

## 'How To Build A Dating App' Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

- Kate: [00:09](#) Hello and welcome to 'How to Build a Dating App'.
- Michael: [00:12](#) This podcast will chronicle our journey of building and launching a brand new dating app. Our aim for this podcast is to take you through the whole experience of what it takes to build a dating app from scratch. Not just any dating app, but one that we really hope can take on the big competitors in the market.
- Richard: [00:28](#) We're definitely going to be learning some lessons along the way, as this is the first app of this scale that any of us have been involved with, and none of us have worked in the dating industry or are experts in dating.
- Kate: [00:37](#) To really help us delve into the current dating landscape and online dating trends, we're going to be speaking with some of the leading dating industry experts, coaches, and app developers to share their insights on the industry.
- Michael: [00:50](#) Our interview with John Kershaw continues now.
- Kate: [00:55](#) John Kershaw is the founder of a dating app called Bristlr, which connects those with beards to those who want to stroke beards. He's also the founder of M14 Industries, a platform which allows anyone in the world to have their own branded dating app.
- Kate: [01:07](#) John, thanks for coming in and talking to us today.
- John: [01:09](#) It's my pleasure.
- Kate: [01:13](#) Great. I'm going to ask you a little bit about marketing and how you built awareness for Bristlr, and then in general your advice by M14. But when it came to Bristlr, how did you map out your marketing strategy and how did you get those initial users?
- John: [01:26](#) There was no marketing strategy. I just built something that I thought could go viral. I spent a lot of time in my youth on the internet and sort of figuring out the kinds of things that can go viral. I worked in video game blogs for ages and ages and ages. You kind of learn how things can go viral, how they can share. We built Bristlr to give it the best chance possible to be written about. Because we know it's funny. We know that you can be like, "It's Tinder for beards. Oh, ho, ho." Then so we made a really, really good media kit. We spent ages on that media kit, and I'm still really, really proud of it. But it's a media kit that a journalist who wants to write the story of Bristlr and the story was, we exist and it's just like-

## 'How To Build A Dating App' Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

- Kate: [02:11](#) What do you have in it?
- John: [02:13](#) Essentially the media kit is written like an article, so it opens with the headline and then it goes into a little bit of background of 28 year old, at the time, John Kershaw invented this. It's got like quarter of a million matches, and that kind of stuff. It's actually written like an article so that if you are a journalist, you're writing the Tinder for beard exists. It's not something that you need to really work too hard on. Then so we had, here's a story that you can almost copy word for word. Here is a load of high resolution copyright free images that you can use. Here is an email where you can come to us and get a specific quote. We managed to really get on people's radars. I reached out to a couple of bloggers.
- John: [02:58](#) So when Bustle ... Four years ago, Bustle was very, very trendy, but their writers were the kind of people with maybe either a few hundred or a few thousand followers on Twitter. I'd find a blogger for one of these high reach organisations that didn't have a huge number of followers, and just tweet, "Hey, I saw you write about pink beards the other day. We've made Tinder for beards." They'd be like, "Oh, that's amazing. I love it." They'd go on there, here's the media kit. Bang, here is an article that they know will go viral, that we have kind of planted that seed. Then from the kind of trendy blogs, we then got in the Mail Online and then you kind of get picked up by all these other places who all sort of write the same kind of piece. Then it was general awareness that kind of led to a few other kind of break out pieces.
- John: [03:50](#) When we released the Lothario Detector, we managed to get a piece in Newsweek. You can kind of then just kind of just push it and push it and push it.
- Kate: [03:59](#) So it was PR influence and marketing very heavily?
- John: [04:03](#) Yes. It was all about trying to go viral and ride that wave as much as possible. Then we hired a PR firm, and that was the biggest waste of my life. I think at the time, we paid five grand for them for three months. At the end, in the concluding meeting, they told us that they had generated 45 grand's worth of coverage.
- Kate: [04:25](#) Across like three pieces?
- John: [04:27](#) Yeah. Well, it was across ... They got us in a bunch of different print media. But they got us in The Sun. In The Sun technology

## ‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

section, there was this big piece all about Bristlr. It generated zero signups. Or if it did generate signups, there was so few in number, I couldn't find it in the data.

- John: [04:45](#) When you think about it, it's like, okay, The Sun has what, like 2 million readership. How many people will read the technology section of The Sun? Let's be generous. How many of those people will see an article about apps and then download the app? How many of those people have a beard or want the beard, and how many of those people are single? By the time you've kind of filtered it down, it's like, none. Whereas coverage that we were getting on these small blogs, they were being read by 10,000 people. There's a link they can click, so they would click it, and then we would get thousands of downloads. Whilst we did get value for money from the PR, we didn't actually get a decent customer acquisition from it because it was just the wrong channels. That was a very expensive way to learn about marketing channels.
- Kate: [05:29](#) Yeah, for sure. Well for them, they're looking at the circulation and that's how they calculate the numbers.
- John: [05:33](#) Yeah, exactly. They're like, "Oh, this is a cool brand, and we can now say we worked with them. And as far as we're concerned, we gave you a 10 times return on your thing." Which is like, okay, that's kind of fair enough. But it was also kind of useless for us.
- Kate: [05:46](#) Yeah, exactly.
- Kate: [05:48](#) You mentioned that you did this PR push kind of post launch. How did you get your initial users on?
- John: [05:56](#) I think I just posted on ... The very initial users, there's a small Facebook group of like 30 of my friends called Bristlr Testers. 'Cause I just posted on Facebook like, "Can anyone help me test this out?" My friends I just let go in this Facebook group and then all sign up. Then I think I posted on places like Reddit or those kinds of user generated stuff, and that's where you get a few hundred more signups. Then it was mostly when the blogs started writing about us. Because at the time, there wasn't any filtering, so you just saw everyone in the world. As long as there was about a hundred profiles, it was a list of people longer than you would bother scrolling. That's all you kind of need.
- John: [06:36](#) When you have a critical mass in apps now, all you need is for there to be enough people that it feels full. You don't actually

## 'How To Build A Dating App' Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

need 10,000 active users. You just need enough people that I can sign up and feel satisfied that there's enough people there that I'll keep it on my phone and then check it out in a few days.

- Kate: [06:53](#) Interesting. How long was your testing phase then?
- John: [06:57](#) Arguably it's still going. Well, so because Bristlr is the only one of our products that we own, we do all of our testing of new features on Bristlr. Bless it. God bless our Bristlr users that get put through it. It's like, "What is this random button that has turned up that lets me call people?" Or something. It's just like, yeah, we're just testing it.
- John: [07:20](#) I think we're currently testing referral codes. You can refer someone to join Bristlr. It's like, why would you do that? And it's like, I don't know. We're just testing it.
- Michael: [07:29](#) What do they get through that?
- John: [07:31](#) I don't think they get anything. They just can. It's mostly-
- Kate: [07:35](#) It's just an easy link to share kind of thing?
- John: [07:37](#) I don't think we even have that. Literally as you sign up, it's like what's your referral code? People are just leaving it blank and then they just carry on signing up. But we want to test what it looks like and what it feels like in an actual app, because M14's this white label platform. So before we roll it out to other clients who actually do have a like, if you refer a friend you get money back or that kind of thin, we're testing it on Bristlr 'cause people sometimes their referral code and they'll just put random stuff in there. It's really good for us to test. It's a bit annoying for our users. But most people, if they see a part of an app that they don't understand, will just ignore it. I know that I don't understand most of Facebook settings, but I'm just like, whatever. Life is short.
- Kate: [08:18](#) Facebook is just getting way too complicated.
- John: [08:20](#) Yeah.
- Kate: [08:20](#) It's also so aesthetically offensive. The graphics look so old.
- John: [08:26](#) Yeah. That's what we're migrating to. That kind of generic ...
- Michael: [08:31](#) Old... And amazing!

## ‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

- John: [08:33](#) No, but it's true that it's really difficult to make apps that feel very new, because the apps that feel new are the ones that are actually breaking the mould. Whereas a company like ours, we have to wait until a piece of technology is stable enough that we can kind of move to it. We can't take the risk and just be like, "Let's rebuild our entire infrastructure in this random thing." We did that early on. We used a piece of technology called Phonegap or Cordova. The way we were able to manipulate that technology is what let us, with almost no resources, do what had previously been called impossible, which is to do white label apps. We were able to leverage that, and that's cool.
- John: [09:17](#) But now that we're kind of bigger and slower and we have to do things properly, we can't take massive risks with other people's stuff. Now we're probably gonna move to React Native, which is the stuff that Facebook's made of and that Instagram's made of and a bunch of other ... That feels like the industry standard. Every app looks exactly the same. It makes me sad, but people are used to that now. Then the apps that look really, really good take a huge amount of effort to actually get right. We can't really do that because we do the white labelling stuff. But over time, we'll get better using React and get better at customising so we can kind of bring some of that fun back in again.
- Kate: [09:55](#) Yeah, cool.
- Kate: [09:58](#) I guess I don't know how with Bristlr, because it's niche, maybe this isn't so relevant. But I'm wondering how you deal with competition in the marketplace. I guess with Bristlr, how would you advise your clients as well?
- John: [10:13](#) With competition, it kind of depends on what form that competition is. Bristlr has no competition. But arguably, every dating app is Bristlr's competition. I don't think competition is actually important. I think it depends on what your customer acquisition channels are. Let's say you're doing Facebook ads, and your competition is actually not other dating apps. It's other people doing Facebook ads that are similar to yours, because you're bidding against them. I think that's where the competition is. Until you are a Goliath in this space, and then there are the Bumble versus Tinder, and they may actually be competing for users. For the most part, you can just have two apps. Competition isn't as big of a worry, at least for us. If someone went into a niche where there was a big player already there, then you have to be like, do you actually want to go into that niche? Is there an opportunity for you there or are you just going to be in a constant uphill struggle?

‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

Michael: [11:13](#) Has there been any more beard-related dating apps that have popped up since you guys started?

John: [11:19](#) Not that I've noticed, but-

Richard: [11:20](#) Like a moustache dating app or something?

John: [11:25](#) Don't get me started on the beards/moustache thing. It's a whole thing. There's a reason that it's called the Beard and Moustache Championships. I have learned this the hard way after dropping quite the clanger to a local beard group.

Richard: [11:38](#) So you included moustaches in that?

John: [11:40](#) I don't want to talk about it. Because I've probably forgotten the details, and I'll just do it again and I'll just get angry letters.

Michael: [11:48](#) Sounds like that's a hot button topic.

Richard: [11:49](#) It is. I wonder whether the soul patch comes into that.

Michael: [11:54](#) What about the sideburn?

John: [11:56](#) It depends how far. Like at what point does it become ... Anyway.

Richard: [11:59](#) Yeah, you're retreating further away from the face with every suggestion.

John: [12:02](#) I have books on this. I can go and refer back to them if you want. Who's doing the fact checking for this? 'Cause I feel like they're gonna have quite the rabbit hole.

Michael: [12:12](#) This is a silly question, but I've just been wondering since we met you. Do you feel now that you have to keep your beard?

Kate: [12:17](#) I was just about ask that.

Michael: [12:17](#) 'Cause you're the Bristlr guy.

Kate: [12:20](#) And have you ever not had it? Since before-

Richard: [12:25](#) Between the ages of zero and 20, I guess?

John: [12:26](#) Well, I shaved it off once at university and that was a big mistake. I think my face looks weird without a beard now. 'Cause the beard changes your face shape completely. I've got a

## ‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

driving licence, but it's just not a good look. And I've gained weight in the last five years running this company, and I'm like, "I don't want to see my extra chin now." The beard hides it quite nicely and elongates the face. I like my beard, and I'm gonna keep my beard. Maybe it'll get longer, maybe it'll get shorter, who knows? But I like it, and so that's going to stay. I don't feel any obligation to keep it for Bristlr. I had to keep it for the first few months. I say "had to"; it just didn't occur to me to get rid of it 'cause I need it for ... I was using it for PR.

- Michael: [13:09](#) Yeah, it helps the brand.
- John: [13:10](#) Yeah. Yeah. It's bringing back bad memories of some of the PR. People will touch your beard without asking, and that is weird.
- Michael: [13:19](#) Like the pregnant thing, when people touch-
- John: [13:20](#) Yeah, exactly.
- Kate: [13:21](#) Yeah, I find that strange.
- John: [13:23](#) I was on regional news in a "and finally" segment for Bristlr. Of course I was. I ended up in Manchester Market Street with the presenter stopping old ladies on the street and asking them their opinion of beards and then ask them what they think of my beard. I just had to stand there getting humiliated as these random people just come up and they just randomly touch my beard. Or tell me that they hated beards to my face with a camera crew there. I'm just like, "Wow, this is great PR. I'm really happy about this. Thanks."
- Michael: [13:57](#) Well, the things you have to go through with a beard.
- John: [13:59](#) Yeah. I mean, I didn't have to, and it makes good anecdotes. I can look back and laugh, not cry at it now.
- Kate: [14:06](#) What are the kind of key tactics that you would tell your clients to use in terms of actually converting users? Say that's getting them to subscribe or even just their awareness is built up, but they're not at the point where they're going to download. Is there any message in between those that you would recommend people adopt?
- John: [14:25](#) I think figure out who your ideal demographic is. That might be that you get that through testing. But you figure out who it is that you want to reach, the kind of person you want to reach, and then you find those marketing channels where you can

## 'How To Build A Dating App' Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

reach those people. That's probably best done with influencer marketing. If you know that you want people super into kite boarding, you can find the whoever is massive on Instagram for kite boarding and then tap their

- John: [14:51](#) audience. You can do it the other way round, where you find people with a big audience, but where no one's really serving that market and then build something to reach out to that. That's arguably what Bristlr did, that we found a joke that can go around the world and then we attached an app to it very quickly. We attached a real product to it. We've seen people launch dating apps where they'd put out a press release saying that they've launched this dating app and they have a signup form, and it's fake. We have actually had an app that we built piped to the post of PR by a fake app, and it was infuriating. It was-
- Kate: [15:33](#) There is tonnes of those. 'Cause even when we were downloading a few - sorry to interrupt you - just when we were thinking about the initial idea. There was tonnes that just didn't work. You could download them but they just, there was blank.
- John: [15:45](#) But they get loads of PR because the people writing these press releases just don't check. They just assume that it works. It's infuriating.
- Kate: [15:52](#) That's crazy.
- Michael: [15:52](#) What's their goal? They're trying to get people's data?
- John: [15:56](#) Most of it is they're an agency who want to show how good at PR they are.
- Michael: [15:58](#) Oh, really?
- Kate: [16:02](#) They make they make up the company and say we got all this PR for this company? Irrelevant whether it's real?
- John: [16:06](#) Whether it exists or not. Yeah. 'Cause they want to be like ... This was a few days after the Brexit vote happened, and we made bettertogether.eu. We made a dating app called Better Together, because our team is international and we were a bit grumpy and we were like, "Ooh, an opportunity. Not only will this cheer us up and we can do some nice ... We can make a mixed a little website, it'll keep our minds occupied, and off we go." Then it turns out like ... And we built the entire app, and then we're about to hit the road with PR. Then it was the day

before we did that, it was all over the news. I think it was called like Remainder or something had launched and it was Tinder for people ... It ended up just a marketing company who made that up. Made a single page website and then got all the press. We were just like, "We did this wrong around. Should have followed our own advice. Built the website first, got the PR, and then back it up with a website."

Kate: [17:06](#) What is the timing then, between say ... What would the ideal time be between generating that PR, having your website live, getting people to sign up, waiting for it to come out, till actual launch? 'Cause you obviously run the risk ... If you want to react to something like Brexit, you want to do it straight away, but then you've got a lead time to create your app of three months or whatever. That interest drops off. What's the ideal timing?

John: [17:30](#) There's a couple of things there. One is that for us, it was actually an experiment in how quickly we can make an app, and we managed to get an app submitted to the app store within a day, that was fully branded. That's not us working with a client with a back and forth. That's us, as a team, knowing our tools inside out, with a very clear idea of what we want and we can kind of build it instantly.

John: [17:50](#) Every year, I do the same experiment around Halloween. We try and make a Halloween dating app to help you go bump in the night. We do this experiment to see how quickly we can generate things. That is kind of one side of this.

John: [18:06](#) The other one is, it depends on what your intention is. If you're a marketing agency, and you can smugly put in your press release, "We made this whatever current affair thing app," and it got this much publicity, you don't care that it's a real app so you'll just leave that forever. If you are testing your messaging, it depends what the messaging is. If you're testing the messaging for your incredibly polished, elite dating service, then you'll actually go and need to go build a big polished, elite dating service, and that can take months and months and months. So it depends a lot on the marketing.

John: [18:45](#) I don't think it matters too much, 'cause you're mostly just gauging interest in how easy the PR is. If it's something that is very timing specific, so let's say we made a shipwrecked dating out and Shipwrecked the TV show is out and you choose which island you're on or something like that. For some reason, Channel Four wouldn't sue us over copyright infringement. You've got a very narrow window where people are interested and people are talking about that. It's kind of like with social

## ‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

media. If I tweet a meme that's three years old, nothing. If I tweet a sweet, sweet brand new fresh meme, fresh out the meme oven, then it goes so much further. That's kind of what you want to be thinking about.

Kate: [19:32](#) Yeah. Makes sense. You've mentioned previously that niche dating apps normally reach a user base in the low five figures. Do you think that's still the case? Is it better to plan several niche dating apps at the same time, as opposed to one main? You can obviously see the budget implications of both.

John: [19:56](#) Yeah. We actually looked into this. We launched Bristlr, and we were like Bristlr's probably got a ceiling. This is people who like beards. Let's make one for people who like coffee 'cause that's kind of the similar demographic. People who like tattoos. We were just like, okay so if we can't get Bristlr to scale, we can scale our company by making multiple ones of these. That's actually where the white labelling for what later turned into M14 came from.

John: [20:20](#) I think you can do that. Lots of people have found success doing that, but it also depends on your demographic. If your demographic is millionaires with yachts who want to find other millionaires with yachts to have yacht parties with, you probably need like a hundred users on there and you can charge them thousands. So it depends on what your demographic is and what's important to you.

John: [20:42](#) Because also if you're, let's say you build a social network for people who listen to podcasts or something, and you charge five pounds for that. If you're an individual and you're paying, let's say you're paying M14 like 200 quid a month for hosting and management and all that jazz, and you're earning a couple of grand a month off that. You're probably perfectly happy with that. If you are a major business and you want to do that, you're probably not going to be happy with that. We've had clients drop because they would only earn tens of thousands of pounds, and they would only work with projects that earned them hundreds of thousands of pounds. Which is slightly upsetting to hear, but nevermind. So it really depends on your goals.

John: [21:26](#) And also, until you launch, you don't really know how good a niche is going to be. It might be amazing. It might be tiny. But if it's tiny but really valuable, people will be willing to pay a lot more because you're providing a lot more value.

Kate: [21:41](#) I see.

## 'How To Build A Dating App' Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

- Michael: [21:43](#) We've got some development based questions, if you don't mind. At launch, did you build in native or HTML. I think I already kind of know the answer to this because I saw a tweet from you the other day saying that you are kind of moving to React soon.
- John: [21:58](#) When we launched, we used a piece of software called Phonegap, where you make a javascript and HTML version of your app, and it gets bundled up as a native app. When you open the app, and this is actually still true now, when you open the app, you're actually looking at a web browser rather than an app. But it looks like an app because all websites look like apps now. That's Cordova or Phonegap that we used initially. That means that you write your code once and you can release it on any platform that you like. We built a website, built an app that was kind of like a pretend app and it's actually a website, and we were able to launch in a couple of weeks across every platform.
- Michael: [22:44](#) At launch, did you release for both Android and Apple, or just one?
- John: [22:48](#) We released on Android first, 'cause I didn't own an iPhone and I thought I probably should before we release an app via Apple. The process for releasing on iOS is slightly different to on Android. On Android, they do some automated checking to make sure that you're not doing anything terrible and then just release you onto the app store. Whereas iOS, they actually test your app out and so it takes ... It used to take a couple of weeks to do that. Now I think they can get it done in 24 hours. They're getting much, much faster at doing that. So we released on the web first, and then we released on Android, and then I think there was maybe a month gap between then releasing onto iOS because I had to figure out how to get signing certificates and go through that whole process, which is a farce, frankly. It's a very good system, I guess. I hate it. It's really complicated and I'm too stupid.
- Michael: [23:44](#) Would you normally releasing on both Apple and Android from the start?
- John: [23:49](#) Either on IOS first, 'cause that's more challenging and it's usually where most of the money is. If you're targeting the UK and America, that's at least 50% of the market. If you're targeting the rest of the world, do Android first. If you can use some technology where 90% of your code is identical, do that. Or have loads of money and just two teams that build two different apps. That seems to work for some people.

‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

Michael: [24:17](#) Best way, okay. Write that down.

John: [24:18](#) Loads of money makes developments so much easier.

Michael: [24:23](#) I've just realised, Richard, I stole all your questions, didn't I?

Richard: [24:25](#) Well I didn't want to say anything.

John: [24:29](#) Ooh. There's some tension.

Michael: [24:29](#) Host tension.

Richard: [24:31](#) Michael's always stealing from me.

John: [24:33](#) I see, I see. Do you wanna talk about it? Is this like-

Richard: [24:36](#) We just don't have the time, John. We just don't have the time to get into it.

Michael: [24:41](#) Go on, you resume your purple questions.

Richard: [24:44](#) Sure. Is it this last ... This is the one ... This is the last one.

Kate: [24:49](#) You can take one of mine if you want. Balance it out.

John: [24:55](#) I could come up with some questions.

Richard: [24:55](#) So at launch ... did you re de eh mm.

Michael: [24:57](#) This is why we don't let you do things!

Richard: [24:57](#) I'm sorry, I haven't asked a question in so long, I don't know how to ask it.

John: [25:09](#) I think you need to release an unedited version of this podcast. I think it would be great.

Richard: [25:14](#) At launch, did you release an online website or an app or both?

John: [25:19](#) We started with a website and then we added the app, I guess when there was demand. So once people started signing up to the website and using the website, then I started to release. Then I actually put the effort into being like, oh how do I make an app? Then I knew how to use Phoneygap and Cordova, and so I kind of used that and was able to then quite quickly generate the apps.

## 'How To Build A Dating App' Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

- Kate: [25:46](#) How long did it take to develop the first release, and how much did it cost to develop this?
- John: [25:49](#) Two weeks, and nothing 'cause I just built it myself.
- Kate: [25:52](#) You built it yourself?
- John: [25:52](#) Yeah.
- Kate: [25:52](#) Yeah, right.
- John: [25:52](#) Yeah, so whatever two weeks' worth of my then freelance rate would be I think is probably the cost.
- Kate: [25:59](#) And two weeks. 'Cause I think you said earlier that you kind of release something and just out for testing and you were going to wait to see how it went. It wasn't like a perfect product by the end of it.
- John: [26:10](#) I don't know. It was barely a product. The very first thing that happened is I made a webpage for Bristlr.com, and it had a little fake signup, and it had a giant picture of a beard. It was great. That was kind of all I needed. Then I spent two weeks behind the scenes making this thing where you could join, you could see people, you could like people, and if they liked you back, you could message. I've got a photo of my ... My to do list at the time was just five post-it notes stuck to the side of my monitor. It's like messaging, and then reporting, deleting your account, and really basic stuff that should have been in there in day one, and I was at adding these. It was spending one day building the entire instant messaging outfit, one day figuring out how the homepage should look, one day on the navigation. That's why it only took two weeks.
- John: [27:01](#) When it launched, it was so rough. The very first version of the app that I released, I hadn't really tested it properly and I was in such a rush that whilst you could log in and use it, you couldn't actually sign up. And so if you look at the app release history of Bristlr, there's a flurry of app updates that come out because I'm just like, "Oh this is good enough. Stick it up there. Oh this is slightly better, let's upgrade. This one's ever so slightly better." Because as long as it's a better version than the current version, I'm happy to release it. Even if it's still not quite fully there. That's the only way I was able to kind of move fast enough to kind of keep up with everything.

## 'How To Build A Dating App' Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

- Kate: [27:41](#) I see. I had a question put to me recently, which came to my head earlier. Well, it wasn't a question. It was more like a statement. Someone said to me that to build an app, where usually the most successful apps or ones that work, are built by people with a development background. I'm wondering ... It makes sense, but that is a daunting thing to hear for instance, like a group who are just coming up with an idea. I've never built an app. How accurate is that?
- John: [28:11](#) Well I think that's true insofar as the best people to make you a sandwich are someone who is a professional chef. But if you want to package that and if you want to then build a business around it, there's other skillsets. I've had to spend the last four or five years learning how to do the business side of things, which is as complicated as the development side of things. What I'm learning is that if you're on the business side of things, development looks so easy. If you're on the development side of things, you do not understand what business people do and you're just like, "You just go to meetings. What is this? Why do you have fancy cars? How does this work?" It's because the two worlds are so far apart. When things are far apart, they look smaller.
- John: [28:50](#) So development looks like, you're just putting a button on a website. It's different skillsets. If you are a technical person, you can build an app. If there's enough technical people out there in the world, then some of those apps will be successful and then you get survivor bias, which basically says the best apps are by people who are technical founders. But it's actually probably technical founders who either got lucky or technical founders who got help early on to do all the other stuff. I can build a really well functioning, scalable app. I can't make it pretty, and that's important. I can't do influencer marketing. I don't understand it. I can't really do sales that well. So I have other people who come in and do that and kind of help, and you end up greater than the sum of your parts.
- Kate: [29:39](#) Yeah. Maybe it's from a perspective like thinking that you built Bristlr for instance, that that first product in two weeks. Sorry, I keep hitting the desk. You didn't spend anything because you're the developer, and that's ... If you look at it from that stage, you would say, yeah, you are in a far better position for instance than me. But like you said, with the whole holistic approach to it, getting it to market, all of that, you need different skills.
- John: [30:06](#) It's like, I can get out of the gates faster than someone else. But it's taken me four years to figure out how to actually run this business, where someone who's actually run businesses before

could probably get up and running in six months and doesn't need to learn the hard way all the things that you need to learn.

- John: [30:23](#) I think that you have a big advantage being a technical founder in a world where you're running technical companies. But Bristlr wasn't successful because I intended it to be successful. Bristlr was successful because it's one of 20 side projects that I've built over the preceding decade, and it just happened to be the one that takes off. Most of these kind of things that seem to take off ... I could tell a story about how I have this great vision and how I build it. No, I built it as a joke. I've built dozens of stupid websites, and this just happened to be the one that took off.
- John: [30:55](#) I built a website called battle of everything, where it takes two random Wikipedia articles and asks you which one's better. So you'll have like some French war versus a concept of time, and it's like which one of these is better? What that website will do once it's finished, is it will rank everything and every concept by which is best and you will have a definitive list of how good stuff is. Strangely enough, that one never took off.
- John: [31:21](#) I made one when there was the whole horse meat scandal, where you type in a type of food and it tells you what percentage of that food is made of horse. I made-
- Kate: [31:31](#) I feel like I used that one.
- John: [31:36](#) I've made like a bunch of these weird ... shouldihaveanap.com is mine. You go there, and it tells you if you should have a nap and then it gives you a timer.
- Kate: [31:45](#) How does it work that out?
- John: [31:45](#) What time of day it is, because you should always have a nap. But if it's the middle of the day or the morning, 45 minute nap. Perfect. If it's the afternoon, 20 minutes. If it's after 5:00, don't. You'll ruin your sleep. Then I couldn't figure out how to make it play noise, so you press start and after however long the time has elapsed, it just forwards you to YouTube. This random, loud YouTube videos that it just plays.
- John: [32:08](#) There's all of these random things that I built. Bristlr, in the context of that, is just yet another one of those like, I've had a fun idea. As a technical founder, I can build a novelty website for this thing, and it just kind of ticked the right boxes. It wasn't a skill that I had in product design. It was, I can do technical stuff and I can repeat that process, trying different configurations of

## ‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

idea. And because that was my hobby, eventually I inevitably struck gold with ... I think that might be an over exaggeration. I struck something, and then that became Bristlr.

Kate: [32:46](#) Yeah. Well it's crazy 'cause Bristlr I guess just is a really nice PR story.

John: [32:52](#) Yeah, it's a really nice-

Kate: [32:53](#) It fits all of that work so well. But then actually, yeah you did strike gold in the sense that you had a really marketable company.

John: [33:00](#) I think the key with Bristlr is that first off, the idea was marketable and we managed to get to like 60,000 downloads without having to spend money and it was kind of just me. Then it was the random chance of getting on the Ignite Startup Accelerator, and it's because I met the founder in a pub at a startup event and he tried Bristlr and it happened to work. Then he went to New York, happened to use Bristlr, and it happened to still be working. Then through that was like, "Hey, you should come on this Startup Accelerator. I think you've got something. Don't know what it is, but you've got something." Then it was through that that we then white labelled and were like, there's a bigger opportunity here. But it's not because we found a problem and we're trying to solve it. It's that we kind of had something and we're now kind of seeing what the bigger opportunity is. Now after four years of kind of fumbling around, we've kind of hit our stride and we know what's what's going on. We think that we understand enough about this industry that we can actually serve a section of it. So it's not that I have all of these great predictive skills. It's that I'm incredibly stubborn and I'm willing to just keep trying things until something works.

Kate: [34:12](#) There's presumably a market there, sorry I'm going off-piste here. There's presumably a market there, is lots of people wanting dating apps. Are all your clients looking for a dating app, or is anyone who's looking for like another type of-

John: [34:26](#) Two years ago, it would be a hundred percent dating. But we've realised that the social apps are a big underserved market, so maybe 50% of our apps are now dating and the rest of the social, like social networks for x, y, z. I think going forward, we're probably going to move more towards social and away from dating, just because it feels like there's more communities out there that are stuck using a giant Whatsapp group or a Facebook group, who would be better served if they just had

their own app. If you're a sports team with like a couple of hundred people, if you had your own app, that would be really convenient. It doesn't need to be a particularly fancy app. But if you could send out notifications, if you could message people, if that's where you uploaded your photos, great. If M14 can provide something that can do all of that and we can provide that easily and cheaply, then we win. We get to build cool technology. We get to actually be a growing company. And we got to serve a real need and make people have a nicer time, and they don't get stuck using these like slightly inefficient ways of doing stuff.

Kate: [35:35](#) Yeah. That's really interesting. I assume the Whatsapp groups as well and how you're looking at translating that into a whole product, because Whatsapp ... What's the latest on it? It's going to be integrated into-

John: [35:45](#) Facebook.

Kate: [35:46](#) Yeah, well they're going to start advertising and stuff.

John: [35:49](#) Yeah, it's kind of interesting. In my head, even though if you look at Whatsapp and you look at Facebook, they're totally different. In my head, it's like you're trying to facilitate a community chatting, and on Facebook, if it's just my feed then it's a community of my friends. If I'm in a local sports team thing, then it's the sports team's version. It's like serving communities, and I think that Facebook tries to serve every community with the same set of tools. I don't think that's how communities are. I think that whilst there is similarities, like everyone probably wants to upload pictures. Everyone probably has events. Everyone wants like a newsfeed. But there's some specific stuff that you can, the specific tools that you can give people which lets them customise their community to meet their specific needs.

Kate: [36:44](#) Exactly. What features were released at first launch, and what was released later? Was it an MVP model for first launch? This is for Bristlr.

John: [36:52](#) Yeah, so it definitely was ... I think it was pre MVP, to be honest. It was not about apple. I guess it was the minimum marketable product. You could log in, you could see people, you could match, and you could message. It didn't send you any emails. There was no notifications, there was nothing. The apps, all of the other features came later. I think we've probably got a hundred different features that you can turn on or off on M14, and maybe 30 of them are turned on for Bristlr. Maybe of those

## ‘How To Build A Dating App’ Podcast – Episode 3 Transcription

30, one or two were there at the very beginning. I think that might be being generous. We've just added and added and added.

- John: [37:36](#) With M14, I think we are at the MVP stage now. For me, the MVP of M14 is people have now raised money from companies that have an M14 app in them, or they have got money based on their actual app with M14. People are getting these signals of confidence from the outside. We're starting to see that our sales are sort of getting easier. We think we've kind of hit it, and so now's our time to kind of switch from MVP to version one.
- Speaker 5: [38:15](#) Stay connected.
- Michael: [38:17](#) If you want to get in touch with any questions or feedback, you can find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Soundcloud. Just search for 'How to Build a Dating App Podcast'. Thank you for listening.
- Michael: [38:31](#) Our interview with John Kershaw continues on the next episode.