From 2010 to 2020, we had the golden years
of deterministic matching where it was very easy
to run an ad and understand with precision
who installed the app, maybe to know their name,
but you actually would know their IDFN,
you could tie that to their PII.
You can't do that anymore.
So what that means is like these ad networks
are becoming more complex, sophisticated, and interesting
right at the same time that it's harder for marketers
to really understand how they're spending money.
And so I'm paying a lot of attention
to how marketers make decisions with probabilistic data
because most of the work that I'm doing now
is actually saying, well, given that we don't have
deterministic data about a certain audience
or where somebody came from,
how can I find other information that will create a model
for 30% of the population?
And we can use that to extrapolate to 100.
Welcome to Lenny's podcast
where I interview world-class product leaders
and growth experts to learn from their hard-won experiences
building and growing today's most successful products.
Today, my guest is Austin Hay.
Austin is one of the smartest people in the world
on the field of MarTech, aka marketing technology.
He's advised companies like Notion, Airbnb, Walmart,
Postmates, Robinhood, even Pete's Coffee and Mars
on their MarTech strategy and tactics.
He's currently head of marketing technology at Ramp.
Before that, he was VP of business operations at Runway.
Before that, he was VP of growth at MParticle
and the fourth employee at the Unicorn Branch Metrics.
He's also a teacher at Reforge
on this very topic of MarTech.
In our conversation, Austin explains
what exactly is MarTech,
how it fits into your growth organization,
when you need to hire a MarTech person,
and what to look for, plus his favorite interview questions,
also his favorite tools, frameworks, team structures,
and emerging platforms that he's most excited about.

This episode is for anyone who's responsible for growth
and is curious about ways to optimize your approach
and how marketing technology fits into that.
Enjoy this episode with Austin Hay
after a short word from our sponsors.
Today's episode is brought to you by one schema,
the embeddable CSV importer for SaaS.
Customers always seem to want to give you their data
in the messiest possible CSV file.
And building a spreadsheet importer
becomes a never-ending sink
for your engineering and support resources.
You keep adding features to your spreadsheet importer,
but customers keep running in CSUs.
Six months later,
you're fixing yet another date conversion edge case bug.
Most tools aren't built for handling messy data,
but one schema is.
Companies like Scale AI and Pave
are using one schema to make it fast and easy
to launch delightful spreadsheet import experiences
from embeddable CSV import
to importing CSVs from an SFTP folder on a recurring basis.
Spreadsheet import is such an awful experience
in so many products.
Customers get frustrated by useless messages
like error on line 53
and never end up getting started with your product.
One schema intelligently corrects messy data
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So check it out at mixpanel.com slash friends slash Lenny.
Austin, thank you so much for being here.
Welcome to the podcast.
Lenny, thank you so much for having me.
We are going to get super nerdy today
and we're going to dive deep
into the very cool field of MarTech.
How excited are you about us chatting about MarTech?
I'm so excited because, you know,
it seems like you might be one of the first people
in product and growth to talk about MarTech.
Wow, okay.
That makes me even more excited.
Yeah, it's something that I haven't fully understood
and so I'm excited to dig real deep.
So let's start with just the basics.
What exactly is MarTech?
And then what does someone who is in MarTech do?
Such a good question.
Because marketing technology is like this very amorphous,
cross-functional discipline
that lives at the crossroads of product and growth
and engineering and marketing.
It brings together processes and systems
from kind of like a wide range of disciplines.
And I think really the way to think about marketing technology
is it's a product manager whose specific role and focus
is the system or the third party or first party platform.
Because, you know, marketing technology can mean
a collection of third party tools,
which is a lot of people think,
but as a company scales and grows,
actually it could include a collection
of first party homegrown solutions

that you build yourself with
or in addition to third party.
So I like to think about marketing technology more
as like, you know, one piece is people and process
and the other is the system and the platform.
And, you know, that probably sounds pretty familiar
to what like a lot of product people
think about their world as.
And that's how I define MarTech.
And then you ask this other question like,
what exactly the role of somebody in MarTech?
And maybe we'll talk about this a little later,
but it's such a function of the size
and the stage of the company that you're at.
At Airbnb, I would say Dmitri,
who you might have worked with was the MarTech guide, right?
He like managed a lot of our,
a lot of Airbnb, it's the first and third party tools.
Airbnb at that size is, I don't know,
maybe eight hundred people or so.
And so it makes sense to have a function
with product and engineering resources.
A small startup, for example,
when I was working with Seeky,
we were just talking about this at runway,
there was this thing as MarTech.
There was like me and Tanner
and Seeky's standing up tools and using them
because you just have to use the tools to get the job done.
And so I would say on the spectrum of what is MarTech,
you really have to look at the size
and the stages of the company.
And as you grow, you start to see it
become more refined or pronounced.
So if someone listening to this that has done growth
or has a growth PM may be like,
oh, but this is sort of what I do.
What is the difference between someone that just runs growth
or has a growth team versus someone
that's specifically a MarTech person?
At some levels, there's maybe no difference.
Like there's a lot of startups that I would say
are 30 people or less where you have a growth team

and your growth acquisition person is using a CDP
to send data to their ad network to run their ads
because that's part of their job.
And maybe they are the MarTech person.
And actually you find a lot of people
who consider themselves MarTech professionals
now having started in growth or user acquisition roles
because they had to just use tools
that already get their jobs done.
But what I would say is like as a company grows in scales,
it moves from being a community
or village driven aspect of your product
to being something that's centrally owned.
You know, like if you're, I start up again
like 30 to 40 people, everybody might chip in
to manage your CDP or use amplitude
or build a first party solution on top of those.
It's a mixture of first and third party tools
and engineering and product
and marketing all kind of work together on it.
That doesn't scale though,
is you cross 100 to 200 people,
somebody has to be responsible
for knowing how data flows through tools,
how it's worked, what's the schema.
And that's not even considering procurement
and legal stuff, right?
You know, you have like infinite liability
if you kind of don't manage your contracts well.
And so usually around, I would call it like 100 to 150 people
as the critical mass
where you can't just have a village approach
to systems and tools, much like in the IT org,
you know, if it was a village approach to SSO,
like, you know, businesses would be in a lot of danger.
That's where you typically start to see the question of,
all right, we need a systems and tools person.
We need somebody to manage these systems
and manage that platform.
And there's a variety of ways it can go.
Like I've seen it go just into pure product
that's like with a product operations org
and a product ops person actually will manage

a lot of third and first party tools.
I've seen it go into the IT org.
You know, Walmart, for example, at a really big scale,
they had a Marprod function, which was marketing products.
It was product within the marketing function
or product that was designed to serve marketing.
And then of course you can have more traditional routes
like you can have marketing technology
as a single standalone unit
or business technology as a standalone unit.
Some of this depends too on whether the business
is B to C versus B to B.
Classically in a B to B business,
you see it like in rev ops or some types of systems role
because you have to serve not only like users
coming into your funnel,
but then the businesses that you're serving afterwards.
That's also where you typically see tools
like Salesforce coming into play and more advanced CRMs.
In a B to C business, your user funnel
is actually really simple.
It's your acquiring users
and you're getting them into your product
and then product is taking them over.
There's no additional CRM.
It's so usually your CDP is the source of truth.
And that's where you might actually see marketing technology
fit in with growth a lot more.
Just some examples like at Postmates,
I worked for them for a long time as a consultant.
Marketing technology was just part of growth.
Like we had a director of growth
even before that, Siki Chen who's the CEO of Runway
and I guess you were his first manager as I just learned.
He was the first VP of growth
and like marketing technology was just part of growth
and product kind of owned that as a system.
As a different example though at ramp, we're big enough
and we're a B to B company,
we have a B to C top of funnel
where we try to acquire users
and get them to fill out our application
to get a credit card.

We have like a distinct revenue operations team
that's broken into business technology
and marketing technology.
So there's lots of flavors of how it can exist.
I think that's what's kind of the interesting
and fun part of marketing tech
is that it's not just one single version of the world
that you apply to many companies.
There's like a million variations that I've seen
and they all kind of look to solve the same problem.
So to make it even more specific
and really simple for people
to think about what someone in Martech does,
essentially it's using technology and tools to drive growth.
Is that a simple way of thinking
about like this one specific roles?
Totally, that's exactly right.
And I like to, I have this adage I would say
which is like tools are just meant to solve problems
and the problem set for marketing technologists
and business technologists is like you focus on the tools.
And so when someone currently say listening
doesn't have a Martech person
and they're thinking about, hey, is this a gap we have?
What is that slice of work that a Martech person would take
if they currently have say a growth team
or a growth PM that's leading growth
and a growth team around them?
This comes up all the time, by the way.
I talk to businesses every year
that have this problem of like,
we have a growth team, we're growing pretty fast.
We have a guy that we hired, usually an engineer
who like stood up all these tools for us
or it could be a gal too, just to be clear.
But this person has been here for two years
and knows all of our systems really well
but now they're becoming overwhelmed,
they don't have enough time, the systems are too complex.
And this is the flavor of story that I hear so often
around startups who have like hired a great growth person
and managed tools and systems, but at some point
they reached that kind of point in time

where it's no longer manageable by one person
or even a set of people.
And that slice of works looks like setting up new tools,
building new tools on top of them
because a lot of times you'll take a third party tool
called like a segment or an amplitude
and you'll build tooling in your own stack behind it
to power something much more advanced.
And everybody thinks that marketing technology
is just the third party tools
but actually it's designing, architecting
and building that stuff on top of your third party tools.
That's how you actually have a lot of velocity
is thinking about not just build versus buy,
it's build and buy now.
So you buy the tool to get 90% of the way there
and then you build the cool thing on top with the other 10%.
And so that architecting decision
usually falls on this person.
The one like really unsexy part of it,
which I tend to love because it's really high leverage
is the contract part, right?
Like when you start out as a business,
you sign any contract you want with a third party
because you're just trying to get going.
You have much bigger problems,
product market fit, staying alive, runway,
but at some point as you scale,
and you're starting to make money,
now you start to care more about
not just how much money you're making
but how much money you're losing
usually from contracts and SaaS tools.
And so that's where you start to have more scrutiny
around what types of deals are we signing?
What are the terms?
Do we have liability exposure?
What's it gonna cost us if we actually scale?
And it's great that we have this cool rate at 500 MTUs.
What happens when we have a million MTUs?
So I worked at Emparticle,
which was a CDP provider for a long time
and I was their VP of growth.

And part of their SaaS vendor strategy is like,
how can we design these cost structures in a way
so that other companies scales, we make more money?
That's just part of the business.
And so if you have that mindset of,
well, I'm looking out for the business not just now,
but two, three years in the future,
that's where you can also have a lot of value
from systems or marketing technologies.
Maybe a sign that you should start thinking
about a more tech person on a growth team
is what I'm hearing is you're starting to accumulate
all these different tools
and maybe there's a sense
that you could be a lot more efficient
in connecting data and the backend infrastructure
for how you think about growth
and how you drive growth and measure growth.
Yeah, efficiency and pain.
Like I would say pain drives people more.
It's like, hey, we can't do something
because nobody knows this thing.
We can't do something because we don't know the best way
to set up these tools or to change these tools
or we can't even move forward with a business plan
because we're worried that changing our tools
might have an impact.
And usually this is related to like email marketing tools
and data tools, so like CDPs and, you know,
folks like Braze and Errol,
just because a lot of times your email
is the thing driving recurring customers
to come back to your product and use it.
So you can't actually like sometimes make the changes
you want without understanding how things,
something was set up in the first place.
You talked about where this person
would live in the organization.
There's all these different places.
So I'll talk about revenue team, maybe,
maybe the ops team, maybe growth team, marketing team.
What's your general advice
for who should lead the hiring of this role

and also just roughly who should they report to?
Yeah, so I have, not to like shamelessly plug
my reforged course in the fall,
but I'm going to be shamelessly plugged
by reforged course in the fall.
We have this awesome matrix that we built
that shows like, you know, where this person should live,
what they do, who they should report into,
and it's all part of the fall course.
So if you want to like the deep dive into it,
there's going to be a section on it,
but just the gist of it is I like first,
like to break it down into two dimensions.
First is, is a B2C company or B2B company.
And then the second dimension is like,
how important is it to you that this person
report into a specific function or not?
So first with B2C, and really maybe like a simpler version
of that is centralized versus decentralized, right?
So we have B2C, B2B, centralized, decentralized, okay?
In a B2C organization,
I think I just think it's quite simple.
Most of the time your tools, your marketing tools
are intended to help the growth team.
The growth team has a job to be done,
which is to spur user growth
and tools are just meant to solve the problem.
So marketing technology's job is to serve the growth team.
Now it obviously serves product and analytics and data,
but it's key stakeholder and customer
is the marketing or growth function.
And so I think it makes a lot of sense
that if you're designing an org under a CMO
or a marketing person,
you put marketing technology alongside your head of growth
or maybe reporting into your head of growth,
depending on the seniority of the person,
and that works quite well.
The key thing there is you just want to make sure
that this marketing technology person
is a really strong technical architect
or some type of technical operator
because they're going to be your representation

to the product and engineering orgs.
Now some people take a little bit of a slight twist on that.
They say, hey, I have a product manager who manages growth.
So that comes from the PM side.
You could have a platform PM
that serves the same thing in Martech.
And they're responsible
for all internal platform systems, right?
And then you get into questions of does that belong
in product ops or not?
And I'm not going to go there, but for B2C,
that's the centralized function.
For B2C, decentralized, what you do instead is you just say,
like, hey, we're going to have one of these systems people
in every org.
Product is going to have a product ops person,
and growth is going to have a growth ops person.
Engineering will have engineering ops.
And then we divide the lines
based on what tools they're managing.
I generally don't see that working very well
just because as you add more operational people,
it just creates more systems.
And so unless you're a massive company
where you need that type of scale,
I think most startups like should avoid
that decentralized model.
And then for B2B, I think B2B is really messy
because not only do you have like pure B2B,
where you're only selling to enterprises,
but you have this concept of like B2B to C,
which is where you're actually selling to users
and to businesses, sometimes at the top
of the funnel in the bottom,
but also sometimes at the same time, like Notion.
Notion sells to users,
so they have a whole growth acquisition funnel at the top,
but then they also sell to businesses.
And I find like there's really,
there's again, there's two ways,
decentralized or centralized.
Actually at Ramp, we've gone back and forth
between the two models.

We started centralized with the RevOps group.
We decentralized and put marketing technology
into the CMO work,
and now we're rolling it back
into the revenue operations org.
Largely has to do with like, who is our customer?
Like whose problems are we solving
and where are resources allocated?
Because if you have a decentralized model,
then you run the risk of having to have like lots of resources
decentralized across the team.
And the question is,
can that function actually get work done?
Or resources spread too thin and the priorities on a line
that it makes it challenging to get work done?
And yeah, I would just say,
especially on B2B for people out there listening,
like there is no right answer.
And I even think that marketing technology
could live in product,
it could also live in engineering.
Some of this has to do with like,
who is the leader of this function?
If it blends more towards ops,
meaning like managing processes and systems,
then yeah, maybe you wanna decentralized it
and keep it in its representative function.
If you have a really technical leader
who was an architect or a PM,
that might indicate where that person
should actually be leading their team.
So it's very case specific,
which I know is like a terrible answer,
but it's the way it is.
Makes total sense.
If someone were to hire someone like in Austin,
are you doing the work yourself?
Are you an IC for quite a while?
Or do you end up building a team,
like say engineers that are building some of this infrastructure?
How does that usually play out?
I think like all marketing technologists
at some level are ICs.

I think it's a great job personally,
cause I get to be an IC and a manager.
You have to be an IC in that you are the most senior
technical expert on all first party and third party systems.
You have to know really well how third party tools work.
And you don't know that without doing the work yourself.
So I do find that like some of the best marketing technologies
have at least at some point in the last five years
been an operator and expert managing tools and systems.
And then usually the teams are small
and super cross-functional.
So what I would say is like more important to look for
than how many people has this person managed is
how well can they manage upward, laterally and downward?
Because they're gonna have to go talk to the head of RevOps
if they wanna change something in Salesforce.
They're gonna have to talk to the VP of product
if they wanna make a big platform change
that touches something else.
They're gonna be relying constantly on data resources
from their head of data.
So I think that this person, like the secret sauce is more
like how good of a cross-functional team player are they?
I almost view them like a true quarterback.
Everybody like says people are quarterbacks
but really marketing technology because it lives
between so many departments, it plays that role
of having to call plays and pull on different departments.
And because it sounds like you don't have a team
to do some of these things
and you need to convince people to help you out.
Totally, yeah, it's a game of persuasion and salesmanship.
You have to convince people why the problems are big.
And especially as you get bigger,
a lot of the decisions or problems of marketing technology
are not about rapidly making a huge transformation.
It's slow transformation that can have big implications.
I'll just give you one example.
Like lots of big companies I talked to have two CDPs
or two attribution tools.
And it's like, there's the cost problem.
How do we get rid of this secondary tool
to reduce the cost, maybe it's a million dollars.

But there's also the complexity
and decision-making problem.
How do we make people move and work faster
by not having the complexity of asking which tool do I use
in such a simple decision, right?
And then you get to a really big scale like at Walmart
where your problem isn't even,
how do we consolidate the stack
and make it so tools are helpful for people?
But how do we like prevent from getting back to that state?
How do we put safeguards in place
to make sure people actually have access to the tools
that they want and can solve their problems,
but we're not introducing like duplicative tech
into our organization.
Because like a really well-known,
sorry to put SaaS vendors on the spot here,
but well-known SaaS vendor play
is the land and expand motion, right?
You get in small and then you grow your business.
Well, you know, that's a distinct problem for businesses
that are trying to control costs
and simplify the way the world works.
I wanna talk about tools that you recommend and use most
often, but I'm thinking maybe we start
with a different question, which is around just,
what does your day look like as a more tech person?
What are you doing day to day?
And kind of from the lens of your growth PM listening
or a leader listening and like,
what could this person do for me
and how much leverage can I get
if I were to find a more tech person?
There's half of marketing technology,
which I would call like somewhat administrative
and high leverage.
Like it's managing PII requests and PI technology,
managing administrative stuff like contracts
and admittance to tools and permissions.
This is always like a big company scale.
You probably don't do this when you're a small company,
but that stuff matters.
Cause like, I'll give you an example.

You give edit access to somebody who wants HubSpot
and they send a fake email test to like a million people.
And now you're like on Twitter being embarrassed as a company.
And so it's like, that's it.
That's happened to me,
but I've gotten the emails from certain companies
where it's like, this is a test and it came from an intern.
You're like, that's just permissioning gone wrong.
So like, I think a big part of the role is like designing
systems that are automated to handle that stuff.
Cause ideally you don't wanna be sitting around
on your computer all day,
like clicking one conductor request to approve permissions.
You should like kind of look at the role,
look at the experience of tenure in department
and make a decision about which actresses you get.
So automating that is a big part of my job.
The manual part of my job,
which I feel like is actually really fun is again,
the designing systems and contracts for the future.
So it's about how do we design a system
and kind of create a vision and persuade people
about what our system technology can look like
over the course of one to two years.
Cause that's the time span that I usually look at.
And then how do you change state from then to now?
Some of that has to bring in financials and contracts.
That's where this plays a role.
Like, what are our contract terms today?
What's the price we're paying?
What is our growth gonna be?
Can we build a financial model to show
how much it's gonna cost us
both in terms of operational efficiency
and actual real fixed and variable costs
to like end up in that state.
And then how do I create a graceful argument
to persuade people that we should
spend engineering time and resources?
Usually it nets out pretty clearly.
It's like, you know, if it's less than a certain amount,
how do you justify spending any engineering time on it?
You have to wait for the problem to become big enough.

But then back to your other point around like,
how do I give growth managers out there something useful?
I would say like the big thing that people forget
in an early stage of a company's lifetime
is that the company will live outlast you, hopefully.
Like, you will not be the last growth manager
unless the company fails.
So I tend to take a little bit of a different approach
than most, which is like,
I think you should always be thinking about the future.
That doesn't necessarily mean you should make design choices
that over index towards the future so much
that you miss product market fit
or you make poor product decisions.
But when you set up tools and you pick tools
and you implement them, you should be thinking,
what's gonna happen a year from now
if I don't change anything?
And is this gonna be a catastrophic situation or not?
And then try to take actions to mitigate that risk.
Some examples are like,
if it's $2,000 to get SSO and two days to set it up
and that prevents you from having a security problem
where somebody downloads all your users,
seems like a great investment.
And guess what?
Over time, if you don't do that,
you're gonna eventually have to hire an IT person
to go and set up SSO for all your tools.
So some of this is more of just like being a good steward
about managing first and third party tools
with an eye towards the future.
It's always a trade-off, right?
Because the more time you spend
when you're building product
early in a company's lifetime,
that time could be spent on other things.
If you wasted managing third party tools
or setting up correctly,
then maybe you miss out on a key product feature.
But so I think it is a tough balance to strike.
Coming back to the different kind of roles
within the growth umbrella,

if someone has someone leading paid growth, let's say,
and they're just like a paid growth person,
do you also find a more tech person
to work alongside this person?
How connected would you be to someone
that's just like responsible for paid growth?
Maybe a key differentiator too,
because we didn't talk about this in the beginning,
but there's like marketing technology
and marketing operations.
So in my mind, this is just my own kind of mental framework,
is marketing technology has tech in it.
So it's usually an engineer
or somebody with an engineering background
doing that function.
Marketing operations is usually not always technical.
It's maybe a system analyst or a business analyst,
could be somebody really smart,
but they may not have an engineering background.
So I think that's a key distinction too.
And you typically see that in B2B,
where you'll have a MarOps function,
which is like setting up campaigns,
sending email blasts, debugging,
doing analytics work, SQL queries,
all like semi-technical work, but not engineering based.
So in my mind, when we talk about marketing technology,
I'm really thinking of it as an engineering based role.
And even by background, like I'm not a software engineer,
but I was a civil engineer and I learned how to program
and I went through a bunch of coding to kind of get there.
So that's my way into the engineering world.
And you typically find that a lot
with marketing technologists in particular,
is there either are software engineers
or they've got enough experience
to kind of moonlight as software engineers.
And so we get to this problem set
of like a user acquisition person,
how would they rely on a marketing technologist?
Well, I think like the most super human
user acquisition people out there are engineers
and they just like, they don't need a marketing technologist

because they set up the tool themselves.
They know how the paid campaign runs and they just do it all.
And you'll typically find these super humans
at small startups where like, you know,
the engineer is just told by the co-founder,
hey, go figure out how Facebook ads work
and like, you know, super human is born.
More often though, that doesn't happen
or those people, once they do it,
once they never want to do it again.
So you'll typically find the role split, right?
And that's the natural thing that happens as you scale.
You divide responsibility.
And you'll see how the person who's responsible
for bidding and acquiring users
and paying down those campaign costs,
then you have the person who's in charge of,
how does it all work?
How do we get this thing to actually run?
And that's very similar to what we have at Ramp.
You know, we have an amazing user acquisition team.
I know Shri Bachu was on here a while back.
He hired a guy named Cody Morgan at Ramp
who has a user acquisition team.
And the way to think of it is like,
my job is to help support them
and running all their campaign needs.
And when they have a directive from the CEO
that says we need to improve CAC
or change any of our metrics,
it's my job to partner with them to help them do that.
And actually, one of the coolest
and most fun projects that we worked on
early when I joined Ramp is we were optimizing,
we're trying to get top of funnel data
all the way down to the bottom of the funnel
and tie it with opportunity data
so we could send that back to the ad network.
So rather than like optimizing your campaign
off of when a user clicks a button on the website,
you're actually optimizing it off of,
did the opportunity occur?
And what was the kind of the ideal value

for that opportunity?
You're sending that data as a synthetic event
back to Facebook and all those guys.
So it can be really cool and super advanced stuff
depending how deep on the funnel you get
and how complex your business is.
So you're generally not running campaigns
of your own on, say Facebook or AdWords.
You're mostly as a MarTech person
supporting people who are doing that.
Yeah, awesome.
Helping them use tools and technologies to do it.
Great, do you find that,
do people give you goals?
Are you responsible for growth goals
of your own?
And in general, are MarTech people,
should they have goals and growth goals on their plate
or are they just there to support people who do?
Oh, that's a great question.
And I would like,
maybe this is like at the end of the podcast,
we ask people about this
because I would love to know
what is a better version of goaling.
So there's two ways that I've thought of it.
One is my goals are directly tied
to the people I'm serving.
So if user acquisition has,
we have, I mean, we do,
we have a growth goal and we have a cat goal at ramp, right?
So like, you know, my goals are tied to them.
So I'm gonna help make sure that that is achieved.
But then there's also like a cost and efficiency goal
that I internally think is valuable.
Whether or not the business thinks is valuable,
it doesn't really matter.
I just, I come from a sales background
and I like to run lean and efficient teams.
And so I'm always thinking myself,
how much were the tools when I came in?
How much are they now?
Have I set us up for success so that as we grow

our cost per user or cost per seat comes down
and how much more efficient are we because of that?
The ideal world is that you actually are growing
as a business, making more money,
hiring more people, acquiring more users
and your total cost of tooling per person goes down.
That's like the dream.
And there's lots of ways you can build that financial model.
But I mean, that's kind of,
that's what I think most marketing technology leaders
should strive for is to make sure
that they're controlling costs over time
because most businesses don't.
There can be some goals that are discreet in nature
that are not cost efficient,
but more like net capability related.
So it's like, hey, we wanna design a first party system
that's world class that achieves these three goals, right?
Maybe wanna incorporate artificial intelligence
into some part of our product platform
and incorporate third party tools.
And those are more like discreet product goals
in the same way that a business might launch
an external product goal to like launch a feature.
They sometimes also might have internal product goals,
clean up our revenue operation systems,
make our email marketing system better.
In particular, email marketing is one I see come often
a lot with small businesses
and even medium sized businesses
where they'll have picked a tool
at the start of the company's life cycle.
And as the company has grown,
they've outgrown that tool.
They need to move to like a braze or a marquette.
And so there'll be a big six month initiative to say,
we just gotta switch.
Like that's the goal.
We have to safely get off this small tool
to a much bigger, more complex tool
that's gonna cost us more, it is a lot more complex,
but we need to do it without losing money.
And so that's usually the job of a MarTech person

and like some type of change transformation effort.
Perfect segue to where I wanted to go,
which is tooling and your recommendations
and favorite tools.
And so maybe we start with just like,
what do you find as a good starting tool stack
for people starting to think about MarTech
and basically growth?
And then what does it end up being generally?
In terms of stack again,
and we think about B2B and B2C, right?
B2C, I would say the stack was largely solved
from 2017 to 2020.
We've had like a renaissance of the data architecture.
So I mean, what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna take your B2C,
then and now, and then we can go B2B, then and now.
Great.
Okay.
So B2C, like if you back up to 2016, 2017,
you have segment and MPortical and the rise of the CDP,
consumer-based businesses have to collect a user
and tie a bunch of data to them
and then track their actions to send about
out to performance ad networks
and email marketing tools and product analytics tools.
And so you would see this like very commoditized stack.
It would be like CDP in the middle,
bunch of tools connected.
The promise of the CDP was you integrate one SDK,
your engineers don't hate you.
You send all the data to the other tools,
you can create audiences.
Great.
Lasted for a long time.
The thing about it though,
that I think really changed around 2020
is that the cost of ownership of warehousing
became much cheaper.
And so 2021, you start getting the place where like,
yeah, it actually makes a lot of sense
and is really easy to store all your data in a warehouse,
model all your data in the warehouse
and to do it without needing a vast data team.

Cause I would say Airbnb was probably doing all this
well before anybody else was,
but they had the main advantage of a lot of money
and a lot of resources.
So now come 2020, it's cost efficient
to have a data team with your own warehouse
to manage data centrally in something like Snowflake, right?
So now this question is like, okay,
well we got to get data into the warehouse,
but how we move data around is totally different, right?
And that's what really led to the rise of reverse ETLs.
So now you can actually build your own CDP
and lots of businesses already have.
I'm consulting with a,
a Wellnum financial trading platform a couple months back
and like, they have a CDP,
they have all this internal data in their warehouse,
but they have not been able to activate it
because it's pretty old architecture,
everything's batch based end of the day.
What they need is a reverse ETL,
they would need to take that data
and just get it out into the world.
So they need the reverse ETL component
or the transformation component of a CDP.
And so I'd say now today,
when we think about B2C businesses,
you can either go to the traditional route,
buy a CDP, hook up all your tools, third party.
I think that's a great move
if you do not have a lot of engineering resources
because you're not spending a ton of time and energy
on a warehouse and all the modeling that comes with it.
You're just spending time to implement one SDK.
So I think like if simplicity is the name
of the game for your business,
CDP centralized stack, great move.
If you are an advanced engineering culture
and you are cutting edge
and you're gonna do a bunch of modeling in DBT
and you already have snowflake,
you should move towards the model of using a reverse ETL.
What it means is that there's a way

to get your data into the warehouse
and then how you activate it
is completely independent from the CDP.
And so what that means
is actually you can have like lots
of different variations of the stack.
You could like use amplitude as your CDP,
collect all your data, stream it into snowflake.
They actually now have an integration with snowflake
that like lets you feed data directly out of snowflake
and then you could use a reverse ETL
to just pipe that data wherever you want.
There's a really good section though.
I'm sorry to, you know, self-aggrandize,
but there's a really good section
in the reforge module this fall
that talks about like what happens
when you have multiple ways to move data.
You buy amplitude for your CDP
and you're moving data to your warehouse,
amplitude is much integrations,
but you also have a reverse ETL
and you can move data out of your warehouse.
Where, like, where do you choose?
And I would say like a lot of businesses get in trouble
when they don't have a methodology or a system
for how and when to move data from one place to the other.
So they just do it haphazardly, right?
And the key in systems management
is you wanna design a process for doing it.
Some type of waterfall or mental model
for when it makes sense to move data directly from amplitude,
which is like the ingestion point of your data stream
or from the warehouse where you can model and make it better.
I think the key is just having like a philosophy and approach.
There's not really like one answer,
but that's all B to C, right?
So B to B, I would say, yeah, go ahead.
Before we move on to that one,
you mentioned reverse ETLs.
What are some examples of products that are reverse ETLs
so that people can look them up?
Yeah, so I personally think like the reverse ETL

is a capability.
It's the ability to move data from a warehouse to a tool.
So technically speaking,
you will find reverse ETLs in CDPs and as standalone products.
Segment has a reverse ETL function they just launched
and particle has a reverse ETL function they just launched.
Rutterstack, which is a CDP,
has always had a reverse ETL function
where you can take warehouse data
and move it to different cloud infrastructure.
Then there are distinct standalone products.
Census, which was back base 16Z
and HiTouch are the two standalone reverse ETLs.
And like I said, I'm an investor in HiTouch,
love their work, we use them at Ramp.
At the end of the day,
you should pick tools because they help solve problems
not because of like anything else.
So we can come back to that.
Awesome, great, great.
Yeah, that was perfect, keep going.
Okay, yeah, so we talked about B2B, or sorry, B2C.
B2B, I probably don't have as much history as say like
people who survived the dot com crash in 2008.
I started really my career in B2B in 2014.
So I'll share a little bit of my experience.
And I'm just hopefully just saying this
cause like listeners may chime in and be like,
oh man, this guy doesn't know what the hell he's talking about,
which is like totally fair game.
So 2014 though, I remember working at Branch.
I was working for our COO, Mike Moleney,
who's now at this really cool company called Athena.
But at the time I was working for Mike.
And as we talked about before,
oftentimes growth stacks just appear
because you're given a challenge.
And I remember like sitting in this tiny room with Mike,
we were over in Palo Alto,
like right off the fills in Palo Alto in this tiny room,
it was boiling in the room, like so hot we were sweating.
And we were like mapping out on a whiteboard
how we would design our first version of our like system,

like how we capture leads, how we get them into Salesforce,
how we would email them with a little tool
called outreach at the time that was like still a startup.
And you know, I'll send it to you after this
if you want to show it to viewers,
but it's like so MVP,
but it still models what a lot of people have today.
There's like some ingestion point for your data,
there's Salesforce, there's some type of outbounding tool,
there's an enrichment tool,
and then a lot of other Jerry Riggs stuff
hooked up to Salesforce.
And for the most part,
that's how B2B still exists today,
is you have Salesforce,
and then the whole world
and the universe revolves around Salesforce.
You just have more advanced tools,
you have like GOM and stuff like that.
I think the big change though,
and what is like really fascinating
and has been fun to watch is in the last two,
three years, you now have this whole rise of B2B to C,
which takes all the complexity
of the top of funnel user acquisition system
and stuff set right alongside your CRM.
And how you build an elegant system there in that space,
I think is one of the most complicated
and intricate pieces of being a Martek person today.
And some of it just has to do with the data language,
like all these B2C tools were designed
with two objects, a user and an event.
And so if you're not a technologist,
it's like object orientation
is how you kind of think about the world.
There's only two concepts for the world
in a user acquisition based system,
a user who's a person either anonymous
or known coming into your website,
and the things that they do on your website or application,
and you kind of use all that data
to acquire them or model them.
In a B2B business, you have all that complexity,

but at the end of the day, you might not really need it
if all the person is doing is just the company
is signing the contract,
and then you don't really care what happens afterwards.
You might track users and events inside your application,
but it's not for the acquisition,
it's for the retention of the user.
B2B to C is fascinating because
you have all the complexity at the top,
but then like how and when do you tie a user to a company
or some type of entity object?
And what tools do you need to do that?
And where do they live in this system?
And do those tools actually have competing priorities?
Let me give you the greatest example of this that happened
at Notion when I was consulting with them,
at Chris when I was consulting with them,
and at Ramp is having both HubSpot and Salesforce.
Both are CRMs, both have the ability to track users
and companies, neither are CDPs,
and how you actually mapped the data
from HubSpot to Salesforce
kind of determines how much hell you're in.
And there's really no good solution.
It's just like you have to figure out for yourself,
like how do you want to acquire use at the top of the funnel?
How do you merge them in the bottom
of the Salesforce?
And again, there are lots of options
or versions of the world.
You could use amplitude only
and collect all your user and event data
and then merge that into Salesforce directly.
You could collect all your data in an amplitude or segment
and then post that to HubSpot,
which then posts that to Salesforce.
But of course, as you make these decisions,
your system becomes more complicated
and more than one person can manage.
So there's this trade-off between complexity
and resources that you always have to juggle.
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That's brave.com slash Lenny.
There's this big question within B2B and B2C
around how to do attribution.
Well, it's a never ending struggle.
I'm curious if you have any pro tips or best practices
or tools that you use to improve
the way attribution happens at a company.
Actually, I listened to your pod on multi-touch attribution.
I'm forgetting who you was with at this point,
but it was like, I was loving it
because it talked about MMM and MTA specifically.
Yeah, that was a newsletter post actually
and not even a podcast.
Yes, so back to our conversation

around division of responsibility.
I'm not always the person you should talk to
to create an MMM model.
I'm not a data scientist.
I know how to make MMM models and I know what they are.
Can you explain MMM briefly?
Mix media modeling and MTA stands for multi-touch attribution.
And it's these two ways of measuring the world in marketing
to understand how you should allocate resources
to campaign spend.
MTA and MMM though are both underpinned
by how you collect data.
They're both informed by the user object
and the event objects that you collect
on your website or your application
that then lead to the data that data scientists use
for MTA and MMM.
That's the connection between data and MarkTech
is often the tools and systems
that we build and stand up and manage
are what are used for these very complicated
growth experimentation and attribution results
at the end of it.
And one of the most discreet things you can do for MTA
because I get this question all the time around,
hey, do we need MTA?
What should I do first touch or last touch?
Should I do both?
And there's actually really,
I couldn't send you this guide
but there's like six or seven things you can do
to basically future-proof yourself
from needing either one.
Because most businesses either start with first touch
or last touch and then eventually they want to move
to a multi-touch attribution model.
And for those who don't know what that is,
like first touch is where you kind of collect the data
about where somebody first came from.
Last touch is where you collect the data
about where the person last came from.
So an example would this be like,
if I went to Lenny's newsletter from a Google ad

and that's all he has,
that would be my first touch and my last touch.
If I first came from a Google ad to Lenny's podcast
but then later I came from a Facebook ad
or I don't know, direct,
then that would be my last touch.
And so it's this question of like,
does the Google original first Google channel get credit
or does the second one, the Facebook or direct get credit?
And the first touch attribution model,
100% goes to the first channel
and the last touch attribution model,
100% credit goes to the last touch
and a mixed attribution model
or multi-touch attribution model,
you're trying to figure out how to split the difference, right?
And usually the evolution for businesses
is they start with first touch or last touch,
then they go to splitting it, literally 50-50.
And then somebody gets angry
because they're not getting enough credit
and they say, we're gonna go to MTA.
And there are both first party solutions for that
and third party solutions for MTA.
But back to the main thing,
the main point is if you think about what you're collecting,
this is for website businesses.
You're collecting the refer, like they're in the URL
where the person's coming from
and you need any UTMs associated with that person.
And you also need any parameters
from the advertising networks
that might give them the ability to counter conversion.
Every ad network out there has little things they stuff
into your URL that tell you that you came from them.
Facebook has an FPP, F P I D, they sometimes encode it.
Google has this thing called Google click ID,
which is just a really long string of characters
that don't matter unless you know how to decode it.
But all advertisers, and for the longest time,
advertising worked by putting parameters in URLs,
pushing somebody through your went to your website,
collecting those parameters,

and then passing it back to the ad networks
so they could get credit for it.
And so in my mind, the best practice
that everybody should stand up from day one
is to basically design the system for MTA
and then use whatever makes sense as you grow.
And so the way that I typically recommend to people
is like, imagine when a user comes to your website,
you collect the URL, collect the referring URL,
collect all of the additional marketing parameters
you might want, GCLID, TikTok ID, Microsoft ID,
you should just make a list of them.
And if you don't have that list, I can give them to you.
And then you should collect all UTMs.
So in the URL, you're gonna have UTM campaign, UTM medium.
Most marketers use this to note
like what the campaign type was.
Now, the thing is, is that UTM is only gonna be specific
to the moment in time that the person came to your website.
So like back to our example about Lenny's podcast,
if I come to Lenny's podcast and I came from a Google ad,
then my UTM is only for that Google ad, right?
So I have a Google click ID and I have a UTM.
So what you're gonna do is you gotta store
those parameters locally on the device,
either the browser or whatever,
gotta store it as UTM first campaign, UTM last campaign.
And what you do is every single time that a person comes,
you kind of replace the last campaign
or the last value with the one that's there.
So say, you know, the last one was Facebook
and then I come later from a direct mail ad,
you replace the UTM last medium with the new one.
Now, what's happening if you're using third-party tools
is that you're collecting this user information
when the person's on the website,
you're gonna collect it both as a user attribute
and as an event.
That way, what's gonna happen on the backend
for your data warehouse team
is they're gonna see a user profile
that has both the first attribution information
and the last attribution information.

And then for all the stuff in the middle,
you're firing off a page view event with first and last
where the last might deviate
if there were multiple steps in the middle.
So what they can do is they can just coalesce
over all the last UTMs they've seen
on all your events by user to get both the first one,
all the ones in the middle and the last.
And so this isn't actually that complicated to set up.
Most people just like don't do the work early on
and then when they wanna go back later
and have MTA results, they don't have the data to do it.
So one of the things I tell people
who are debating this is like,
let's just get the infrastructure right from the beginning.
Let's set up so that you have users,
you have user attributes,
you're collecting first and last UTM on users,
you're firing events with all those.
There's some other more like complex things you can do too.
Like you can set them in first party cookies
and you can also set them in your third party cookies
for your tooling vendors.
At the end of the day though, what matters is like
you just are collecting this information from the beginning.
That way, when you actually wanna progress
your attribution model,
you don't have to wait a really long time
to start gathering that data.
Amazing, I love the details that you're sharing.
I don't know where else people can find this sort of advice.
It sounds like a core part of this is one,
just having a data warehouse where you just throw
all this data into and to having a taxonomy
that you can rely on and do multiple things
with down the road, is that roughly right?
Yeah, I think that's right.
The taxonomy though, I think like what's interesting
is it's very much guided by your third party tools.
And again, that's the reason why I think companies
often miss the mark here is because they're not thinking
about what can my tool actually allow me to put into it
in the first place.

Just to make sure I understand what you're saying there.
You're saying generally, maybe third party tools limit
what you can do, which set you up for hardship later.
And maybe what you're saying is do that yourself,
that tracking piece, is that roughly what you're saying?
Yeah, I think that's right.
The way to think of it is like,
if you build your own data warehouse,
your schema is unlimited.
You can do whatever you want.
You can design product schema,
you can design user schema and event schema,
but most third party B2C tools don't allow you
to control the schema.
There's only one CDP I know that does that, that's Snowplow.
The rest are there's a user object and an event object.
So you can either stuff data as a user property
onto the user object,
or you can stuff data into the event
and fire it off as an event.
But that's what you're working with.
So what I'm saying is most people just like,
don't think about the object orientation
of the third party tools they think about,
and they don't design their website traffic
or their app traffic.
We didn't talk about app, which is a whole different slew
because doing attribution with iOS 14 is much more difficult.
But even in the website version of the world,
people will often just like collect UTMs
and think that their job is done.
And it's like, actually it's more complex.
You have to think about first and last,
think about the steps in the middle,
design it so that you're putting it
on the user profile and in the event.
And so this goes back to the main thing
that we were talking about earlier,
where it's like the job of a marketing technologist
is to think often one to two years down the road
about what we're gonna need to solve for
and design systems in an elegant way,
not to break the bank,

but to at least be the minimum viable product
to actually get there.
And so a lot of my job,
and I think the job of marketing technologists
is trying to preserve that future state
in the most minimally invasive
engineering and resource way possible.
You've talked a bit about thinking ahead
and a bunch of tools and platforms.
And I'm wondering, are there any new and emerging tools,
platforms or even growth channels
that you're keeping an eye on or excited about
or finding more and more useful?
I'd be remiss if we didn't talk about threads, right?
Threads is super interesting.
The question will be like,
how quickly can they stand up an API for advertising?
And like, what does that look like?
Or did they just blend it in with the existing meta
and Facebook architecture?
You know, one of the caveats that I'm sure
a lot of performance marketers out there
will agree with is like,
Facebook has a conflict of interest in reporting, right?
Like they want you to spend money.
So obviously they want to report the best results.
And that's the reason why attribution parties
like Branch and Afslire exist
is to somewhat curtail that conflict of interest.
And so I'll be really interested just to see
like how attribution works,
especially when you're moving from Instagram to threads,
from Facebook to threads,
will it be the same architecture
or will it be the same advertising platform?
Will they try to do something new?
So I'm keeping my eyes on that.
Reddit is also a very interesting place to convert now.
They're opening up their conversions API
and I'm seeing a lot more investment in Reddit
just because you can have embedded ads now
that almost look like they can be posts
that you can comment on.

And I think it just speaks to kind of like the maturity
of the advertising business.
You know, what's happening in the background of all this
is like ad attribution from apps
has become a lot more difficult and mostly aggregate.
From 2010 to 2020,
we had the golden years of deterministic matching
where, you know, it was very easy to run an ad
and understand with precision who installed the app,
maybe to know their name,
but you actually would know their IDFN,
you could tie that to their PII.
You can't do that anymore.
It's very challenging.
Even when you can do it,
the results that you would get are pretty low
because nobody's gonna be opting
into giving you their IDFA.
So what that means is like these ad networks
are becoming more complex, sophisticated and interesting
right at the same time that it's harder for marketers
to really understand how they're spending money.
And so I like, I'm paying a lot of attention
to like how marketers make decisions
with probabilistic data
because most of the work that I'm doing now
is actually saying, well,
given that we don't have deterministic data
about a certain audience or where somebody came from,
how can I find other information
that will create a model for 30% of the population?
And we can use that to extrapolate to 100.
So probabilistic matching and probabilistic attribution,
I feel like is a skill set that more marketing technologists
and marketers should just like get familiar with
because that's the way that we make decisions today.
Wow, I haven't heard of this concept before
and that's how people are starting,
or at least you're suggesting
that's how people should start thinking about
growth results and impact is less.
Here's how much this ad drove.
It's the likelihood that this ad did this sort of,

had this sort of impact.
Yeah, and it's not the case with all channels
but it's specific for apps that have mobile apps.
Like they're gonna be impacted by it
because they just aren't gonna be able
to like discreetly identify one to one
the person that came from a campaign.
They'll know that a group of people came from a campaign
but they won't be able to make measurement
with those people along some other attributes.
For website, it's not the same
but there are lots of things
that are making it more challenging.
What is browsers now are stripping out
those URLs we talked about.
So you're just seeing a bigger and bigger percentage
of people being counted as organic
that actually came from a paid advertisement
because when they got redirected to your website,
they just, the browser truncated all those URL parameters.
The second thing is cookie blockers, right?
We talked about all these third parties before.
The way that third parties often collect information
is they drop a cookie in your browser that tracks you.
If you've heard of segment,
which is one of the most well-known CDPs
of the last few years is they implant
a little third party cookie on the site
that contains an anonymous user ID
and all of your attributes as you're navigating the site.
And then once you log in,
they convert that to a known or non-anonymous user ID.
Usually that's tied to some type of entity ID
or a user record.
And at that moment in time, if you come back
and they see your cookie, they kind of know who you are.
Now, if you're blocking cookies,
that means you're basically remaining anonymous
throughout the entire user journey until you log in.
Not to mention like a lot of people have lead funnels
where you need that information
to actually understand what the user is doing
before they convert.

So if you're blocking third party cookies
before they even get a chance to convert,
you have no information about like where the person came from.
You just saw that they signed up
and so it might as well be organic.
So you talked about how many people are trying to get used
to this new world of ATT
and much harder to measure attribution and all that.
Is there anything you've learned that has worked well
to help you kind of recover from that a little bit
in terms of measuring what's happening?
Is there any like tips you've, you can share
or anything you've seen work?
Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of people are just like
gravitating towards MMM now
without really understanding when MMM is useful or not.
You know, I don't know if like there's a company
called Recast, maybe you're, I think you're an investor.
I am.
And that's who wrote that article that you mentioned actually.
That's right.
It's Michael and it was somebody else.
I can't remember the name.
It was another Mike, Mike Taylor.
I'm not an expert in MMM.
So like I'm not going to be able to comment
to quite the degree that they have.
But when I spoke with Michael
and when I think about MMM,
a lot of my conversation is like,
is this actually really realistic for our business right now?
Do we have the data to run an MMM model?
And how is it going to change the,
or kind of chart the course
of our performance ad marketing business
in light of having this information?
And when I think about it through those lens,
most of the time, businesses are not ready for MMM.
They actually just need MTA
and they need better probabilistic modeling.
And I know that's like not a super spicy take,
but I just say like, at least at Ramp
and what I'm seeing at other businesses right now

that are operating, it's much more of like,
we're going back to the days
where we understand in broad strokes
how much each of our campaigns is driving
and advertising revenue.
We're not able to tie that to screed with the user journey.
And we know that some percentage of this user base
might have been lost to organic.
So in light of those, how do we make spend?
And then also you can be pretty smart.
Like you can do, for example,
geobase testing on billboards,
try to isolate that as a factor
if you kind of like withhold all other confounding factors.
So you can be smart coordinating
these types of campaigns that was really challenging,
especially if you're a really big business
that say runs online advertising throughout the US
and you're trying to do targeted billboard tests
and an isolated number of cities across the States,
coordinating to like turn off demographics,
make sure there's not isolating factors.
It can be really challenging.
So there's not a silver bullet right now, I don't think.
Awesome.
Just a few more questions
and then kind of a broader question I wanna ask.
So say you want to start hiring the next Austin.
First of all, what do you look for in the person?
What are signs that they're probably
gonna be worth chatting with?
And then what are some interview questions
you'd like to ask to get a sense of how strong they are?
So the first thing that I always gravitate towards
is just like intellectual curiosity.
And I know that's like very, maybe a little bit overrated,
but I think you can tell pretty quickly
if somebody's just interested in the world
and learning things.
And the thing about third-party tools
is you are constantly learning.
You'll never be an expert in everything
because there's way too many tools to be an expert on.

I forgot what publication it is.
I think it's Martek Editor-in-Chief or something.
There's a publication that I subscribe to
and like everything is classified as Martek.
And the diagram is like, it's huge.
You like cover a wall.
Now I don't believe everything like that is Martek,
but even if a fraction is,
there are way too many tools and technology
to ever be an expert.
So you have to be both very interested in learning
and very willing to quickly learn
if you wanna be in the space.
And so I generally look for intellectual curiosity
as the first sign.
The second thing that I think helps people a lot
who have intellectual curiosity
is they're scrappy in engineering.
They might not be the best engineer possible,
but they know how to get around.
They know JavaScript, they know Python,
they can read API documentation and make an API request.
They have enough base knowledge to basically understand
how to solve a problem that an engineer might do,
even if they themselves are not an engineer.
Obviously, like you can get lucky sometimes
and you'll find the engineer who never wants
to be an engineer again and decides to move
into something less technical.
And in those cases, they're super powerful, right?
But I haven't met a lot of those people in my life.
And also there's just some like business dynamics to it.
You know, like you could probably make more
as a backend engineer than as a Martek guy.
So like you probably just pursue the pathway
that makes more money.
It's like a little bit of a like utility function.
So, you know, I look for a talk through curiosity.
I look for, you know, basic engineering scrappiness.
And, you know, as a side note,
I would say lots of people out there,
the advice that I give them is you don't have to go get
a software engineering degree.

You can teach yourself, I am self-taught.
You can take a coding academy online.
I think you get enough knowledge
through being able to do web programming
or some type of backend programming.
So I would say it's not more than a six month investment
for anybody to really get the skill set that's needed.
Obviously, like once you get the skill set,
you can build upon it with years of experience afterwards.
But if you're new to the space
and you're like in marketing ops
and you want to get more technical
or if like you're a user acquisition manager
who did pay performance,
but you're like, I really want to do things end to end.
You can just go pick up some software skills
and you probably are going to be pretty dangerous from that.
And so, you know, those are the kind of like
the two things I gravitate towards.
There's obviously many more, but those are the first two.
The questions that I like to ask is,
what is it like to ask people
how they prepared for the interview?
This is not, I can't take credit for this.
Somebody, my wife told me about, gave me this idea
and I loved it.
I think it was an A16Z partner.
But I love the question because when you ask like,
hey, how did you prepare?
You're really asking like, how does the person think?
How do they plan?
How do they take things seriously or not?
What did they read?
What did they do?
And if you have to prompt them
to tell you all the things they did,
then like, they're just not a systems thinker.
But if they're like, hey, actually, I read these things.
I did this.
I woke up.
I went for a run.
You know, like the more interesting, complex the answer,
the more interesting, complex the candidate.

And so I love the question
because it just gives you a really good understanding
of the person on a whole, like right out the gate.
And then the other question I like to ask is,
I like to ask like, so, you know,
you're coming in tomorrow to our marketing tech system.
And by Friday, you have to like write up a report
on all the things we should change.
What do you do?
And I like to ask that question
because it pretty much signals out people
who are biased versus not.
People who have tooling biases will like immediately just like,
we should implement this tool because I used it before.
And I really like to hire people who are not tool specific
or more tool agnostic.
And they think about tools as being things to solve problems
as opposed to like tools being things that you just solve
because you've already solved it one way.
This isn't a gripe and certainly not intended
to like slice at PMs.
But one of my observations of a lot of PMs
is they just like pick the tools they've already used before
because it's easy.
And it's a shortcut for them, which I understand.
But you know, problems are not always the same.
So tools shouldn't always be the same.
So I like to pick people who kind of like think
about the problem set and the solution space more.
And they ask questions about what problems
you're trying to solve.
Which I think is much more of an actual PM mindset
of like trying to work backward from the problem
as opposed to just taking the problem
and regurgitating stuff that you already know.
Are there any flags you look for that tell you maybe
this person isn't someone you want to be working with?
I answer that question on two spectrums.
One is if I'm hiring like as somebody who's hiring an IC
versus I'm getting hired.
So like one of the red flags whenever I'm approaching
a company to work for them is I'll
ask for their company financials.

And like a company that's not willing
to divulge their financials to like a director level
or above person, I don't want to do business with.
Because that means like they're hiding something.
Or they have a culture where like they
don't trust the most senior leaders of the organization.
Like either is a bad choice in my perspective.
So that's one of the questions I always
ask when I'm going up for a job.
When I'm hiring somebody, red flags,
you know, I feel like one of the false flags, not a red flag,
is more like when there's a gap in somebody's job resume.
Like it already gravitates towards that.
And it's often like really explainable.
A good example is I was hiring somebody
once you had like a two-year gap in their resume.
We didn't end up hiring the person,
but they went through all the stages.
And we didn't hire them not because of them,
but because the job got removed.
And like this person took two years
to like get a philosophy degree or maybe was a poetry degree.
And then also like taught themself to program.
So like it was like a really enriching two years.
And there were lots of ways that I could see them
bringing their past experience and the way
that they took time off together to be
a really well-rounded candidate.
And so I would say like I look less for red flags
and more for like false identifiers
on the resume application that may shortcut me
towards a decision.
Another one is just like school, you know,
like people just look at your school
where you went to undergrad or grad
and they kind of make a decision one way or the other.
And I feel like that's also can be a really bad
shortcut because there's some like amazing founders,
for example, who went to schools you maybe never heard of.
So yeah, I know that's not a good way to answer the question,
but I don't have a good way of like looking for red flags,
but I do tend to spend a lot of time
on netting out of false flags.

That was a great way to answer the question.
I want to move on to something totally different.
And this isn't something I've been asking people,
but I'm curious if there's something here
and then maybe if there is, I'll start asking this more
regularly.
I'm curious if there's just any frameworks
that you've found especially useful in your work
or even life, has anything come to mind?
One thing that I want to build,
so if I ever build this, maybe it'll be a newsletter for you,
is just a one page doc of the most useful life frameworks.
And they're just the words.
And so you obviously have to know them,
but I feel like I come across really good frameworks
all the time and then I forget them.
So I just want a one pager of Lenny's life frameworks.
We're starting this right now.
Okay, great.
Let's go.
Number one.
All right.
I like this.
All right, so I've already said this
and you've promised to put this at the top of the list.
So I'm really excited.
It's just tools are not meant to solve problems.
And I tell that to every person I hire,
I repeat it consistently at ramp
and all of my consulting gigs.
And it's not just the words, it's the spirit of it.
You know, like tools are only just meant to solve problems.
You don't have to buy a tool to solve a problem.
You also don't have to buy a specific tool
to solve the problem.
And I think it embodies so much
of like what marketing technology is trying to do.
It's trying to help people understand their problems
and then actually take action on them
using tools and technology
that are both first party and third party.
So, and most people just like focus on the tool part
and focus on the buying and integration part.

And so I think like, if you will consistently remind yourself
that tools are just meant to solve problems,
then you really get into a space
where you as a systems person can be an advocate
for your marketer or your product people.
I think sometimes there is a little bit of a tendency
for people to think that people that who manage
the set up tools are just interested
in managing and setting up tools.
But really at the end of the day,
we're trying to help people actually do stuff.
Then there's this PPS framework that I talk about a lot,
which is problem people and system.
So whenever there's a challenge that comes up,
like at ramp or in a consulting gig,
I like to first say like, what's the problem
where the people are involved
and what system does it impact?
Usually because people just jump straight to the system.
They're like, Hey, there's this problem.
I just need to solve it with the tool.
Hey, like I'm trying to do X, Y and Z.
Can you just give me admin permission straight to the system?
So if you back up though,
first you understand the problem.
Like, Hey, what is this person trying to solve?
What is their discreet issue?
A great example is like, I'm a sales manager
and I want to make it so that every time I hire somebody,
I don't have to go through this really tough process
of like onboarding my staff.
All right, so that's the problem.
Who are the people that involves?
Does the sales manager need permission from the CRO?
Do the sellers need to be trained?
Is there some other confounding factor
that we're not aware of,
why we don't want to just automate this thing?
Once you have an understanding of the people
and the problems that you're trying to solve,
then it's really, really easy to design the system
to solve that.
And so that's like my number one framework

for technologists in particular is like,
don't just jump to the system,
think backwards, start with the people and the problem
and then move to the system solution.
And then another one that I've already mentioned to you
is it's B and B as opposed to BVB.
So build and buy as opposed to build versus buy.
People all the time just think like the second
that you're talking about implementing a tool
or procuring a solution,
it's, hey, I want to build this thing
or I want to buy this really expensive thing.
Build versus buy is a very narrowly constricting
decision tree, right?
If it's only build versus buy,
then you've already made the decision
that you can only do one or the other,
which means you're already fighting
somebody in your organization.
Build and buy means that both of you can win
and you can actually create a solution
that is not only unique,
but saves the company time and resources
and makes everybody happy.
It's more of a consensus driven approach.
So I just, whenever I hear in a meeting or a call
or some discussion about how we have a tool
and it's really expensive and we want to build it ourselves,
I try to just use the build and buy framework
to tee people up and say,
what about the problem can we buy?
What about the problem can we build?
And where does it make sense to invest our resources
and our people accordingly to get the optimal outcome?
A great example is a company that I was consulting for
was thinking about building their own A.B. testing tool.
And actually like we had the same problem at Ramp recently.
And they're like, well, we just think we should build ourselves.
This is core to our technology.
We have the engineering resources to do it.
And they were evaluating it to build the entire system
themselves or buy a third party.
I think it was split.io or something like that.

And the entire engagement was basically designing
a financial model to show them
that they could make a lot more money, save money,
move faster if they just bought the third party tool
at the lowest possible cost
and spent all of their resources
that they were going to spend building it,
building around it and making it their own.
And there's lots of, hit the word synergy
because it's just like so yucky.
I don't mind it.
I think it communicates what you want to communicate.
And I feel like people don't say it as often anymore.
So maybe it's okay.
Yeah, because they're afraid.
There are mutual benefits is a better way of saying it.
If you build a tool custom to yourself
when you've bought a tool
because the vendor at that point is committed to you
and they want you to be successful.
So you often can get like kind of accelerated outcomes.
If you build on top of a third party
then if you just build it yourself.
A great example is like,
say you buy one of these AB testing tools
and you build around it
and you're a large customer of them
but you've invested a lot of your own engineering resources
to make this solution your own.
If they know that and they care about you
they're going to be willing to actually like
make you happy in the moments
where you need to change from them.
Say some SDK change or a new feature or something like that.
A framework that I talk a lot about in my reforge course
is like about building a stack.
Everybody asks like, hey, how do I build my stack?
What should I do?
What tool should I use?
You and you earlier were like,
like what's the golden stack, right?
Tell me what five tools should I get?
Just tell me.

Yeah, yeah.
I'll tell you, they'll be all at the very end.
I gotta hold out otherwise you'll ditch this podcast.
That's true.
Yeah, wait till the end.
Is there anything else you want to share
before we get to our very exciting lightning round?
The only thing I had wanted to fit in
which I feel like is maybe a framework
or maybe just like a really good decision-making philosophy
is this concept of thinking gray.
Have you heard of it before?
No, go on.
Okay, so Steven B. Sample is a professor at USC.
He wrote a book called The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership.
Really great book.
It's one of his principles.
There's actually a lot of great principles in the book
but this is the one that I think has stuck with me
the most in my career.
And the concept of thinking gray is like,
so often in life and in our jobs,
we are forced to make decisions very quickly.
We have to think black or white about a problem set
or a solution and then decide.
And one of his tactics is this concept of thinking gray
which is actually to not decide
for as long as you possibly can before you have to decide.
And it's really challenging
because it involves this little thing called patience
which I do not have a lot of most of the time.
And I know most people don't as well
but it's particularly really relevant
in systems thinking and product
because so often we believe that we have to make a decision
because our boss is telling us because there's an OKR,
because we feel the pain,
because somebody's complaining to me
but actually in reality,
you don't have to make a decision at all.
You can just let it sit for a while.
And this also applies to I think
how you move through the world and view people.

Like a lot of times we will meet somebody
in a company setting or in a business setting
and we are quick to make decisions about them.
Like we even ask me questions
about how I hire people very quickly.
We're looking for shortcuts to make decisions
about evaluating people.
One of the best pieces of advice though
about thinking gray is it gives you the grace
to not decide about people until you have to decide.
So obviously for an interview decision you have to decide.
You have to decide yes or no.
But so often you'll come across people
and you'll meet them once or twice
and I feel like there's this tendency
in the back of everybody's brain to be like,
do I like this person?
Do I want to work with them?
And the question often is like not that.
It's do you have to even make a decision right now?
And by leaving yourself to have space to decide,
you actually open up the possibility
that in the future you'll make a better decision.
So I think that's like a really good lesson for systems
and it's obviously like a lesson
that you can apply to the rest of your life too.
Austin, that was awesome.
And with that we reached our very exciting
and enlightening round.
I've got six questions for you.
Are you ready?
I'm so ready, Lenny.
What are two or three books
that you recommended most to other people?
So first book I already mentioned,
but say it again, it's the Contrarian's Guide to Leadership.
Awesome book.
Second book that would be really good
is The Art and Adventure of Leadership
by a guy named Warren Benes.
And these are more like philosophically leadership books.
They're less about like technical specs
on how to run a business.

So you have to be into that.
Favorite recent movie or TV show?
I'm currently watching for the first time Suits,
which I'd never seen before,
which I think is like pretty good
because the story arc of every Suits episode
is that there's a problem
and they solve the problem
and then the problem is solved at the end.
So it's like very gratifying for anybody out there
who's like a high anxiety person
who just like wants to have this story arc resolved
at the end of the episode.
But if that's not your jam and you like excitement,
also watching Silo,
which are, there's a, for comic relief,
there's Our Flag Means Death, which is hilarious.
Have you seen that show?
No, not Our Flag Means Death.
Now you need to go watch it.
It's about Blackbeard and a gay pirate captain.
So strongly recommend that.
And then for just like really dumb comedy,
what we do in the shadows is hilarious.
What was that?
What do we do in the shadows?
Yeah.
Okay.
Wow, a lot of recommendations.
Thank you for that.
What is a favorite interview question
you like to ask candidates?
So I talked about what you did prepare,
but the other one that I think is really good
because it forces people to get vulnerable
is tell me about the most difficult
or challenging thing you've overcome
in the last year in your life.
It doesn't have to be work related.
It can be personal.
And I think it's like a great way to just like
reset the atmosphere,
make people dig a little bit deeper into who they are

and be more vulnerable.
And I find usually it also helps calm them down
because if they shared them,
one of the most like challenging, difficult
and hard parts of their life,
then like all the other questions just are like pretty easy.
So that's one of my favorites.
What is a favorite product
you've recently discovered that you really like?
This sounds super dumb.
It's called Cal.com.
And I'll tell you the story first.
I like a bit of big Calendly user for a long time.
But Calendly is pretty expensive.
If anybody from Calendly is listening,
you want to give me a promo, cool.
But it's very expensive.
And then I also just found that like,
it is not always graceful at syncing multiple calendars
from both businesses and consulting gigs
and personal.
And I had trouble remembering my Calendly link.
There's like, I don't know,
the interface is like circa 2016.
So like really looking for something
a little bit more notion like with like command K interface
and just like integrations that work.
And Cal.com has not failed me.
It has been awesome.
So if people are looking for new Calendly tools,
strongly recommend.
Wow, I never heard of this.
What a great domain, Cal.com.
I know, right?
Killer.
What is a favorite life motto
that you often repeat to yourself
or share with other people,
either in work or in life?
I just think a lot about the power of appreciation.
And you know, like one thing
that I've just been thinking a lot about recently
is the challenge that people might be facing

in their daily lives.
I actually was recently listening to another podcast
by Adam Fishman and he had Brian Balfour on.
And Adam's basically just interviewing a bunch of dads,
which is cool.
But the nice thing about being a little bit older in life,
being a dad is that you maybe have seen hardship before.
And this podcast is great at just exploring the stories
of people I really admire and have,
and go through their hardship.
And in that, it's been a very profound experience,
understanding the type of challenges
that people have gone through in their lives.
You know, people who have lost mothers and fathers
early in life, people who have lost children,
I myself, you know, my wife and I lost her dad last year.
We lost two grandparents to COVID, we lost our dog.
So I think that, you know, the way that it ties
to appreciation is like, if you can understand
what people are going through,
and you start to view them a little bit more as a human
and understand like, what's beneath the surface of work?
Who are they?
What do they care about?
What are the things that are driving their life forward?
It just makes you so much more appreciative
for what you have and the good moments
when they're actually there.
And this doesn't just apply to life.
It's also like business too, you know?
It makes winning a lot more fun
when you know the hell that people have gone through.
So that's just like something I like to talk a lot about
with people, especially folks who are younger
in their careers who like, maybe have only seen wins,
like describing what the losses look like
so they can kind of picture in their mind
and then have some experience when they go through it.
It's a big part of my shtick.
With an excellent answer,
I'm definitely gonna keep asking this question.
For people who are still listening,
here is the promised golden stack.

Okay, so golden stack.
If I was a B2C business, I'd buy Amplitude for my CDP.
I'd buy Customer IO
and maybe I'd upgrade to Braids in the future.
I'd put everything in Snowflake.
I'd buy High Touch to reverse ETO all that data
out to my ad networks.
For attribution, probably App Slayer from a mobile app,
if not branch, but it'd probably be App Slayer first.
So that gets you, you got App Slayer,
Amplitude as your CDP and product analytics,
Customer IO for email,
Snowflake for your data warehouse,
High Touch for streaming all the data to tools.
That's like golden stack today
if I were implementing it for a B2C business.
For B2B, roughly the same, Amplitude.
If you need an attribution tool,
if it's a B2B, actually, if it's a web-only business,
probably we use Branch because Branch is better for web.
So you have Branch, Amplitude,
connect all the data to Salesforce.
Hopefully, at some point in time,
somebody builds a better Salesforce.
That'll be for our next podcast though, Lenny,
can't cover that today.
And then reverse ETOs, High Touch.
So very similar, except the only difference is,
what do you do for an email tool?
You know, a lot of people use HubSpot.
I would try to go to a customer IO as long as I could,
and then I'd move to Braise afterwards.
So a big difference is just Braise
versus customer IO for B2B.
Final question for you.
I heard that you're a drone pilot,
and I'm curious, what is the coolest place you've flown
your drone, or the coolest thing that's happened
with your drone?
So this actually gets back
to our intellectual curiosity thing.
Maybe I just search for weird people when I hire,
because I just love when people do interesting things

that are unrelated to work.
And the story is during COVID,
I didn't really want to just better myself online
through a bunch of educational platforms.
I just felt like it would be a little bit soul-crushing
to sit in front of my computer screen
and learn how to do statistics or whatever.
So I was trying to look for things that were interesting,
outside of my domain, knew nothing about.
And the three that I came up with
were I learned to fly a drone,
I became a CFP, certified financial planner,
and I became a notary.
And it's just because they seemed like really useful things
that had nothing to do with my work,
and would learn about something
like completely interesting and different.
And so those are the three that I chose.
The drone stuff, it actually was funny,
I started flying here in DC, I live in Virginia,
but maybe a mile outside of Washington DC.
And around DC, there's a restricted air zone.
And so after I did my FA drone pilot license,
and I became a certified drone pilot,
I really went down the rabbit hole
of trying to figure out how to fly a drone in DC,
because I've seen them around,
but obviously it's like a national security.
And I'm probably dramatically mutilating
the exact experience, but as I went to do this,
it was very complicated, archaic,
but also funny, because it was all online.
You have to go follow the form,
you get a letter from a local representative
who says you're in good standing.
So we found a councilman that I just knew.
And then you have to fill out all the stuff,
this paperwork, the site looks like it's from 1994.
There's an office literally in DC
where the person approves you.
Then you have to go and get a police officer
to effectively babysit you while you fly the drone.
So I did all that, and I got to the point

where I was gonna get babysat,
and I called our local police department,
and I was like, yeah, so I talked to the office,
I didn't need an officer to come out and meet at this time,
and they just like laugh me off the phone.
They're like, we're not gonna send a police officer
to watch you fly a drone.
And I just thought the thing was really funny,
because yeah, it like makes sense,
like why would they waste taxpayer dollars
to like have me fly a drone, but it was a requirement.
So I ended up not being able to fly this drone in DC,
but if anybody's listening and they know how to fly a drone
and they wanna fly, I would be totally down.
I have two drones.
I have a Mavic Air 2 and a Skydio Enterprise,
which Skydio is a really cool company as well,
if people are looking for drones.
Okay, so you're saying if people have an awesome drone
and they live in Virginia,
they should come contact you and fly some drones together.
Yeah, exactly, exactly, but just not in DC.
All right, well, Austin,
I think we delivered on the promise
of making this extremely nerdy in the weeds,
and I think we've solved a lot of people's problems.
I feel a lot of gratitude for you,
and I feel like we taught a lot of people about Martech,
which was my goal, so thank you again for being here.
Two final questions, where can folks find you online
if they wanna ask you more questions,
and how can listeners be useful to you
other than coming to fly drones with you?
So first, find me online, LinkedIn threads.
I actually have threads.
I don't have Twitter, like hot take.
I think Twitter like ruins people's careers.
I've already seen multiple careers from my Twitter.
Some people just don't know how to shut their mouth.
I'm not on Twitter, but I am on threads,
and I'm trying to figure it out.
So if you wanna document threads, you can.
I'm on LinkedIn, and then I have my email address

on LinkedIn too, and I'm always willing to talk to people.
Amazing, and is there any way listeners
can be useful to you?
Yes, I have a marketing technology course coming out
with Reforge in the fall.
If you're a practitioner of Martech,
or you're interested in Martech,
would totally love for you to take the course,
would love your feedback in particular.
I love to stand on this podcast
and act like I know a lot about Martech,
but I'm still learning.
And so I think it would be awesome
to just get feedback from the community
about what was interesting and helpful,
what wasn't there, and what we can improve upon.
And then the other thing is,
if you're ever looking for Martech help
and you wanna reach out, that's great.
Amazing, Austin, thank you again so much for being here.
Thank you for having me, Lenny, it was a pleasure.
The pleasure was all mine.
Bye, everyone.
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