



Episode 1 Transcript: Technology at Disney – Emerging Technology and Machine Learning Engineering

Ashley and Tony (Podcast Hosts)

Welcome to the Life of Disney podcast, the show where you discover what it's like to be part of the story and a career with Disney as we bring the Walt Disney Company's core values, culture, and work to life. We're your host, Tony Williams and Ashley Siegel, and we are going to share some remarkable stories from the perspectives of the people and the teams behind the magic.

Ashley

This week on Life at Disney. We're excited to sit down alongside Rekha Bachwani, who is a director of machine learning engineering at Disney Streaming. As a technologist with Disney Innovation is at the core of everything we do. Our technologies are constantly elevating, evolving, and pioneering the future of our streaming platforms, content, and more to be one step ahead when creating the latest in immersive entertainment experiences.

Ashley

Hey Rekha.

Rekha

Hey, Ashley. Nice to meet you. Thanks for having me here.

Ashley

I'm so glad you're here with us today.

Rekha

Yeah, same here.

Ashley

So, everybody has a Disney story. Would you talk to us a little bit about how you got to where you are right now and the role that you're doing today?

Rekha

Yeah, it's a short story, but it feels much longer. So, I joined Disney in the early stages of the pandemic. So, to be specific, June 2020. So, I've been like a little over two years. I joined as a senior principal engineer with the specific goal of growing machine learning, specifically machine learning for various engineering pieces at Disney streaming. And boy, it has been a journey. We have gone through a merger with Hulu, and it's been exciting. So today, I lead a team of about 11 dedicated reports. So, we're about a team of 20 spread across three different locations. So, it's been a fun ride.

Ashley

That's amazing. In June 2020. So, you were a couple of months after Disney+ launched. Right? So, what an amazing time to be coming in and taking on such big work. How was that?

Rekha

It's been great because I was at Netflix prior to that, and we would see some increase in subscribers, but the amount of explosion and rate at which the subscribers grow, keep us on our toes. So, it's been amazing to see how we grow from like a few tens of millions to over 100 million subscribers. It keeps us on our toes but also brings in a lot of challenges in building this nice streaming platform that supports Disney+, ESPN+, and now Hulu. It's exciting and challenging.

Ashley

Yeah, it's amazing. And, you know, knowing that you were coming from a streaming company into Disney to be working on our streaming platforms, not only domestically, but around the world. How does someone get into that? I mean, I started my career with streaming, too, and I know how niche it is. But especially, you know, when we think back, you know, five, ten years. So how did you get into that work, to begin with?

Rekha

Actually, it was, in some ways, by accident. So, I came to the U.S. to do my grad school, and I was in this weird area of combining machine learning with engineering. And I was working for Intel more on the research side. But I had a couple of friends like a couple of friends from undergrad as well as my grad school at Netflix. And they would talk about the unique culture and stuff. And I was wanting to work in the Bay Area, so I applied there, and I got that role. And actually, I wasn't a big watcher of TV or streaming, but being at Netflix and now at Disney, I consume a lot more content and realize the power of the amazing stories, especially the impact Disney has had on people across their lives. The diversity and variety of content we have. It's amazing.

Ashley

I think that's my favorite part, too, right? We get to impact everybody, from small children to grandparents, and all the stories that we're telling everywhere around the world. I mean,

you mention that your team is in three cities around the world. Where is your team spread out between?

Rekha

So, I have a few folks in the Bay Area and a bunch of folks in New York, and then they work with a lot of folks in Beijing. And now, even like the product managers out in Seattle and L.A. So, it's a diverse company spread all over the world. So, you get a chance to meet people from very different backgrounds at the same time, you are working commonly towards a singular goal.

Ashley

I love that. I think that's one of my favorite things we get to learn about the culture that all our colleagues and all our teams are working in. And it can be, like you said, so diverse, such a spread of folks around the world working on this. I think that's what brings so much of that big life view in everything that we're doing. Right. I think that's so powerful.

Rekha

Absolutely. Like before this, I worked only for tech companies. So, there was diversity, but it's a different type of diversity and heterogeneity. Versus here at Disney, I have sat in the meeting with former all-star athletes to like artists and musicians, and it's just mind-boggling, and the way it opens your mind, it's unbelievable. I don't know any other company that would expose you to this kind of people from diverse backgrounds.

Ashley

Thinking about your day-to-day. So, what does a day or a week in your role look like?

Rekha

The more I get into leadership roles, a lot of my day goes into talking to different people. So, I have a couple of days a week that goes into mostly one on ones with folks, where some of it is technical but more about how they're feeling, working on their career, and sort of generally getting to know people. The other part is split between meeting with stakeholders like product CPMs and then working on the plan and vision. So typically, I just to spend at least once a week planning out, reflecting on myself, how we did and where we are from the product perspective, what we plan to do, where we are, and how we need to adapt as we go along. So, I would say a lot of documentation, listening to people, talking to people, setting the vision, and making sure that all the gears that power that amazing streaming platform are not out of sync.

Ashley

Now, I know that when I was at streaming, explaining what my job was to people outside of the industry was one of the most difficult things. How do you describe what your job is, for people that are not in the industry? How do we how do you describe what that looks like?

Rekha

I can tell 20 stories, so my niece thinks I am working on Frozen 3. More realistically, what I would say my job is that my team is building a platform that powers a portion of the Disney streaming. So more specifically that all the awesome personalization algorithms that you see that follow around the homepage, also my team builds a platform that keeps that can enable these algorithms to be developed quickly and production it without affecting data like everyone having to understand all the infrastructure that they need to do. So, sort of building a scalable and intelligent platform on one side, the other side of my team actually comes up with algorithms to say prevent fraud in our space so that streaming accounts are safe. And if they're compromised, take big action, or we detect them before the users notice it, and maybe like capacity management or something like ESPN has Pay-Per-View events, we launch tons of titles practically on a weekly basis. So how do we get intelligent scale up and down that infrastructure so that the costs are not too high, but at the same time it keeps spreading the magic at a much faster rate and then up to a much broader audience seamlessly.

Ashley

That's amazing. And you know, there's so much of an impact, it sounds like, from your work directly on our consumers, right? They know when a Pay-Per-View is starting on a Saturday night or when a new show is launching on a Wednesday or Friday on Disney+; they just get to put it on. But your team is really the ones that are making that possible, right? So how does it feel to be working on these different products that are impacting directly? You know, your niece who wants to watch the Frozen movies or any of our consumers who are sitting there to hit that play button. What does that like to be leading work that really is making that direct impact?

Rekha

Oh, it's absolutely inspiring and motivating and scary at times. I mean, there are Friday evenings where we are looking at and solving bugs if something goes wrong. But at the same time, just to be able to see the magic and how seamless the experience is, is extremely rewarding. And now, with Hulu on our plate, we are unifying this platform, and it's different; we support live sports on both ESPN, we support live TV on Hulu, and then all sorts of video on demand across Disney, Hulu, and being able to work on projects like this. I don't think any other company can provide you with an opportunity like that.

Ashley

Yeah, I think people forget, you know, there are so many conversations we have where people don't realize that Disney+ and Hulu and ESPN+. Right? That's all being really built and run by your teams. And so, I think it's also amazing to see how the technology is kind of melding into each of those. Right? We're now starting to see some live on Disney+. Certainly, Hulu has had that for a long time. Seeing the ESPN+ content on Hulu. So that all must be really the result of the innovation that a lot of your teams are driving. Is that right?

Rekha

Yes, absolutely. I mean, since Hulu joined the Disney family like they're going through this unification process, and the plan is still sort of individualized across services. But we are going through humungous insights so that we have a singular platform to empower all of these services so that the user experience doesn't change drastically when they move from Hulu to ESPN+ and Disney+ in that ecosystem. And we do it in an efficient way. So, it's exciting, it's challenging, it's hard. But that's what keeps us inspired and motivated.

Ashley

Absolutely. Do you have any favorite stories of projects that you've worked on or maybe even challenges that you've taken on?

Rekha

So, I mean, when Hulu joined the family, I'm part of that unification effort and led the building of a machine learning platform. So initially, as a senior principal engineer, I'm wearing my principal engineer hat; my goal was to figure out what would be the right way to combine them or if we should make one and build up off of it. We realized like no, for us to do justice, we need to sort of take a step back and not build all of it from scratch, but kind of restart, and so building this platform has been the maximum growth I've had in a year, I would say, in my career. So, we start off building a new platform, still trying to use what existed on Legacy Disney+ or Hulu. And that's where I sort of brought a team that is spread in the Beijing office from the Hulu side. There were folks from Warsaw who recently left. But like the European team and U.S. team, bringing them all together and just an amazing way to pick people's brains who have had different experiences, some of whom don't even have Disney+ but are then able to contribute. So that has been my favorite project, and I think that is going to be a project for the next couple of years.

Ashley

Absolutely. It's amazing to hear just how much growth, not only in the work but personally, you're feeling and seeing through all this work. Now, we've talked a little bit about Disney and the culture here, but thinking about Disney streaming as a kind of a business within the business, right? What does it feel like working at the kind of streaming company that is within the larger Walt Disney Company? And what is really unique to the culture of streaming?

Rekha

I would say one way to describe I feel that Disney streaming feels more like a medium-sized startup within the large Walt Disney Company. So, in some ways, when I joined two years ago, some of the things were said because that part of our Disney company, that is legacy, that is history, and there are ways of doing things. But if I focused more on streaming and day-to-day, it works more like a startup. It was literally like, hey, if going to figure out if you have a way to do it, just all like get the minimum set of approvals, but just execute on it, and you're going to have multiple hats and stuff, which is usually typical of a small to medium-sized startup. So, my experience at Disney streaming has been about

working on this very fast-paced, amazing startup. But without having to worry about funding, or like having to raise funds are going to VCs or something, that is given to you. So, it takes away that pressure. But you still get to innovate and have an impact from the ground floor onwards.

Ashley

Yeah. And I mean, in the time that you've been here, we've grown to so many countries, right? Especially with Disney+, I feel like every day it's launching somewhere new.

Rekha

Yeah. I mean, I lost a count at this point before we launched 20 or 40 new countries and stuff. So, like we recently had a media launch, and we added another set of European countries, Hotstar existed in India, but we consolidated it with ESPN+ and now Hulu. And that's just like things keep changing, and you get to wear different hats. We evolve at a fast pace both on the technology side as well as like on the workforce side.

Ashley

When you think about your team and the teams that you work with and how you're fostering that sense of belonging right there, so much that we're doing in terms of our day jobs, but there's so much more that comes with especially being part of the Walt Disney Company, whether it's our employee resource groups or mentorship, the different conferences, the things that we represent at. What are some of the things that really excite you in that space that helped foster that sense of belonging?

Rekha

I mean, personally, all of them I've benefited from all of them. Like I've worked with you in going to say Grace Hopper or PRIDE summits and having the resource group like the resource groups. There has been such a, I don't know, like there's such a sense of belonging and comfort in being able to talk to other people who look like you have similar experiences across some dimensions of your life and yet collaborate with the diversity of people on the technology. In the beginning, when I joined, there wasn't like the BERGs weren't necessarily fully introduced. I think I worked with our talent and recruiting to get them included. But on my team, when a new person joins, we typically end up playing some online games. I don't have a slide deck, but I share with them that these are the different BERGs that I'm part of, and people are encouraged to speak, and I think my leaders do the same. But I think more than everything; people are very good at listening to you, and I think that's the biggest way I feel like a sense of belonging is irrespective of your differences or similarities. If there is room and space for like different voices, and people are able to listen to me; that has been the best part of belonging at Disney. And I'm trying to pass it along to my team and grow my team accordingly.

Ashley

That's amazing. I think that really is a test of your leadership, right? That's not how it is everywhere. And so, to have somebody that is saying, yes, like come in and share your story,

your own personal story, your professional story, I think it's such a powerful thing. And it's, you know, it's one of my favorite things about my job is I get to work with people who have been here for 30 and 40 years to tell their story, people who are brand new, and everyone in between. And you mentioned the Grace Hopper celebration, so I have to dig in a little bit. So, a woman in technology, you're a director in streaming, in machine learning. You're probably one of the only ones in many spaces, right? Doing the type of work you're doing at that level, how has that been throughout your career, and how have you seen that hopefully improve, especially over these last few years? Navigating that.

Rekha

I mean, Grace Hopper. I mean, today is a 10,000+ conference. I remember attending Grace Hopper back in 2007 or 2008; I can't remember. I was in grad school at that time. It was still a big conference, but it had like 1000-2000, it's grown so much. So even at that time, it was such a, I don't know, sense of belonging, comfort to see other women in technology. Like when I went to grad school, in my department of 30 professors, there was literally just one female professor. And by the time I graduated, there were two out of like 33. And from there to now, when I look at some of the companies, it's like, okay, yes, we may still not be at 50/50, but we are at 30%, 40%, and that shows the progress. I would say my personal experience has been two-fold in some ways; I've been lucky. I was always different, but at least that gave me a power and shut out the noise if that was not the case. But I also had amazing allies. I think the allies are highly underrated I would say. I've had amazing allies who believed in me or who would actually speak on my behalf when I couldn't or for me to speak would have been a bigger risk. So, I felt very supported along the way. Amazing female and women or queer leaders. That is another way. So, I think the fact that a Disney, somebody like me is in a leadership position is able to speak and recruit and have a voice. Shows like how the companies have come along and how we can actually only improve from here.

Ashley

That's awesome. I love to hear that. There are just so many different opportunities for connecting with people, and I think that that's just so amazing. I would get bored if there were not that opportunity to continue to learn and grow. And so, it's awesome to hear that you're experiencing that both in the tech, right? Continuing to innovate, but also in that personal space of your leadership and your exposure to folks around the world. It's just it's incredible to hear how you're continuing to grow that.

Rekha

Yeah, I think without that, it would end up being just machines; it wouldn't be the actual human cells. So, the fact that you can bring your full self to the company, and you get to meet people who will help you explore every different aspect of yourself, not just technology, but different aspects of you being a human being. That's amazing.

Ashley

For anyone listening who is so inspired. Like I am. What advice do you have to offer for somebody who's either just starting out in their career or maybe who's looking to make a change at some point? What advice do you have for especially the women listening?

Rekha

I would say do it. Maybe find, one thing I would say is to go talk to people whom you feel have a similar title or similar role because like I might say, machine learning engineer, a machine learning engineer on my team versus at a different department of Disney itself might be different or versus what it would mean at another company like Google, Facebook, Netflix, or a smaller company, it varies, and it might be totally different. So, one thing I would say is just like seeking out people either whose work you are aware of, or you would like to do. Talk to a lot of people, and don't be afraid to approach people and go talk to them. With the technology that we have, you can also search for things, like things what to do and not to do, but there can also be a lot of noise. I think searching and being prepared is one piece, but there is no substitute for hearing different voices and learning from people's actual experiences.

Ashley

All right. I'm going to give you one challenging one possibly, when you think about technology at Disney, I am going to ask you to finish the sentence here. So, technology at Disney is...how would you finish that sentence?

Rekha

That's a hard one. I would say it's unique, it's challenging, and it's extremely motivating.

Ashley

Yeah, always a challenge. I love that. I think that's such a great way to think about it. Well, thank you, Rekha, for joining us today. It's been so fantastic to dive even more into your role at streaming the opportunity, and the work that you do all across the company, and especially the giveback that you're doing. To really inspire our next generation of leaders. So, thank you again so much for being here with us today.

Rekha

Thank you. Ashley, it was a pleasure speaking to you. Thank you for having me on this podcast.

Tony

Thanks again, Rekha. It was so great to learn more about Disney streaming and what's going on behind the scenes with machine learning and data analytics. Innovation is truly the foundation of what our Disney technologists do. Which brings us to our next guest, whose work expands the user experience. Let's welcome Director of Technology for Emerging Technology with Disney Parks, Experiences and Products, Technology and digital team, Scott Ray. Scott, welcome to the podcast.

Scott

Thanks, Tony. Pleasure to be here.

Tony

For sure. So glad that you're able to make some time for us today. I know there's always a lot going on in your world, so we really, really appreciate it. So, you're the director of technology of Emerging Tech. Right? And we're going to jump into your career and all that. But I got to know quick overview, what's emerging technology?

Scott

Yeah, so that's a good question. As the name kind of implies, our group is looking at kind of all the up-and-coming technologies out there right now and evaluating them and determining how Disney can leverage them and use them to expand on our experiences. So right now, that would be a lot of things like natural language processing and computer vision, AR/VR technology like those.

Tony

Interesting. Thanks for sharing that. And something I heard, which we'll get back to, right, is that the kind of end-user experience is central to our emerging technology? Right. It really sounds like it guides that strategy a bit, but we'll get back there. Would love to learn more about you and your journey. Can you walk us through your career and your Disney career?

Scott

Sure. So, I joined Disney almost 12 years ago. Now, I originally came into Disney Interactive at the time, and I was the server lead for a gaming platform that ran the first mobile version of Club Penguin. After that, we moved on to work on some of the later Disney Infinity video game series. So, we helped out with that team. And then Disney Interactive merged with Disney Consumer Products to form Disney Consumer Products and Interactive, and our studio kind of had a role shift at that time. And we moved into more. We formalized the name later, which was Flex Force, but we moved into more of a role where instead of being on individual projects, we kind of helped other teams get their projects over the finish line. So, we would come in and help out across all of the various businesses. And so, in that role, I helped with a line of connected toys called Playmation. So, we came in and helped on some enhancements to that and optimizations to get that to ship. And we helped with the second round of that. I also worked with WDI very closely on a number of their projects, primarily in the natural language learning space. So, it was really great to kind of move across business units there and be able to see what the other groups were doing and help out on all those various projects. And then that brings us to kind of now the more recent where Disney Consumer Products merged with parks and now were Disney Parks, Experiences and Products. And now, I lead the West Coast Emerging Tech Team.

Tony

What an amazing journey, right? Both. I think for you, your team, and your part of the business. Disney is such a big place, and there are so many opportunities for individuals, I think, to learn and grow. And it sounds like for your team to learn and grow as well, particularly as you're responding to whatever the user needs seem to be. Would love to hear more about what is the day in the life of the director of technology of emerging tech look like. What's kind of your day-to-day responsibilities?

Scott

You know, I think one thing that's really kind of interesting about our team and that transition we went through is that we are we're a really small group and everyone there kind of had to wear a lot of hats. You know, myself included, and so kind of diving into what we did, we did more than our traditional role kind of allowed. So, like right now, you know, to give you an idea, I kind of like what I work on right, I do project planning, budgeting, finance, staffing, I.T. support, you know, architecture design, you know, just to name a few of the things that, you know, I handle on a day-to-day basis. I spend a lot of my time right now where we're trying to ship a product right now. So, there's a lot of my time is actually just spent communicating with all the various teams and partners, you know, both internal and external, to make sure that we're all on the same page and we're all moving in the right direction together.

Tony

Truly a Jack of all trades.

Scott

Yes.

Tony

What have you found to be maybe some best practices? Right. And working with that many folks and having that many stakeholders involved in the process?

Scott

Yeah. Communication is definitely key there. And learning the kind of the right communication style is really important. So, one of the things I noticed is like you need to quickly be able to pick up the style that other people respond to and kind of adapter style when you're dealing with that particular group. So, it's about adjusting the style. So that you can get the desired effect that we're all going for. And, you know, certain groups have different ways of communicating and working, and it's like picking up on those cues and finding that so that we can get everyone to the final destination.

Tony

Got it. I'm hearing this theme of kind of adaptability and flexibility, right? With your team kind of moving around the business a bit and even you yourself thinking about how do I communicate with all of my stakeholders in a way that gets things done. That seems to be

a common theme; I think in chatting with our technologists, that adaptability is kind of high up on the list there.

Scott

Yeah, I'd agree. And like I said, I think the personal circumstances that myself and my team had actually, you know, gave us a lot of opportunities in that space. And we really had to be really flexible. I mean, hence the name Flex Force, which was what our group went under for a while.

Tony

That sounds incredibly accurate. And so, you mentioned at the top of our chat that so much of your work is driven by the consumer experience. Right? And you're able to kind of bring technology to life. How do you do that? How do you and your team think about bringing technology to life for the consumer?

Scott

Let me give you an example from like the project we're currently working on, which is called Hey Disney, an Alexa Smart speaker for our resort rooms with a large amount of Disney magic sprinkled in. We're leveraging, in this case, natural language processing to make our guests' lives easier and more entertaining. So, for example, we give them the ability to order amenities and services directly from the device in the room now and then as far as entertainment, we have like Disney music, soundscapes, and games for them to enjoy on the device as well. So, I was just out there to kick off cast testing like a week ago, and it was really neat to see it all come together and be able to order coffee from my device and have it show up to my room. You know, in what I considered a fantastic amount of time, it was less than 10 minutes

Tony

That is pretty impressive as I've stood in some coffee lines for longer than 10 minutes. So, to actually get it to your door isn't bad at all. Yet another reason not to leave my bed when I'm at the resort. You all are just kind of adding to that list. But I think in a really, really cool way. So, this is obviously a cool project. Hey, Disney's going to change things, I think, in a lot of ways. And you mentioned the process, I think it was natural language processing. For those of us that might not be familiar. High level. What does that speak to?

Scott

Yeah. So that's basically training a computer to understand what humans say to it. Right. So, it's everything that's involved in that. So being able to take the speech, translate it into a transcript, and then have a computer understand that transcript and how to respond back to whatever the request from the person was.

Tony

Want to shift gears just a little bit, right. As we think about the kind of culture that we have around innovation here. I say all the time, I think folks think that the magic at Disney is

really magic, right? But it's actually people, and more often than not, people in technology making it happen. What does it mean to you to be a part of the technology and digital team here at Disney?

Scott

I'm glad you touched on the people. I think that's a really important aspect here. I mean, we are blessed as employees of Disney to have the opportunity to make magic for our guests each and every day with an unparalleled library of IP and emerging tech. We're always looking for ways to leverage cutting-edge technologies to make more immersive experiences for our guests. I think as I've mentioned earlier, we're doing a lot of work with natural language processing and computer vision for our resorts, call centers, cruise lines, and parks. I think some of the more interesting things we worked on recently as far as an experience point of view, leveraging some of those technologies you can experience on the Disney Wish, our new cruise ship.

Tony

That is really close to the top of my to-do list, Disney Wish. I'm going to make it soon, hopefully. Happy to hear the people right once again or at the center of not only whom we do this work for, right, but how we do it. Help me then understand what is the culture, right? I think of the tech and digital team knowing every team, every business, every space, particularly in technology, kind of has its own culture. Help me understand the culture of the tech and digital world here.

Scott

Yeah. Everyone brings such a passion to the work that they do here, and it's really refreshing to see that they're obsessed with the guest experience, and they set a really high bar. I would actually say that like the people that I work with and interact with, including the groups, and so is a large part of why I've been at Disney for so long. It's I would say it's more like almost a family or, you know, a great group of friends than just coworkers. So, you know, we get together outside of work socially. Everyone is extremely supportive of each other. When we kind of had that flex force model, a lot of us were working on very different projects and had very, very different deadlines and stuff like that. But everyone made time available to others to help with any issues they may be having or some like that. So, it's just a very collaborative group experience. And like I said, the passion, you can just feel it.

Tony

That's awesome. I think the passion is, I think, obviously necessary in the work that you all are driving. But hearing kind of the dynamics between the teams, I think, is something that might be a bit unique that I don't hear in every tech space. But I always hear here at Disney, I think, particularly with leaders like you folks that are slated to go pretty far. And so, the world that you're in, right, it has so many unique Disney elements. But I think not only the work that you're doing, but the way that you do the work. And so, you could do this work probably, you know, anywhere in the world if you wanted to. But you choose to be here at

Disney. What's so special? What's so unique about the tech and digital world here at Disney?

Scott

Yeah. I'm going to go back to the people and the passion, right, the passion and the guest's obsession across not just in digital but the entire company. You know, I've worked for companies before where we've built products for consumers in previous jobs, but it's just it's taken to a different level here. A few years ago, I took my first Disney Cruise and was just like blown away by the experience. Right. Just like how attentive our cast members are to our guests, and within tech and digital, you see the same passion. Even though we don't tend to interact directly with our guests, that attention to detail and seeing everything through the guest lens really influences everything we do. And you can see that in the final products.

Tony

Absolutely. And that resonates with me as well. I think I mentioned it when I saw the demo at the parks in Orlando. Such a warm welcome, right from our cast members. And I looked and what like, do I have my badge on, or is it? No, this is everyone, right? It's absolutely a top-tier experience that is followed through, I think obviously from the technology piece, right up to when our guests are receiving the technology themselves, that shows for sure. And so, the guest experience drives that. You use the term guest-obsessed, and I think that's probably the most accurate description that I've heard, and that drives what we're moving forward. What do you think is next? Right. I know that you're already at the forefront of emerging technology. What do you think is next from that part of the tech world?

Scott

Yeah, I think we've just scratched the surface on the blending of the digital and physical, and Disney will continue to innovate in this area by leveraging our immense physical space with new digital product innovations. We'll continue to be a leader in this space. I also think we'll start to see more connected experiences where our guests interact with us and have more personalization through the various mediums.

Tony

Thanks for helping us understand kind of what's next in terms of technology. And so, for anyone that's listening and saying, hey, I love Scott's journey. I love the work that he does. I love the direction that it's going in. How do I get there? What advice would you give them?

Scott

So, I think it goes back to a couple of the points that I've already mentioned in our talk. So, like be proactive and curious, look for opportunities to learn other aspects of your project. Get involved, you know, if you're interested or you want to know something about like how tech ops works or something like that, go find out. Right. That will just broaden your knowledge base and make you much more valuable. The next piece I think we have already

talked about as well is like make personal connections and be helpful and courteous to others. Those relationships will be invaluable as people move throughout the org, and you'll find yourself interacting with the same person in a totally different role, you know, a year from now or three years from now and stuff like that. And so, having that personal connection just makes all that work much better, right? And you're able to kind of pick up where you left off. And then the last thing is like, see the big picture? So, step back and make sure that we're making the right decisions, and don't be afraid to, like, go outside your comfort zone. You know, I think one thing I hadn't mentioned yet is that before Disney, I come from the video gaming industry. And so, one of the things I did there was every time we moved on to a new product, I elected to work on a different aspect of the game, so I could just get more experience with everything that makes up a video game. And I think that's, you know, you want to continue to push yourself and learn as much as you can.

Tony

For sure. What do you see from your gaming experience? Right, that's really applicable to the way that you're working with technology now.

Scott

It's really interesting. You know, I would say half of our studio comes from the gaming space. And I think because games are so large and there's so much things to work on, that it lends itself to kind of being able to pick up and run with anything. So, like I found it was very easy to transition to any kind of other project or something like that. But I have the skill set and the knowledge to, you know, go find out how something works, you know, go, how do I build firmware for an embedded toy, right? How do I write software for that? Right. It just kind of leverages a lot of that skill set that you had from that experience.

Tony

Got it. So, continued growth. That seems to be the solution for so many things. I've noted that a couple of times, I think I might need to apply that a bit for myself. So, thanks for that reminder. One last thing I've heard you talked so passionately about technology and specifically technology here at Disney. So, I'm going to ask you to finish the sentence in as many ways as you would like. Technology at Disney is how would you finish that?

Scott

Yeah. I'd say to kind of quote our CEO embarking on the next generation of storytelling. Right. I think we're at a really neat crossroads here where, you know, as part of emerging tech, I can start to see it. There's a lot of technologies out there that are starting to come together. We talked about natural language processing. We talked about computer vision some and some of the projects that we've already done along those lines. But all of these are going to enable new storytelling opportunities.

Tony

Absolutely. Right. From our CEO, Bob Chapek, the importance of really creating a space for the next generation of storytellers. What is the story that you hope to tell with your work?

Scott

I'm really interested in, you know, once again, I'm also guest-obsessed, and I really want our guests to have kind of the best experience they can. And I guess I always look to find that. And I think that's maybe one thing that we didn't touch on earlier kind of advice for people, right? Always go back and look at what you've just done and like, how can you make it better the next time, right? For the next product, what learnings can I take with me to this to this next one? Or how can I improve on that experience? Or how can I make something better? We all have deadlines in real life, and things have to ship on time. Nothing, I mean, my favorite quote is especially from the video game industry; nothing is ever done when you ship it, right? And so, you always want to look to make it better the next time.

Tony

Scott, thank you again for taking the time to share so much of your journey with us. So much of the incredible work that your team is doing. I think I'm really excited to see what emerging technology continues to roll out from your team in your world, particularly Hey, Disney, I think that's going to change my experience whenever I'm in the parks, and I'm really looking forward to it. So, thank you again.

Scott

Oh, thank you for having me. Really appreciate it.

Tony

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Tony

This episode was produced by Christine Torres and Jaron Kaufman, with contributions from Ally Fisher, Holly Dudley, and Kayla McCarty. Editing was done by Claudia Benfield and Luis Vega. Music arranged and produced by Nat Young Music Group Inc. Design and graphics by Kathie Collins and Luis Vega. And a special thank you goes out to the Disney Streaming and Disney Parks, Experiences & Products Technology & Digital Teams.