-- Speaker 0   00:00:04   Make It Right. The manufacturing podcast,

Speaker 1   00:00:09   We are surrounded by technology. It's humming away all around us. It's constantly at our hands. It's at our fingertips, it's in our ears and it's getting things done for us. Technology is used by people and it generates data. And when used properly, it can be absolutely transformative. Welcome to the Make It Right podcast. I'm Janet Eastman. And this week, my guest is Jonathon Hensley. He's the CEO of emerge interactive, and he works with companies who develop technologies and the helps bring people, data, and processes together to create success. And naturally he is a big fan of technology. So welcome to the show, Jonathon. Thanks for joining us.

Speaker 0   00:00:50   Thank you so much for having me, Janet.

Speaker 1   00:00:52   My pleasure. So you are a big fan of technology, so I have to know what was that first piece of technology that really blew your mind?

Speaker 0   00:01:02   Oh boy. Well, I think the technology that really inspired me is when I was very little, um, my father who was in the coffee industry worked right across from sprint labs and I had an opportunity, uh, to in the very early days, I think I was only about seven years old and I was watching them figure out how to stream video for the first time. This was, you know, way before streaming services. They were just trying to figure out how to do a more large scale realtime broadcasting. And I would go into these labs and these, you know, double PhD doctorates and, uh, engineers would take this little kid through these facilities cause they were just excited to see somebody else who was excited about what technology was doing. And we would connect with offices in New York and in Shanghai and all over around the world and have these real time conversations with. So the time was, was magical. It wasn't even possible. And it just absolutely inspired me to follow a career in technology that cause I was so enthralled with how that connection was made. It was not as much about what was happening in the conversations when I was in the lab, but it was seeing the connection that itself, that it was possible. And it just, it sent me down a path around technology and computers that eventually led me into digital and the internet as a career.

Speaker 1   00:02:30   Okay. So based on that, and now with your company that you're with, which is emerging technologies or emergent directive, what does emerge do?

Speaker 0   00:02:41   So it emerged, what we do is we help clients design and deliver digital products and services. So we're helping them understand at a deeper level, what are their customer's needs and wants and how can you develop products or services to meet those needs. Um, and then actually bring those to fruition. About half of our work is also internal where we're helping organizations that are going through digital transformation, develop better, uh, tools and processes internally. So how technology is changing the, uh, the operations and the way that companies are able to actually function is also a huge part of that. And so we do a lot of work, uh, internally building better experiences and tools for the employees, um, that are connecting with customers. Okay.

Speaker 1   00:03:32   So in manufacturing, it's focused on using technology to enhance and aid that manufacturing process. So what kind of work do you do in that field?

Speaker 0   00:03:42   So with manufacturing, we do a couple of things. It's really exciting time right now. I think for a lot of manufacturers who are, are in the process of modernizing is we're helping them understand, uh, in one example where their websites are no longer brochures, these are actually products themselves. They become a way where they can enable, uh, their ability to engage with customers and vendors and employees, um, delivering self service models to support the products that they're manufacturing, uh, and so forth all the way to the internal side, where we're taking huge sums of data or operations and looking at how they can modernize the way that they model their manufacturing process, finding new ways of innovating and abandoned and finding efficiency. Uh, one of the things also is driving more employee engagement. How do we actually create engagement and more real time collaboration inside of your organization. And those are all facets that emerges currently helping its clients w --

-- ith today.

Speaker 1   00:04:48   Hmm. So with all the gains that are promised in the large investment that's required, why does so many digital initiatives in I'm thinking particularly in manufacturing, why do they fail?

Speaker 0   00:05:00   Well, the biggest point of failure that you hear people talk about as a misalignment with understanding your users needs. But I think you have to go a lot deeper than that today. We really invested into the study of failure and it comes down to misalignment and that misalignment can show up in a couple of different ways. One is certainly not knowing your, your user very well, whether it's your customer or an employee. Uh, a lot of times there's this idea of moving forward with technology first, without really deeply understanding the problem and then designing and testing a solution before you get into that development process. And that, that holds up a lot of companies, they get a lot of, uh, failure and challenges that come from that. Another one that we see it all the time is just organizational complexity. These organizations, the complexity is not accounted for in the technology.

Speaker 0   00:06:01   And so the promise of technology and what it's going to take to bring it to fruition is just not very well understood. And so that really tends to hold a lot of organizations back, or they're not, they don't fully understand how much of their knowledge is institutionalized or siloed or how they have interdependencies of being able to where they have to solve another problem before they can deliver that solution. And so we see that a lot as companies are dealing with legacy technologies or lack of solutions in place at all, where it's been a manual process for in some cases, decades, and now they need to overhaul and rethink that and the business.

Speaker 1   00:06:44   Can you share a story about how you've worked with a manufacturing company? Like I'm just thinking, you know, um, there's some technology that's promised to help with a manufacturing process and you were just talking about this, you know, okay. You bring the technology in, but you don't exactly understand the problem that you're solving. And like, just because you put the technology and doesn't fix the problem. So just explain how, how you've seen this actually work or not work where you've seen the wheels go on or come off in a, in a manufacturing setting.

Speaker 0   00:07:15   Sure. Well, I'll, I'll try to give you an example of both when we've seen it work really well when we haven't there w first I'll start with a success story. So we have a client that we worked with who saw an opportunity with where technology was going, where in the past, the installation of, of their, uh, products required a lot of manual configuration. And these were usually embedded products at very complex, uh, facilities and the ability to realize that the biggest problem, both for them and providing support as well as for their customers was the installation and maintenance process. So by embedding new technologies into their products, they were able to, uh, create a mobile application where they could actually provide installers the ability to configure without having to, you know, climb, you know, giant ladders or, you know, get into, uh, you know, corridors and start to really be able to look at each one of these devices that were being installed.

Speaker 0   00:08:29   And then also being able to manage the performance and maintenance of them. So it was creating that an incredible amount of data that really was able to show for the first time, how well that product was, was doing and performing. And when they needed to think about maintenance and management, and it was game changing for the organization, as much as it was for their customer. So unavoidably by solving the installation problem, they created also the story that could help them drive more sales and create an overall competitive advantage going forward. And it was a really wonderful project to be a part of.

Speaker 2   00:09:05   Hmm. How, how did you actually go in and, um, figure out what the initial problem was to begin with?

Speaker 0   00:09:14   So to really understand the problem, what we had to do is realize there wasn't a lot of, there was so many people involved in the process. What we had to do was we had to pull all of that institutional knowledge to the surface and really look at it and understand, you know, the, the t --

-- otal picture and for many, uh, people and divisions within the organization, there were so focused on what they were doing. They had never seen any of that be visualized and articulated. So they could look at the entire picture of how that product line was being produced. And then the full life cycle of that product, how is being sold, supported, and the constant improvement that needed to take place. Um, so it was happening in these functional teams, uh, that no longer was nearly as effective. Cause we weren't unlocking all of the skills and experience that was, uh, you know, propagated through the entire organization.

Speaker 0   00:10:13   So what we first did is really brought that to the surface. And as soon as we saw that we were able to apply a similar methodologies to lean manufacturing, where you go and you look for where's the bottleneck, where is the deficiency or area of opportunity. And it was very clear that where a lot of time was being spent was on this idea of service and what was causing that challenge. What was the topics of service that kept coming up and it was related to installation and maintenance. And so that gave us an area to focus on and go a lot deeper and really hone in on where we needed to solve a problem that was having a significant impact on the organization.

Speaker 2   00:10:53   So how important was it that somebody from the outside saw where the bottlenecks were?

Speaker 0   00:11:00   I think it's incredibly important. I think at all times, even if you are experienced in providing that kind of service, like we are at emerge, you really find that outside perspective just allows you to ask questions. You might not have thought about, or we start to ask questions about things because we don't understand them the same way you do. We have an expertise through the lens of how do you develop, you know, customer experiences, how do you implement technology successfully? And so we're asking questions, but maybe sometimes just in a different way or with a different point of view. And as we start to ask clients to really unpack what they, uh, how they do things and what they think about all of a sudden, you usually see light bulbs go off. They're like, Oh, I didn't think about it that way. Or yeah, we used to do it this way, or we thought about doing it that way, but we never really went anywhere with it. We weren't sure what was possible. And sometimes that's the key is showing a client what's possible once they actually have identified that problem in different potential opportunities.

Speaker 1   00:12:04   So you were also going to share a story about how things went awry and the wheels did fall off. So share that story with us.

Speaker 0   00:12:11   Sure. So there was a project, this was a long time ago, but we had a client who had invested in, put in, um, they had done an analysis and they're like, we're going to invest into this new technology to increase our yield. And we're going to proliferate this new technology into our process across multiple factories. And it was with really good intention, but what they hadn't done yet as they hadn't fully modeled all of the considerations that went into that process, right. We always think about, you know, things like material time, people yield, um, you know, how much, uh, you know, our air rates as through every step of a manufacturing process. And some things just hadn't been fully accounted for. And they had different partners in different facilities, had different layouts, different types of equipment. And so the proliferation became very complex and the promise of the new technology, uh, proved to not be nearly as effective in moving them forward.

Speaker 0   00:13:17   And what they really hoped for out of that process was they were also going to start to accumulate a bunch of data. And so this was at a time, which is still a lot of organizations are doing where the, everybody was like, we need data, we need as much data as we can possibly gather, but then people were still figuring out what do we do with this data once we have it, how do we make it actionable? And so the expectations between what that data would do and that new technology that was being implemented just fell completely flat. And they hadn't really anticipated the people factors in transforming the culture and the organization and that they needed to build alignment to move that forward. And so that was that a failure and how they approached --

-- the process of implementing technology. And it was just a gross underestimation that there was, uh, took them a couple of years to unravel. And so when we came in, we were really trying to help them figure out how do you unravel, uh, where you are because the investment had been so substantial.

Speaker 1   00:14:22   Okay. So we've had a pretty picture and kind of an ugly picture. So I have to ask you when manufacturing leaders are thinking about technology, how should they be thinking about what it can do for them?

Speaker 0   00:14:37   Well, I think there's two things about technology is there is something that we've seen a lot with leaders that, um, technology creates this natural optimism and excitement. There's this promise of technology. And I would encourage every leader is to think about technology and temper, uh, the enthusiasm and to sow and ground your goals to near term objectives. I think sometimes the focus is so much on what we can do longterm that we lose sight of what has to happen short term. And we don't measure the right things to show us that we are moving forward successfully. And so expectations, uh, fracture very quickly. And there's a lot of frustration intention, uh, where there doesn't need to be. So that, that would be one thing. I think the other thing that's really critical, especially in manufacturing, is looking at technology as, um, part of an ecosystem and building your technology through a strategy of building a platform.

Speaker 0   00:15:42   So that platform thinking of how do I unlock and all the components of my technology ecosystem. And if I'm going to create something new, how do I build it into that ecosystem? So I information and its capabilities can move both upstream and downstream through the organization to empower every function and that methodology and that thinking coming from leadership is one of the hallmarks of really successful technology initiatives. We see that again, because they start to understand when they look at things through a platform, a lens, the interdependencies and intricacies of what it's going to take to move forward. And the third piece I would say to that is that leaders need to take a process of Guittard, of technology implementation and design. I'm not running into development, not standing up something without really going deeper and having a strategy where you understand the root problem and really making sure you have a cohesive set of steps to overcome the obstacle. We see planning being used as strategy, um, but planning isn't strategy or goals being thought of as strategy and those things again, are not strategy. So those really hold back organizations. So leaders recognize those differences. They're set up for success.

Speaker 1   00:17:08   How do you manage those expectations of a digital transformation? And I mean, you just mentioned it in there to you, like you've got to, you have to talk about what the expectations are and what this thing is going to do for you, but you also have to manage the people that are using that technology and get them trained up. And I'm sure that there's a fear of technology as well. So when you go in with a, uh, uh, a technology transformation project on your hands, how do you manage that whole process for them? So that everything gets that, you know, that alignment that you need in pretty much everything that you do.

Speaker 0   00:17:44   Yeah. I think one of the key things that we found is that you break up your projects into very small stages. Usually digital transformation, you know, is can, if, can feel really exciting, but very overwhelming really quickly. And we see that, you know, transformation, whether it's around empowering employees with new tools, um, how you're going to engage customers, you know, the optimization of your operations, or maybe your, you know, what we see a lot is you're adding technology to your product or service offering in some way, right? You're amplifying the value of your current product, or you're adding a way to connect with it. Like the configuration tool. I mentioned for another client, when you start doing that, you need to break it into very small near-term digestible chunks, and then that way you have a path to, so you're not overwhelmed. Um, you know, it's like the idea of like, how do you eat an elephant one bite at a time, right?

Speaker 0   00:18:42   These are huge initiatives. They cost, you know, significant investments of time --

-- and money and, and, you know, making sure you have the right people. And a lot of times, if you have a way that your organization has done stuff for a long time, it, it discounted the amount of effort it takes to build alignment and to retrain and educate your team so that they are part of the process. And so if you don't make people part of the process, your digital transformation is going to create a lot of misalignment. And so instead of championing one team to lead, you need to engage the entire organization. If it's going to be organizational wide change, or you're gonna need to engage the entire product and manufacturing team related to a particular line that you might be producing. And so we see that that is, is really essential.

Speaker 1   00:19:36   Hmm. I, I love technology. I use it all the time, I guess we all do, but I have to be honest, there are times when I find it really frustrating. And I kind of think at times things are designed not so much for the ease of use by the user, but to allow, you know, engineers to geek out and create things that they think are really cool. So I have to ask you as somebody who works with developing technologies, where in the development process, should the user experience come into consideration,

Speaker 0   00:20:08   It should be at the forefront of the entire process. I think there's a lot of, uh, there's a lot of bad product out there. There's a lot of bad tools that are built and they happen that way because they're led purely from an engineering perspective or, you know, they, they lead in and well, let's just build it. And there's, there's also a lot of talk in the technology space about, you know, well, we need to, we need to be agile, so let's just get something out there and let's see what people think. And we'll just, we'll just dive right in. And the problem with that is that you have these really poor experiences like you're talking about, and then you find a lot of those products, either unsuccessful or the work gets thrown away and what's happening in most cases is there's a lack of understanding about what agile means.

Speaker 0   00:21:01   There's a lack of understanding about how you approach lean product development. There is a lack of understanding of how you can incrementally make the investment in order to make sure that it's going to be a good one. And so we see a lot of times that, you know, you need to pull that customer experience, that user experience part to the absolute forefront. And that comes down to in the forefront of that might mean, make sure you're talking to, you know, the people who need your solution that are experiencing your problem, make sure the problem's a big enough one where if you invest in a solving it, the impact on your business is measurable. You know, what does that really look like? And there's just some kind of key things that you need to know. So you can create not only a good experience, but a better solution. And so we see that, that those are kind of some common issues that people run into.

Speaker 1   00:21:57   Yeah, I was actually working with, um, with a team at one point we were trying to, um, develop an app and I had gone out to the community to ask them what they really wanted from it. And when I brought that back to the table, I said, okay, this is what these people want from the app, but it wasn't what, what the developers wanted to develop. And there was this like, wow, how are we going to marry what you guys want to do with what the user is really going to need? And it was, it was, uh, an exercise in frustration, to be honest with you.

Speaker 0   00:22:31   Well, I can tell you, after two years of working on a book and the amount of research and interviewing that, I've done. One of the things that was really interesting to learn is that the highest performing organizations have a couple of really common attributes that the tap exactly into what you're saying. One of those is that they really do focus on alignment. How do you build alignment strategically through the entire process? But the second one is, is that, uh, to your point about there being the disconnect between what users are asking for and what, what wants to be built is that the most high performing organizations are the ones that are obsessive about, and they fall in love with the problem and not the solution they get out of their own way. They really acknowledge that. They're the only thing worth solving is the pr --

-- oblem that customers are having, or our employees are having that will have an, a positive outcome in moving our business forward. And they get out of the way of their ideas, because it may be a great idea, but it may only be an idea that's great for a handful of very select individuals that will have no impact moving the business forward. And yet the business is making a tremendous investment to do that. And so being able to step back and really fall in love with the problem that you're solving and not get hooked onto what you feel is the solution is really a common trait that we see in, in the most successful organizations.

Speaker 1   00:24:07   Okay. So where have you seen that really work? Where have you seen them fall in love with the problem?

Speaker 0   00:24:14   Well, we have a lot of our clients I think really fall in love with the problem there. And I'll preface one. I actually, I think is, is a really interesting company that everybody follows. And I just I'll preface this, that we have no relationship with them whatsoever. Um, and that they're listening to this and they want to work with us. They should call us, but Tesla doesn't create jobs. I do, I won't lie. Um, the, but I think that what I, you know, when you look at their company, they embody a lot of the things that we're talking about. You know, they, they are clearly developing platforms. You know, their, their car is a platform, the way that they think about technology and customer experience as a platform, the way that they engage, they are very cognizant of what, what that means. Uh, they also are doing a lot of things, at least from what I can see from the outside that are, you know, very much in alignment with they fall in love with the problem, the evolution of, of their, you know, vehicles, as an example, is meeting a demand by the consumer, not predicated on what they just think is best, you know, so needing to find ways to innovate and drive a price point, they recognize the problems that they're having in market and they they're tackling them and they're taking it from a platform perspective.

Speaker 0   00:25:44   And I think they're doing a really good job.

Speaker 1   00:25:48   So you had a chance to actually tour a Tesla. What was that experience like?

Speaker 0   00:25:54   Uh, it was amazing. I mean, I was just a kid in a candy store. Um, you know, I had a, uh, just a very narrow glimpse into a world there of just, um, incredible innovation automation. And, um, most importantly I think, was to meet some people, uh, that work there and just to see the incredible passion that they had for what they were doing. And, uh, it was, it was a really incredible experience.

Speaker 1   00:26:20   Okay. Um, I just want to ask you a couple more questions, but how can or should technology to be, be used to engage and connect with the customer. Now, I know you talked about this really briefly at the very start, but I mean, for a manufacturer, um, how should they be using that technology to connect with their customer?

Speaker 0   00:26:40   Well, I think, you know, more than ever, you have to understand that when you're your customer, it's important to understand the customer buyer journey. So you might have potential customers that are need to educate themselves about, uh, solutions that you might be manufacturing or the potential of finding you to help them manufacture a solution. And so there's this research stage that, that customers are going through. There is an evaluation stage, are you the right? Do you have the right product or service, or are you, are you the right partner to work with? And then there's the actual purchase decision. And then there's the actual product or service delivery and support, and the website as one example, because it's an easy one, you know, as soon as it goes from being a brochure to supporting that entire journey, it is a product in itself. And if you really get clear on the jobs to be done on that website, by your customers at every stage, you're creating an incredible engagement platform to really connect with them.

Speaker 0   00:27:51   The other thing that you can do with technology to really engage customers is understanding how do you present and educate them about the value of your product. Especially if you have a complex or sophisticated, you know, offering, it has to be broken down and you need to do that where you might not be able to work in the same ways that y --

-- ou used to with needing with social distancing, uh, being able to be mindful of, you know, custom configuration or collaboration that is taking place in order to produce and create, uh, products. So I think that there's a lot of tools that, uh, manufacturers need to think about when they engage with our customer. You know, what is, if you invest into working with us, what is the, you know, what does that look like and what kind of sales enablement tools, or what kind of intelligence can you produce with great technologies and how do you empower your team to drive the growth of your company?

Speaker 0   00:28:49   Um, we see that one a lot. So, you know, there's a lack of business intelligence, yet. There's so much at their fingertips and they've just never been able to bring it all together. And so many times just bringing that information together. So you can talk about the quality of your product and the numbers to back it up, or you can say, well, all of our customers are this type and what is the common considerations? There are, what's the common way they use our products and services, or want to engage with us. All of a sudden that becomes very, very insightful. And you can take, you know, really actionable steps into engaging your customers more effectively.

Speaker 2   00:29:29   Do you think that this, this current period that we've gone through with the pandemic and are still going through, do you think it's going to transform business?

Speaker 0   00:29:40   Absolutely. I mean, I think we've already seen it start to transform business, and I think that there'll be some things that over time we'll go back to the way they were, but I think a lot of things will be transformed forever. I think there's, there's really no way around it. I think there's a, there's a deeper reliance on technology to support, um, everything from customer engagement to employee safety and that reliance and that opportunity is only going to continue to grow. I don't think that's going to actually shift, uh, backwards in any way. I think the need for companies to invest into ecosystems where they can, where they're cross connecting and amplifying their investments. So they get a higher return and being able to, uh, innovate and pivot and adapt faster is going to become more and more important. And by taking a, you know, really are organizations that really understand technology and how to approach it. So it can be very flexible and adaptable are going to be the winners in the future. They are going to be able to work in more effective ways. They're going to be able to innovate, pivot their manufacturing lines. They're going to be able to have more insight intelligence to respond and have the right conversations with customers and prospective customers. And I think that's, um, that's only going to get amplified.

Speaker 2   00:31:05   I suspect you're going to be a lot busier in the near future with the type of business that you do.

Speaker 0   00:31:11   I, I, you know, I certainly hope so, but at the same time, I think what, what is most important right now is education. I think a lot of these things are re I mean, these are not small projects. You know, you know, you might invest a few hundred thousand dollars or a few million dollars in some of these initiatives and leaders have some new skills that they have to build in order to lead their organizations through these things. And so it's been amazing, you know, some of the manufacturing leaders that I've had the opportunity to talk to through the last several months, these are some of the most thoughtful, well, you know, uh, well-intended educated people, they know their business inside. Now. It, I mean, and when we talk about technology, what it is is how does what they do now mirror to the new realities of the skills that are needed as in they're in the C suite, in their, in their senior leadership at, at the VP and the director level. And what does that mean to bring them proliferate that through to the rest of the team? And so there's some really critical, you know, things that they, they need to start doing in order to not just adjust now, but adjust longterm. And, and we're seeing that more and more leaders are recognizing that it's not always clear how to do it, but they certainly are recognizing clearly that there is a significant, um, opportunity and investment that needs to be made at just understanding how to approach technology going forward.

Speak --

-- er 2   00:32:49   Hmm. What are some key takeaways, Jonathan, that you can leave, uh, manufacturing leaders with, um, you know, based on where we're going in and where they're at right now with technology.

Speaker 0   00:33:03   So I think for anybody that's listening, one of the key things that I would recommend is understanding and investing into a building. You're your understanding your acumen of, um, you know, continuing your business development acumen consider continue your invest into understanding, design thinking and understanding how technology is implemented. I think just a, a top level knowledge and understanding of these things is incredibly empowering. It helps you understand the investment you're making at a totally different level. And I think it really changes a lot of the cha and transforms you to be in a successful place. Um, based on a lot of things we've talked about today with managing alignment expectations, the promise of technology and making sure it fits. I think another thing that I would really encourage every leader to invest into is almost every single organization has their own shorthand, um, acronyms phrases that they use and so forth.

Speaker 0   00:34:12   When it comes to technology, you talk about things like customer experience. Um, you need to really invest into making sure there's a common understanding in your organization. So when you talk about customer experience and one part of the organization is that, uh, understanding the same as this other individual or this other group, and the other part of the organization, that connection that alignment is incredibly critical. It helps you move faster, have more effective collaboration and reduce a lot of potential rework. And so I think that's really, really key. And the last thing I I'd love to encourage all leaders to consider is really investing into, uh, mapping, uh, your, your technology ecosystem. So you have that bird's eye complete picture in view, and then also investing into really mapping to understanding their customer journey and what that looks like and how technology supports delivering your promises to your customers. Um, many organizations have never done that, or it lives in bits and pieces, and it's incredibly empowering as you go forward.

Speaker 2   00:35:21   It sort of gives you a full picture then.

Speaker 0   00:35:24   Absolutely, absolutely.

Speaker 2   00:35:27   Jonathon, um, it's been a pleasure talking to you. You have said a couple of things to me today that have made me sort of rethink certain things. One them was fall

Speaker 1   00:35:38   In love with the problem, not the solution. I love that. I think I got to write that one on the wall for a bit. And then you're right about people's websites. It's not a brochure, it's an active tool for the Mets. Those are two of my key takeaways. And then just also how you talked about Tesla and the opportunity for technology. I think it's fantastic. So thank you so much for taking the time to have a chat with us on Make It Right. Well, thank you so much for having me. It's an absolute pleasure. Excellent. Johnathon Hensley is the CEO and co founder of emerge interactive. That is our show. This week, you can check out our Twitter and LinkedIn feeds that are on our podcast page and subscribe and share the podcast with your friends and colleagues through iTunes, Google plays, Stitcher, your Spotify and YouTube and the makeup right podcast is brought to you by Kevin Snook. He's a leadership advisor and author of the bestselling book Make It Right Five Steps to Align Your Manufacturing Business from the Frontline to the bottom Line. I'm Janet Eastman. Thanks very much for listening to Make It Right. --