Welcome to the OpenAI podcast, the podcast that opens up the world of AI in a quick and concise manner.

Tune in daily to hear the latest news and breakthroughs in the rapidly evolving world of artificial intelligence.

If you've been following the podcast for a while, you'll know that over the last six months I've been working on a stealth AI startup.

Of the hundreds of projects I've covered, this is the one that I believe has the greatest potential.

So today I'm excited to announce AIBOX.

AIBOX is a no-code AI app building platform paired with the App Store for AI that lets you monetize your AI tools.

The platform lets you build apps by linking together AI models like chatGPT, mid-journey and 11Labs, eventually will integrate with software like Gmail, Trello and Salesforce so you can use AI to automate every function in your organization.

To get notified when we launch and be one of the first to build on the platform, you can join the waitlist at AIBOX.AI, the link is in the show notes.

We are currently raising a seed round of funding.

If you're an investor that is focused on disruptive tech, I'd love to tell you more about the platform.

You can reach out to me at jaden at AIBOX.AI, I'll leave that email in the show notes.

Welcome to the AI Chat podcast, I'm your host, Jaden Schaefer.

Today on the podcast, we have the pleasure of being joined by Brad Lee Metrock, who is the CEO of Project Voice, which provides content and community around conversational AI and a general partner of Project Voice Capital Partners, which is a venture capital fund, which invests in top tier early stage conversational AI startups.

Project Voices annual conference takes place every year in April in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

And it's actually known as the one of the most influential events on the calendar for conversational AI companies and investors.

Super happy to have you on the show today, Bradley.

Welcome to AI Chat.

Jaden, you killed that.

I need you to follow me around and introduce me everywhere.

I'm honored to be here.

Well, you've done some pretty cool things.

What I would love to kind of kick this off with is, I give a brief intro, but tell us a little bit about how you got started with Project Voice, how you got started with Project Voice Capital Partners.

Was that like an extension after the fact or before?

What's the kind of story and journey to being CEO and working on these two different spaces?

Yeah, you know, I'm just a guy, you know, I'm a business guy, I'm an entrepreneur, I'm not an engineer, I'm not a PhD.

I'm just somebody who around circa 2050 and saw Amazon Alexa come into the fore and became very intrigued and wanted to learn as much as I could about the idea of speaking to technology.

Okay.

It was at that point that I started learning as much as I could.

I started meeting as many people as I could and it started my podcast, This Week in Voice in 2017, which is in season nine.

Amazing.

Yeah, we've had a lot of great guests.

Mark Cuban's probably been our biggest, but who's who of those working in conversational AI?

Along the way, I started This Week in Voice VIP, which is a sub-stack newsletter that 27,000 people receive and a few of them occasionally read and, you know, they're talking about conversational AI topics and companies, the conference, Project Voices Annual Conference has been around since 2016 and has been very influential in that time.

So all of these things have gone into accelerating the adoption of conversational AI, not just voice, but text and chat as well, this idea of using our natural language to engage and interact with the technological world around us.

And a couple of years ago, as a result of the conference, I had the privilege to meet Mark Lait, who's the original venture capitalist in the conversational AI world, and he had a predecessor fund called Voice Punch, which made a lot of investments and he learned that I was looking at the market wanting to start a fund.

He was in the process of thinking about starting a second fund.

And so we decided, hey, let's team up.

And that's what we did.

And Project Voice Capital Partners is the result of that, which deploys capital to what we think are top tier conversational AI companies and startups on a quarterly basis.

So, you know, the answer to your question is, I gave you the answer.

You put one foot in front of another, you get your work yet on a daily basis, trying to improve your own understanding and network, and ultimately, you know, you can get somewhere and wherever we are, that's how we got there.

That's fantastic.

Tell me a little bit more about Project Voice, what that entails.

Is that just kind of like the name of your conference and podcast group?

Is there more to it?

What's kind of under that?

Yeah, it encompasses the podcast, all the content, and it encompasses the conference.

So prior to COVID, we had a bunch of events all over the country.

We had a big healthcare event in Boston.

We had a big car event in San Jose that also went to Detroit.

Different events that were broken out by verticals that were in different parts of the country.

We've now reduced that to just one event, our annual conference.

So there used to be a lot more under the roof, but it's helpful just to think about that as podcast newsletter, conference, as well as a decent amount of consulting work, and then the fund is a separate entity on its own.

Okay.

Very cool.

Well, I'd love to dive into that a little bit more, but I did have one question.

You piqued my interest.

You said you had Mark Cuban on your podcast.

How did you score that?

How did you get in contact with him?

You know, Mark, one of his very positive attributes is that he is interested in technology.

He's a proud early adopter of technology, and you can see that over the course of his career in numerous ways.

And with Alexa, just like it captivated me, it captivated him.

He did some interviews with Amazon themselves.

He was in other media outlets talking about Alexa.

I thought, you know what?

I need to have this guy on the show, and that resulted in not one, but two appearances.

I had him back on a couple of years later, and he was part of a conference we did as well, and just cultivated a good relationship with them.

Very friendly guy, very obviously super smart.

Very, very cool.

Okay, so something, you know, listening to you talk about some of the things you're interested in and focused on, a question I have, and I'm sure a lot of people would have is, you know, how have you kind of seen this AI landscape shift since you started this back in 2015?

Obviously, there's been some big advancements.

I mean, Alexa alone has announced that they're almost completely scrapping what they have, and they're rebuilding it with something more like chat GBT, sort of like an AI language thing.

What are some of the other ships that you've seen since you've started?

Yeah, it's a great question.

So, you know, back when Alexa came into the mainstream consciousness, 2015, 2016, in there, and then, you know, a year or two after that, really selling all, you know, echoes and echoes in everybody's house, and Alexa, you know, on everybody's mind, it was in that era where it was, you know, you had business looking at that, say, what is it we're exactly supposed to do with this?

First of all, it's Amazon.

It's on a consumer level, a company that a lot of people place trust in on a daily basis.

But from a corporate point of view, really doesn't cultivate the same sort of warm, fuzzy feeling, right?

Right.

Well, that's strike one and strike two.

But a lot of what Amazon did at constructing that, how that ecosystem worked, did not make it as easy as perhaps they could have to enable businesses, all sorts of businesses, to create the experiences that would be housed under that roof.

Okay.

And there was some successes that you saw, like, for example, Batman vs Superman, random example.

But when that movie came out, it had a very successful, incredibly, surprisingly successful Alexa skill, which is the nomenclature for an experience in Alexa, an app for Alexa, very successful app that was in that ecosystem.

Others, some bigger brands put a lot of money into it and didn't see nearly the success.

So it was hit with that ecosystem.

And now, to see what you just described, that Amazon has gone back to the drawing board and they said, okay, we have this existing, it's not quite tearing it down to the stud, so to speak, but it's, it's, we've got this existing skeleton, how to add, how do we use generative AI to add more musculature to what we're trying to do and accomplish.

And I think that, I mean, one of the top stories I'm watching for between now and the end of 2024 is the rise, once again, of the Alexa ecosystem, because I think that it's going to be profound.

The other sort of, so that's one major trend line, I get simple in sort of answering your question in that back then, it was very unclear how all of this conversational AI would lead to business outcomes.

This is how to say, hey, we need to experiment and keep one toe in the water, but it doesn't feel like the time has come.

Now, there's no question that the time has come.

And part of that, it's not so much chat GPT.

It's more of, at the beginning of the pandemic period, a lot of conversational AI solutions were implemented into contact centers because it's easy to forget how transformative that period was, but everybody's at home, calls flooding into businesses, nonstop, how are we going to deal with this?

Conversational AI was the answer, right?

And that was the first moment where it became crystal clear, unambiguously, that beyond debate, the conversational AI can lead to a positive in the black ROI for almost any type of business.

Yeah.

And it's only progressed from there.

Yeah, 100%.

Yeah, it's so fascinating to see some of those shifts and changes, and obviously it's been really big.

Another question I would have for you, because you have these two sides, you have the conference and podcasts and media side, and then, of course, you have the venture fund side.

Based off of your unique position there, what are some interesting or exciting startups you've been seeing in the space lately from the venture side that are getting you excited about AI and what's happening there?

That's a great question, too.

So I, we're seeing, I mean, I think where I would start the answer to that question is, we love the vertical specialization of conversational AI.

So don't sit here and tell me in a pitch that, oh, we've got this core capability, and we're

going to go into banking, we're going to roll into healthcare, we're going to roll into hotels, we're going to go into meetings at a table, we're going to conquer it all, stomp it.

Yeah.

That's been, you know, like, I stopped listening to that two words out of your mouth, and trust me, that's been tried.

Yeah, yeah.

Where the money is at, it's, as I say, riches and niches.

Yeah.

It's, the nature of this technology is, it's so complex, it's so human that the only way you have a chance to be successful is to dive into a specific niche.

And for example, we, in, in the second quarter of this year, we invested in a company that is specifically applying conversational AI into the financial services, investment banking, like private banking schemes, and using, using a lot of different tools to make it easier to manage customer service, broadly speaking, in that specific context.

Yet, could their tools be useful to help manage corporate prisons?

Sure they could, but they're not because they're focused on this one area and that discipline is really important for this technology in our opinion today.

Yeah.

Yeah, I love that.

I think that's some really great advice, especially for founders listening today.

And, you know, another question, so obviously you have this, you know, you really are looking at people that are going into specific niches and what they're doing, what are some other factors that you consider important when you're making investments and looking at these AI companies?

Yeah, yeah.

It's, it's key, and I tell you a big one that is, I'll phrase this as a ethical framework for the intermediate term.

So right now we're in a very strange time where the technology has moved so quickly in many aspects relative to these startups that regulation, regulation usually lags, right?

You just usually play catch up, but not, not like this.

So the government's way behind and the government's running at maximum speed that it feels like we never even like seen them try to run at this speed before to get caught up on AI policy making.

Yeah.

You know, it creates a lot of volatility, it creates a lot of uncertainty and with what you look for with startups and the entrepreneurs who lead them is it's okay to not have the answer because no one knows what regulation is going to come down the pike and what it's all going to end up meeting, but you better be studying it and it better be very clear that you have at least a reasonable baseline of knowledge on this front because your entire company could cease to exist should the ball bounce one way or the other or it could be the entire opposite where you now have a tremendous new opportunity if something is to shake out

in a certain way or not.

So ethics, policy making, how a startup looks at that today is more important than usual.

Okay.

Yeah.

I don't think that is an important thing to look at as it has a really massive impact.

Another question I'd be curious to hear your opinion and thoughts on, right?

You're in the AI space and you're in like this kind of voice space.

Obviously, the mixing of those two, a really powerful use case a lot of people talk about is how that's going to be disruptive to customer service.

I mean, there's even like sales and other areas, but we're starting to see tools out of like 11 labs, for example, that is live streaming the AI response in real time.

So essentially, you can have a conversation and it's live kind of conversing back with you.

How do you look into these technologies coming out?

How do you see the space transforming areas like sales and customer service?

Are all customer service representatives going to lose their jobs?

What does this look like in five years, say?

A lot of people are going to lose their job, for sure, and they already have.

That's kind of underreported and it speaks to what I was saying earlier.

Really, the bloodletting of jobs started at the beginning of the pandemic in terms of customer service and a lot of that's not coming back.

I think that the framework I try to bring to your question is, and it just informs everything I do, is what you're doing based in utility, like long-term utility to a person or a business or is what you're doing a gimmick that is not the best way over any sustained amount of time to solve this problem.

So there's a lot that can be debated around that.

You've got AI systems in contact centers now that have so-called human in the loop, where it's all AI front-end, but then a human can intervene at any point.

Is that the ultimate destination?

I don't know, it doesn't really feel like it.

But for now, it's a profitable business, and again, this comes back to each industry.

So there's different things that go on with each industry that speak to, like each industry has got long-standing pain points that need to be addressed.

Healthcare definitely has them, hospitality definitely has them, and when you see conversational AI rise up to address these pain points, then the next thing you look at is, okay, what's the cost structure that the economics make sense?

And if these boxes start to get checked, it's not just that those are good businesses, but that's a new sort of galaxy of good businesses.

And figuring out, okay, now if we're solving this problem, then the next domino to drop is here, here, here, here, here, where can we play?

So that's a long way around answering your question, but I think the biggest thing with any technological shift is, is all of this stuff a gimmick, or does it have staying power, and that's something that we feel like we're halfway decent at thinking about?

Yeah, I appreciate that, and I mean, I appreciate your straightforwardness with that, because I do, you know, something I hear a lot from people in different industries, I was recently at a big AI conference, and I saw everyone had this phrase, they would say, which is like this religious phrase, which was like, you won't be replaced by AI, you'll be replaced by someone who has AI, and it was like, I felt like it was this thing people were clinging on to, like, don't worry, AI's not going to replace me, and like, while maybe that's true in some cases, I also feel like sometimes we have to be honest and say like, a lot of what people do will be replaced by AI, like sales, customer service, like, I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but like, I've seen some really incredible startups in technology that automate that to a very high level, even with human in the loop, that means there's only one human needed now instead of 10, right?
So I think sometimes it's important that we're kind of honest where that's going.
A question for you in this kind of space is like, what jobs or areas do you see as being very difficult or impossible to replicate with AI?
I mean, originally, if you had asked me five years ago, I would have said art, music, movies, AI will never do that.
It can automate all the easy little calculation tasks.
It feels like that's completely flipped.
Had a lot of problems with calculation tasks, I know they're getting better at that, but it's like phenomenal at art and, you know, image generation and video is kind of the next frontier with that in your, in your mindset, like, where are the next areas that, you know, this is coming for?
And what are some areas that are a little bit more resilient?
I think that each industry is going to have positions that are
hard to touch, like, for example, in law, you think about like the legal realm.
There is no need.
Well, I should be careful.
There's way less need to have some, to have a human being draw up.
A business life, you know, a business, a basic business.
The articles of incorporation or a wills and trusts or, you know, the
zones where there's documents that have been around for a hundred years that have like miniscule deviation from how it, you know, amongst any of them, that's a real danger zone because, you know, if there's not much, even on the edges to how often these things change, well, yeah, then let AI do that.
But what's interesting about law is, you know, like with publicly traded companies or other, other sorts of scenarios, you need a human there for liability purposes.
So it's not that the human's going to like necessarily add a bunch, although in many cases they do.
They're needed for a different reason.
It's a regulatory concept where there's no shareholders of the company.
There are no lawyers and no, no, nobody who's going to be comfortable without a human being the final sign off on key actions.

So it's a liability thing that's keeping somebody in place.
And the fact that AI can't accept that liability, only a human can.
Same thing at art where we saw, you know, one of these early court cases come
back and say, AI can, AI created works cannot be intellectually, like it
cannot have from IP rights.
So now, even if an AI creates it, it has to have a human name attached to it to
be protected under United States law.
There's you another one where humans are going to be sticking around.
So part of the answer to that question is regulation and policymaking is going
to have a big, big, big, big, big impact on humans and jobs that are shielded.
The utility point of view, there's obviously going to be jobs where humans
are better at doing things than AI is at doing them.
But it's, I would say for where I sit, it's very unclear what those are going to be.
All just simply moving too fast.
And I would never feel comfortable advising.
Like if I'm talking to a group of college, soon to be college
graduates, I'd say, or better yet, incoming college freshmen, what should we study?
I don't know what you're asking me for.
I would simply just stay on top of this AI thing as best you can.
Yeah, it's so funny, because obviously I sit here, I make podcasts every single day.
I see every single AI project and startup that's coming out on a daily basis.
And when people ask, that's why I ask people, because I actually genuinely
have a hard time telling you this or that is not going to be touched by AI.
You know, it's interesting for a long time, people were saying, well,
it's the blue collar jobs.
Like I had some friends that were all kind of intact and started up together.
They're like, oh, man, you know, forget this.
All this AI is going to automate all my businesses.
I'm just going to go become like an electrician or a plumber.
And it's interesting because on the one hand, you know, that that's like a
concept that rings true.
But at the same time, when you look at companies like, you know, Tesla,
creating the humanoid robots, in my mind, an electrician and a plumber
isn't even guaranteed because with a humanoid robot with an AI brain in it,
maybe that's further down the line five years, 10 years, I don't know.
But like it's very hard for me to think like everything, anything is truly,
truly, I don't know, protected.
And I think maybe the reason why it's so hard for us to envision this and
where it goes is because so many new industries and new things will be
created that the entire human workforce may be shifted to a very large degree.
It doesn't mean it's going to dissolve.
I don't believe in that.
I believe like humans are industrious and innovative and will find things to do.

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But I just feel like the whole, the whole thing is shifting so fast and in
such a big way that there's a lot of jobs we don't even think about now that
will exist and that's going to be a big part of kind of where this all goes.
I think the trades are a big target.
Yeah.
Or a, yeah, if you look at the economics of those industries, you know,
you got electricians, you got plumbers, those sorts of folks, you know,
make an akilling.
Yeah.
And it's, and you, that's a golden opportunity for AI to swoop in and at
minimum bring down that cost structure and change the way that the pricing is
done of those sorts of things.
Also, you know, there's, I mean, stuff like that, like I think about
construction where there's injuries to human beings and like there's insurance.
Like it's, I think we're going to have robots capable of building houses.
I mean, I think they probably already exist now.
I think they'll be mainstream in the next two to three years.
And what is that?
As you said, what does that mean?
Like I said, if I had the answers, I'd be sitting on a beat somewhere.
Yeah, no, it's so fascinating to think about.
I was just talking to a guy the other day and he was telling me, you know,
he just got a job as a, as a pipe fitter and he's like, yeah, like brand
new, just started my apprenticeship year one a week ago and like instantly
my salary is like 90, $95,000 a year.
First year apprenticeship.
He's like, you know, it's a five year apprenticeship.
By the time I'm done, I'll be making a killing.
And I'm like, you know, amazing.
But at the same time, like you said, those areas where there's very high
costs and like high liabilities, if someone gets injured, it's going to
make a lot of sense for that stuff to be automated by robots.
Even, you know, like delivery drivers, like, you know, everyone in the news
is talking about how much UPS drivers are making.
Well, we have like, you know, self-driving cars coming very soon.
It's not far fetched to think a little robot's going to drive out of
the back of that thing and go drop a package off of your front door and
zip back in and off it goes, you know, so it's going to be very interesting
to see how a lot of this is, how a lot of this is evolving.
One thing I would ask you is, you know, based off of your vantage point,
what is one piece of advice you feel like you could give to investors
looking at AI startups and then on the flip side, to entrepreneurs
that are currently building in this space, maybe a piece of advice for each

that you think could, you know, in general help the industry?

That's a good question.

So, you know, for ever for the entrepreneurs, you know, there's there's a tendency that we're seeing now with AI, anything AI related, even if it's a startup that doesn't involve AI, we're going to throw AI in there, right, to make it sound better than maybe it is.

Yeah.

There's a real lack of humility around endeavors, corporate startup endeavors to deploy AI in meaningful ways.

And I think that entrepreneurs, it's not a technological piece of advice.

It's a personality piece of advice.

I think that entrepreneurs and startups will be well-served to bring their attitude down a peg and approach AI with humility.

Because as quickly as we have arrived at this place where AI is whatever everyone wants to talk about, it's having real intangible impact with a lot of more real intangible impact to go.

I mean, we take a look at entrepreneurs.

I mean, we just assume your technology is going to work.

Why are you, you're not going to get through the door to talk to us without it being at some sort of baseline level.

We're looking at you, and do you have what it takes to go the distance?

And humility is part of that equation all the time, certainly for what we look at.

And on the investor side, I think the corollary there is you want to see, you're not going to see entrepreneurs, for the most part, who are second, third, fourth, repeat serial investors with AI.

Like that's a liar is what that is.

So it all comes back to, you know, are there things in that management team or even the CEO's profile that suggests that they can deploy AI in some sort of disciplined, niche way?

Yeah, that's a great starting point.

And then from there, do they have the human skills to take it further into where it needs to go?

Because we live in a time today where, you know, a lot of the management approaches, say from the 70s and 80s, or even you go back to like the 50s, that's not going to work.

So you've got to be able to have some involved management skills that you bring to the table.

And that's, no matter how it is you're looking to play in this area, it's important to have that top of mind.

Yep, I think that's super, super key and super important.

Bradley, thank you so much for coming on to the AI chat podcast today and sharing some of your perspectives and insights.

You're working on some fascinating stuff.

If people want to get in contact with you, what's the best way to do that?

What's the best way for, you know, startups to maybe contact your fund,

people to learn more about what you're doing, podcast and event space.

How can people find that?

Yeah, so Bradley, B-R-A-D-L-E-Y at P-V-C-P dot V-C.

So that's a lot of letters.

But Project Voice Capital Partners, P-V-C-P dot V-C.

You can email me there.

I welcome that.

And then connecting with me on LinkedIn, I welcome that.

Amazing.

And I'll leave a link in the description for people to find your website and whatnot.

Thank you so much for coming on the show today to the listeners.

Thank you so much for tuning in to the AI chat podcast.

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If you are looking for an innovative and creative community of people using chat

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I'll drop a link in the description to this podcast.

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It's a lot easier than a podcast as you can see screenshots.

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And I'll see you tomorrow.