a lot. I had a great editor for my first book, who really engaged me in a conversation about the topic, he wasn't so interested in my, my grammar turned out to be pretty good. And I'm a pretty good storyteller. So that really wasn't the issue. It was more why, you know, he wanted to know the motivation, like So why was I telling the story in this way? Or why was I using this example? Or what if we had talked about it in this way? So it's nice because writing is a very solitary thing to do, and having other people be able To You know, give you some input is really welcome. Even if you don't like the criticism part.

Nichole Stohler

I feel like it would be hard not to be defensive, right, they're calling your baby ugly. But it is a necessary to get through and to get the right information across the audience, but I could see that would be quite challenging, I would probably dread those meetings.

Mike Pell

Yeah, as part of my job, I am very good at clarity. And I'm good at taking something and simplifying it and making it more in it. Not, you know, not trying to take something complex and dumb it down, but just trying to make it more clear for people to understand. And one thing that I really enjoyed, as far as feedback from both books that I've written, is people have enjoyed the tone, you know that my books have a conversational feel to them. And I wrote them purposely like this sort of like you and I are talking right now. That's how I wanted the book to come across. I didn't want it to be a lecture. I didn't want it to be preachy. I wanted to be as if you know, just picked up the phone and we were just talking, right or we were like

sitting in a room together. And we were just chatting about this particular subject. And so being purposeful about how your book comes across is another good tip for something for you to think about very early, because you don't want to have to go back halfway through and change your, your voice or your tone.

Nichole Stohler

Good point. So you've given us quite a few tips. You talked about getting the actual chapters, the outline, you talked about deciding whether you want to self publish or publish on your own. You talked about editor, some of those pieces, you have to have a good why because it is a lot of work. Any other tips or advice you'd give someone who's looking to write and publish a book?

Mike Pell

Yeah. Finishing is just the beginning. You know, as is often said, when you finish the book, your job has just started as promoter, you know, as the author, no matter whether you use a publisher or do you self publishing, you are the Chief promoter of your own book period. And so that's like an everyday kind of thing. And if you don't do that, then you'll be disappointed with how many people actually read your book, or even know about it for that matter. So using social media, your professional contacts, you know, looking for events to speak at doing workshops, book signings, world tours, you know, whatever the case may be, you are really responsible for getting the word out that you You are an author, you've written this book, and you would love people to check it out and tell you what they think. And that's part of my decision to do self publishing as an experiment with my second book was I felt like, I was already doing a bunch of promotion for the first one, you know, maybe I can actually do a better job, because I care about doing this every day. You know, and so that was part of the decision that went into it to self publish the second one. But going back to what I said earlier, professional publishers have people and departments and schedules that they actually know work with all of the distributors and large book shows. And there's a whole network that's already established that you can tap into as a as an author, if you work with a publisher in that way, but really, regardless of whether you have a publisher, you do self publishing, you have to dig in and really promote your book. If you want it to go somewhere. It's not just going to go sell itself.

Nichole Stohler

You know, that is exactly what Mike shared in the science fiction side of things. But it's exactly what he shared that he's always looking at how he can continue to market the book. So that is great advice. I know that your newest book is on Amazon. I don't know about your one that was publisher publisher, if that's on Amazon, as well?

Mike Pell

That is yes. It's called envisioning holograms. And that's also found on Amazon and many other bookstores that that was the thing I was finding out when a press my publisher brought out the first book it was showing up in places that I had no idea existed like international distributors and all kinds of online stores and was just an amazing distribution of the book.

Nichole Stohler

Perfect. So where else can listeners get in touch with you? Or? Well, we already talked about Amazon or I always just say that as a as a standard, but there might be other places to buy the book as well. But where else can people stay in touch or learn more?

Mike Pell

Well, certainly, you can connect with me on LinkedIn. It's not hard to find me my pal. I work for Microsoft. You can also go to futuristic calm, which is my personal website, or the books have their own promotional websites, which is another good tip is if you're gonna write a book, settle on a name and try to line up the URL early so that you can put up you know, sort of a promotional site very, very early in the process just to let everybody know that you are working on this book and it's coming. So the age of smart information com is one and envisioning holograms is the other one. And digitally holograms, calm, you just want information calm. Those are both great ways to catch up. And the good thing you'll see is Many people that have read the book, a lot of industry leaders have commented. So you can see what people think about the writing, which is great. I have people that you know, be able to promote it for you, you know, like help you do some of the promotion. And that's why having such a strong presence online is important because you want people to keep mentioning it. You don't want to just do a launch. And then it sort of goes away, right? Because it was very long tail for these things. And you really have to get on the initial promotion, keep that going for several months to try to make an impact.

Nichole Stohler

That's very similar to a podcast. You have to keep going and continue to promote. So thank you for giving us as links we will have for those listening. And if you're driving and you're hearing this, you can go to the Richard geek calm. We have all the show notes will have those links in there. Thank you so much, Mike, thank you for sharing your background and for all this great information and advice for others who might be looking to write a book as well. Thank you for coming on.

Mike Pell

Thank you very much for having I would say again, writing a book or doing a podcast or starting to speak is a fantastic way to build your professional presence and I would recommend it to anybody to just jump in and get started.

Nichole Stohler

Thanks for tuning in to The Richer Geek Podcast. For today's show notes, including links and resources, visit us at the richergeek.com. Don't forget to head over to iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher or wherever you get your podcasts and hit the subscribe button. Help us spread the word by sharing with others who could benefit from listening and leave a rating and review that'll help us get the podcast in front of more people. I appreciate you. Thanks so much for listening.