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Billie Loewen [00:00:02] Hi! Welcome to Room for Growth.

Billy Fischer [00:00:04] A WillowTree podcast about growth marketing hosted by Billy Loewen and me, Billy Fischer.

Billie Loewen [00:00:09] Whether you're an industry expert or just getting started...

Billy Fischer [00:00:12] ...there's plenty of room to grow.

Billie Loewen [00:00:14] Share this episode with your favorite coworker. Follow us wherever you enjoy podcasts and reach out, if you'd like to join the show.

Billy Fischer [00:00:20] You ready, Billie?

Billie Loewen [00:00:21] I'm ready, Billy.

Billy Fischer [00:00:22] Let's go.

Billie Loewen [00:00:23] Let's f***** grow.

Billy Fischer [00:00:28] Hey everyone, welcome to Room for Growth. You're stuck with just Billy today again. My colleague Billie right now is in Brazil, so I'm kind of jealous. She got to go down to the WillowTree Poatek office in Porto Alegre, Brazil, so I'm sure she's having a good time. But I'm really excited about our guest today. We have Jason Lambert, who is the Global VP of Beyond Labs at BEES, which is an AB InBev company — AB InBev, the largest beverage company in the world. I've had the opportunity to spend a little bit of time with Jason and was just blown away with the way that he thinks about product and about commerce. He's one of the few product commerce marketers that I've met who is thinking that full view. He really understands not just the experience that he's delivering on the front-end, but is really deep on the CDP side and really that full view of the customer. So I'm excited to dig into that with Jason.

Billy Fischer [00:01:30] You know, we were talking during my interview with Jason and B2B kind of gets the raw deal when we're talking about great experiences in the market and it doesn't, you know ... Normally when we ask our guest about brands, we've never had somebody say, "Let me tell you about this B2B experience." It's always Nike or Disney that we're getting these kind of standard run-of-the-mill brands. But, when you hear about what BEES is doing and what AB InBev — the innovation that they're delivering and how they communicate and sell to their retailers and their distributors — it's really quite remarkable.

Billy Fischer [00:02:08] As he was talking, I was thinking about another brand. I'm in Columbus, Ohio, and a lot of people don't realize that one of the Fortune 10 companies, Cardinal Health, is based out of Columbus. And I've always heard ... I've never had the opportunity to be really intimate with their work. But I've always heard about the incredible e-commerce experience that Cardinal Health has built over the years. And almost every time I hear it, it makes me think of Amazon — where Amazon Prime, at least — where a pharmaceutical company or a pharmacy can order a product. And as long as they're within some reasonable distance in most environments, they can have that product to the pharmacy within 24 hours. And they've been doing this for like five, 10 years. It's just really incredible.

Billy Fischer [00:02:53] So as I was talking to Jason, I was thinking of these core principles that I think we're really just at the beginning of. In digital, people are finally accepting the fact that a B2B experience needs to be as good as the experience that I see when I use my favorite app. And that if you don't deliver that type of experience, you're leaving money on the table, you're leaving efficiency on the table. And I think we're, again, just at the beginning of what it means to deliver a great B2B experience. What makes Jason unique is, most of the time, when I'm talking to B2B marketers, they're very focused on the design. How can we deliver an experience that is great for our customer making a B2B purchase, or maybe our employee? But Jason and the team at BEES has taken that one step further. And again, they've applied this consumer-grade

experience to BEES by having a really, really smart CDP strategy and making sure that they understand the customer's purchase behavior and how they're interacting with the brand. So all of those interactions are digitally informed, and I think that is an area where in B2B there's a ton of opportunity to get past just designing a really nice looking experience that feels like a consumer experience, but delivering it at every single touchpoint.

Billy Fischer [00:04:15] And so we talked to Jason a little bit about that, but I'm curious, as we post the podcast to LinkedIn, I'll remember to throw this question out there: what B2B marketers — it's not a space that I'm deeply versed and I'd be curious — what are the other B2B marketers and experiences that we should be talking to and using as inspiration? So please comment on that if, if you're listening to this episode and you know of another brand that we need to be thinking of. But with that, I'm excited to share Jason Lambert and our discussion with him from BEES.

Billy Fischer [00:04:55] Alright, Jason Lambert, welcome to Room for Growth. We're pumped to have you here. We have a lot of questions for you. But before we get started, why don't you tell our listeners a little bit about yourself and your role at BEES?

Jason Lambert [00:05:09] Yeah, sure. Billy, it's great to be here and thanks so much for having me and discussing BEES. So my name is Jason Lambert. I'm the Global Vice President of Beyond Labs. Beyond Labs is a unit within BEES, which is an e-commerce and software company that was built in AB InBev, the world's largest brewer.

Billy Fischer [00:05:25] Awesome. That's super interesting. I would guess that most people, unless they're deep in the the beverage industry, would have no idea that ABI has an e-commerce and SaaS company. I remember the first time I heard that, I was like, "Wait a second, how does this work?" And it's taken me a kind of a couple times to truly, really, wrap my head around it. So real quick, though, for our listeners, if they're in that camp that I was in, I'd be curious, can you tell us more about BEES, how it's structured and kind of how the idea for it came to fruition?

Jason Lambert [00:06:00] Yeah, no, absolutely. So it's hard to talk about BEES and especially the history of BEES without talking about AB InBev — who AB InBev is and who we serve. So AB InBev is the world's largest brewer. We have over 500 amazing brands in our portfolio. We operate in many markets all across the world. One in four beers consumed globally comes from our incredible ecosystem, which is amazing. You know, first and foremost, I'd say that the beer category is incredibly interesting. It's natural, it's local and it's inclusive. And that ecosystem actually consists of suppliers and brewers like ourselves, and it also consists of retailers within our environment that we sell our products to — and those retail partners within that ecosystem then sell to consumers. So AB InBev serves about 10 million of these small- to medium-sized retailers in over 70+ geographies around the world. And when we started to think about effectively what digital meant for AB InBev, we looked at how we serve this retailer ecosystem traditionally and then how effectively technology and process change could elevate their experience first and foremost with us. And then, we could actually help this retailer ecosystem thrive as they're selling all these products to their consumers. So the idea of BEES was born. BEES is AB InBev's proprietary B2B ecommerce platform. It really was built and designed to really help our businesses thrive — those partners that we have in the ecosystem.

Billy Fischer [00:07:38] Wow. Really interesting and definitely innovative. How old did you say ABI is?

Jason Lambert [00:07:48] So ABI has roots all the way back to Stella Artois, which is back into the mid-1300s. So it's incredible. We have 650+ years.

Billy Fischer [00:07:58] Yeah, you think of this major, massive company that is not certainly not rooted as a technology company. Building an e-commerce product is really impressive and I would imagine it's made lives easier for your retailers. How exactly do the retailers use the BEES app on a day-to-day basis? How does it enhance their overall experience?

Jason Lambert [00:08:20] Yeah, that's a great question. So if I talk about it in two segments, I think it starts to make a lot more sense. It's kind of pre-BEES and post-BEES. So traditionally how we

would serve these 10 million retailers all around the world is we would, quite literally, make physical sales visits to these retailers. And this could be in bars or restaurants or places where you consume on premise, and it can also be bodegas, grocery stores, large accounts or places that you would consume maybe off of the premises. And so every week, we would send sales reps into each of these 10 million-plus stores. And I'd say to you, Billy, or you know, 'Billy's Bar and Grill', I'd usually take your typical order and maybe try to upsell you a little bit and maybe bring a new innovation to your attention. So with that process, there were all these issues that basically customers would struggle with. One was, if I missed the actual visit, that's a problem because I won't be able to get my product. Two is that when the rep would come in, it's really only a seven or ten minute visit at maximum, but I want to spend a lot of time discovering the portfolio and talking and really understanding. So what BEES does as a B2B e-commerce solution is it provides our entire portfolio to the customers to discover, provides suggested orders, their personalized discount depths, rewards and loyalty programs. But it also provides them the empowerment to place the order anytime, anywhere you want, and really start to choose, maybe even flexible delivery or not, and have full visibility of the import portfolio that is available to you and so that provides this massive empowerment, a lot of flexibility, and it really adds to the satisfaction of our customer base.

Billy Fischer [00:10:09] So anytime we talk about ecommerce, we always go to Amazon or the public experiences that that we know as best-in-class consumer experiences. How much have you, as you're building a B2B ecommerce experience— you know, which we don't read about as often — how often are you looking at best-in-class consumer experiences to draw inspiration for how you built BEES and built new features for your customers?

Jason Lambert [00:10:35] It's a perfect question because I think B2B ... I'll put it nicely: I don't think it gets as much shine as B2C. But actually, the market is absolutely massive. It is. I think Statista put something out that said the B2B market itself, the total retail market, was \$27 trillion annually in terms of goods exchanged. We have a very unique scenario with the least some of the B2B that we're focusing on at the beginning, which are our SMBs around the world, are typically like the traditional profile of a small proprietor, right? Or they'd be one owner, or maybe one or two workers. And so when we set out to do this, we were like, "Look, we believe that we can bring the best practices of consumer." And it wasn't only the experience itself, like the UI/UX, but it was actually more around, let's do the true customer research, let's do the customer experience journey mapping. Let's understand what painpoints exist today, how we can elevate painpoints through technology, how we can replicate the positive moments through technology, and how we can marry both online and offline processes to really create a next level, or next generation experience that our customers have. So using both practices from the consumer side and simply applying them in the B2B model, it allowed us to leapfrog. What was traditionally always thought of in the B2B space is to put our catalog online so somebody can go in and order off the catalog and order a tractor. And we were like, "No, no, no. This is a consumer-like e-commerce experience for the millions of small retailers that we serve around the world." And it has all of those capabilities and user experience pieces that come along with that.

Billy Fischer [00:12:32] You know, I've been saying for a long time ... And I think we're starting to move past where B2B and digital workplace experiences are starting to — at least as far as I've seen — starting to get the same level of attention as consumer experiences. But for a long time, we would make excuses for these experiences being so poor because it was for employees to use, and I guess they have to. And you know, what I've seen is particularly when people are doing their job, if you don't give them a great experience, they will find another way or they will just live in just non-stop frustration. But for a lot of the brands I've seen, people would go around the policies because this system so terrible. Or, you know what? I can use Dropbox or some better tool and daggonit, I'm going to do it because it helps me do my job better. So, it seems like most organizations have started to embrace the fact that your employees and your B2B consumers are people, too. And every time they use the app on their phone, it changes what they expect from the app or the experience that they do on a day-to-day.

Jason Lambert [00:13:36] Yeah, it's interesting because part of the mantra that we talk about a lot is that our small-to-medium-sized retailers, these SMBs, were left behind in the digital revolution. It wasn't just like, "Oh, you're left with, because you're B2B, you're left with a poor digital experience." They were left with no digital experience. And so what we're kind of doing is

leapfrogging and saying, "Look, it's 2022. We can bring a best-in-class e-commerce experience to you with all of the benefits of that— such as full transparency, visibility, full empowerment — to do what you want and when you want to do it.

Billy Fischer [00:14:12] And you're not just doing this in the U.S. This is a global initiative, which I have got to think, comes with a whole host of unique challenges and perspectives. Any comments to make about that?

Jason Lambert [00:14:28] Yeah. I mean, again, in terms of ... We have an incredible customer base. So today, BEES serves over 3.1 million small-to-medium-sized retailers in over 20 countries around the world. So we're a very strong presence in the Americas — so like North America, Middle America, South America, and also Africa and parts of APAC in Europe. It's interesting how different a lot of the markets are, but actually how similar they are as well. And so I think we have the wonderful perspective to also bring best practices from one market to another. Having our operating teams who are very local — and we're incredibly close to our local markets — having them share what works well from a process and selling perspective and serving perspective — and allowing that to more effectively move around the world has been a pretty cool experience.

Billy Fischer [00:15:25] Wow. And the experience that you're building, I know you have ... We're not just talking about a great e-commerce experience, or as part of that great e-commerce experience, you're also focused on, again, consumer-grade experiences, like building out a great CRM strategy, customer data platform, great analytics, great engagement and messaging through the platform. And so I think that's a requirement to build a great e-commerce experience. And most of our listeners on Room for Growth, you know, we certainly target and are trying to create content that helps marketers. And can you just talk about ... If somebody who's listening is a B2B marketer and they're trying to think about their CDP strategy, their organization doesn't have that in place: what are some of the foundational building blocks or places that that you tend to as you've set out to build this strategy over time? Where are some of the foundational places to start when trying to determine which platform you should go with, and if it's time to do that now or wait?

Jason Lambert [00:16:30] It's a question we get actually pretty frequently because I think what we are proud of is, you might say that BEES is built by a CPG for a CPG. And I think, you know, for us, especially in the early days, the focus was intensely not necessarily on the technology, the stack, the capabilities, but it was solely focused on, what is the problem? So going through all of the research, understanding what kind of balancing what our customers need and want, and what the commercial objectives of our company are to kind of transition that value unit. We were able to clearly lay out a strategy around basically two things. One was the technology that we needed in place to achieve our goals. But then two, was the process change and organizational change that needed to happen to accompany that. Because there's no technology that's going to be a silver bullet, or a magic kind of one that will transform your business. And so when we started laying that out, it was like this obsession on, "Okay, we can take our commercial strategy — which is the same in the traditional sense and the same in the digital sense. We take that commercial strategy and now we can route it through new channels." And so for us, back in the early days, it was setting up our core platform, setting up our core data stack, which was our CDP, it was product analytics, it was digital communications, it was data warehousing, data reporting, and insights. And that was, I would say the MVP of, "If we go and solve these customer problems, we are going to need technology one, two, three, and four." Then we were able to go source that, figuring out basically what was best-in-class in the market at the time to provide a very modern tech stack.

Billy Fischer [00:18:18] So you had a unique opportunity, which was to just build it right from the beginning — which a lot of times folks are retrofitting. Before we get too far, I have some additional questions about the martech landscape. You mentioned something in terms of that interaction with consumers; you mentioned before BEES and after BEES. What are some other ways, or have there been new insights that have happened that would not have come to be, or new ideas that would not have come to be if you were doing it the old way, now that you've launched BEES?

Jason Lambert [00:18:51] The best thing that's come of BEES is watching our partner, or retailer ecosystem thrive and grow. I think we always struggle as a business because if you think about the physical nature of the selling process, we always struggled to do basics because of course there are tens-of-thousands of people in the field doing something. Now that we have the ability to provide our customers great experiences digitally, those customers are now not only ordering through us, but they also see a significant amount of value-added opportunities through the experience itself. So we have a rewards program called Club B, where it's not only earning points on purchase, but actually a big part of their business is are they executing well in trade to reflect the brands appropriately to their consumers? And so we actually offer up where we used to have to kind of do the blocking-and-tackling with them physically. And again, we only had like seven minutes to do the order, to do the trade execution, to do everything under the sun. Now we've retrained our entire front line salesforce to become business development reps. And, the retail owners themselves can say, "Oh, I have a challenge here in my BEES application to put a price-to-consumer of this particular product here instead of where I had it higher. And I'll have my consultant, the business development rep, actually visit me tomorrow or the next day to talk to me about the value there and why that's so important." So it's this ability to look at our retail partners around the world and say, "You are not this kind of blocker between us and our consumers. You are an extension of our ecosystem. And if we can get you the empowerment and the right tools and mechanics that you need, not only will our consumers be enjoying our brands and our portfolio, but you will actually be growing and you'll be healthier. And because you're anchor of the community, you know, the community starts to grow and everything starts to move." And there's quite a bit of inertia. So I think that was a turning point for us.

Billy Fischer [00:21:05] During the pandemic, during like lockdown time, you had BEES in place. I have to imagine that that was an unexpected benefit. Is that a fair statement?

Jason Lambert [00:21:14] Yeah. I mean, I think it was actually pretty interesting because we started rolling out BEES prior to Covid in 2019. We launched BEES for the first time in the Dominican Republic. We moved to Brazil in early 2020, but we're still pretty small in Brazil and had pretty ambitious, I would say, ramp-up plans over the course of 2020. But then when Covid hit, it wasn't a tailwind for us necessarily as like BEES the e-commerce experience. It became actually critical, a critical part of some countries's basic infrastructure to receive the goods in the market that they needed. You know, we had some countries in Latin America that had full lockdowns, including our sales reps going out into the market — so for the local tiendas, cómodos, bodegas, all the corner stores — for them to actually receive their product. We actually launched BEES and quickly in those markets to ensure that we could provide the portfolio that they needed to serve their consumers at the time. And so it ended up being a wonderful addition at the right time, kind of the right time with the right technology and the right solution. And we were incredibly happy that that it was serendipitous like that.

Billy Fischer [00:22:32] Yeah, I would imagine so. And what about your role with Beyond Labs, and how does Beyond Labs fit into the overall BEES picture here?

Jason Lambert [00:22:40] Yeah. So I'm incredibly excited about it because I think it's something that ... Within AB inBev, BEES was a wonderful success case of how to innovate internally within a large consumer product goods company. I think it's also an amazing testimonial of how, you know, utilizing the infrastructure of and the platform of an existing company and just adding technology and maybe some process change can be absolutely massive in terms of the value that we can bring to the community, to all of our partners, and to the company itself. So we used a framework again, if I think about kind of some of the best start-ups in the world and I think of some of the best incubators or accelerators, what was the strategy to go from 0 to 1, and then from 1 to 10, and then from 10 to 100? It was really focusing on in the early days, again, an obsession of problem. What problem were we trying to solve? And then doing an intense amount of research in the market to really map out and understand our customers, our problem, our value proposition, doing the competitive analysis, the kind of the DVF models, if you will.

Jason Lambert [00:23:56] And now the goal of Beyond Labs, now that BEES is starting to mature, the mission of Beyond Labs is to expand the ecosystem through innovation. I would say we have no shortage of people with ideas in the company. And so what we needed, to be honest with you, was a place to catch those ideas, a place to foster and nurture them, not put an inordinate large

amount of time and resources behind them, but put the right amount of true ownership, dedication and resourcing where necessary, and advisory to apply that framework and see what takes. We all have hypotheses. I've placed a couple of bets here where I'm like, "This is going to take off." And it's like, "pfffft," you know? And then we have a couple that I was like, "I don't know about this idea," but we've actually seen it be incredibly positive. And so I'd say the mission is to expand the ecosystem and say what we practically do is create an environment where ideas move from a concept to a seed, and hopefully a seed to a pilot if we're doing things well and thinking about it. And then if the pilots are successful, we think about scaling and leveraging the broader ecosystem.

Billy Fischer [00:25:09] Awesome. Well, I look forward to hearing about the the ideas that go the other direction and pass the test. It sounds like an awesome opportunity for you and for BEES. Getting back into the martech world just a little bit: you sit on a couple of customer advisory boards, and have so for some time across CDP and analytics, and I have said maybe on every other episode that we've recorded, I feel for marketers sometimes. Especially when I go to a conference, I always come away thinking, "Oh my gosh, every one of these platforms are saying that they do the same thing. They say they do it better than the other." Every analytics platform says that they're a customer data platform and vice versa, and these are among some of the platforms that we we love. And I'm just curious how you've seen this space change over the years that you've you've been involved. Anything that sticks out in your mind when you think CDP, CRM and analytics, just some of the landscape changes that you've seen? Any observations there?

Jason Lambert [00:26:14] Yeah, I mean, the first and most obvious is that the space is certainly more populated now. Now when we think about who did CDP, I mean "CDP". I can't remember hearing the acronym CDP before, maybe it was either 2018 or 2019. When we first started partnering with Segment, they actually called it, I believe, a customer data infrastructure. And so now it's a customer data platform. And even, to be honest with you, before some of these CDPs or customer data infrastructure companies came about, it was basically building like ETLs and direct links to all of these different tools. I think the space has had a ton of investment. There's not a ton of innovation. It's much, much more modular today. I mean, if I want to try a marketing tool, we can spin it up in 30 minutes and start doing some testing. I think actually that makes it, to your point, I think it makes a lot harder for marketers because if I hire a product marketing manager tomorrow and I'm like, "Okay, go do" — again, focusing on their commercial strategy, business objectives, OKRs — if I'm like, "Okay, go achieve this OKR." There are now 7000 companies that might do it.

Jason Lambert [00:27:31] It's also been interesting over the last maybe two years where if I look at our — what I would say our like data stack between a CDP, product analytics tool, communications tool, data warehousing — these companies are almost trying to verticalize within that stack itself. And so where product analytics and CDP used to be two independent companies, now they're actually saying they do both of those things. And so I think that's starting to muddy the waters a bit. And the reality is what as a ... Again, what I always say to anybody who either works here or starts here is like, "First think about what is your problem? What are you trying to solve? What value does that bring? Is there desirability, viability, feasibility? And then once you address that, then you can just go find the technology, and very likely the combination of technology, and a new process that you'll have to do internally to go hit those metrics." I think the great part about being a marketer today or a product marketer today is that you can switch these things in and out. So if you set up the right frameworks and you're following your key results or KPIs that are leading into your key results, you can say, "Oh, I chose Tool A and it's not working. So let me pull it out, put it into Tool B, and so on and so forth.

Billy Fischer [00:28:59] We were saying a few episodes ago, it really all comes back to these core principles of how you would set out if you're creating a new business, a new idea, testing an idea is like not getting to all the tactics and platforms out of the gate, but focusing more on the standard strategy process of building out, what are the goals, what are the needs of the consumer, the user, and start to build a more thoughtful approach. I get excited by all the tools, so it's so easy for me to just go like straight there.

Jason Lambert [00:29:27] I always make the joke where I'm like, "Think about the Segway — an amazing, innovative piece of technology that nobody wanted." So it's really cool that all these

tools are coming out, but like, if there's no application that's solving a problem, it's going to thud hard.

Billy Fischer [00:29:42] How would you define a CDP? Because it's muddled. I still talk to a lot of folks where even though that's a big a phrase that's getting used more and more often, for a lot of marketers, it's still a newer concept — especially if they're coming from a more traditional marketing background. How would you define in simple terms what a CDP is and what the benefit is?

Jason Lambert [00:30:02] I like the way you phrase the question as for people who are maybe not familiar with it. Because internally within the company or even externally with other with other CPG partners, we've had to go through this like teaching process around what we built and why we built it. How I always describe our CDP is effectively like a circulatory system. I mean, it might not be a perfect metaphor, but I'm like, "Look, you have data sources, places where you're creating data all around your organization. It's on your customer applications, it's on your internal applications. It might actually be ingesting data from third-party sources. And so what you need is, actually like the minute or the moment that that data is created, you need that to be instantaneously flowing around the organization to the various tools." Because historically, what I've seen in our company and many other companies that are very traditional is that you fall prey to almost like Silo Island Effect, where it's like, "'Oh, I have this huge wealth of data here," and I'm like, "Great, what's flowing in and what's flowing out?" And they're like, "What are you talking about?" And I say, "No, no, no. I'm just analyzing this basket of data.".

Jason Lambert [00:31:18] So if you can get to a point where, let's say you have 10 people working in 10 different tools within your stack, if they're all kind of working on that same like fresh data set, then you have like a proper circulatory system of information flowing around your organization. And for us, practically, what that means is that if a customer of ours places an order on our BEES app and then our business development rep with their BEES Force app walks in 10 minutes later, they're like, "Oh, I saw you placed an order. Let me talk to you about this." And then our marketers are not sending communications to say, "Hey, you should place your order," you know? So it's quite simple once you break it down around. Get that data flowing around your organization as quickly or fast as you can, and as consistently as you can. And I think that's what a CDP does for us.

Billy Fischer [00:32:13] Yeah, that's an awesome description. One of the reasons I'm so excited to be working in this space right now — it's like that story that you just told us — this is the stuff that we've been talking about for so long. A 360-degree optimized, personalized experience, all these buzzwords that are really hard to do if you if have a bunch of disjointed data all over the place. And so with a CDP, finally I start to see this stuff actually coming to life in the market. And yeah, like I'm sick of talking about it. Let's let's start making it happen. A CDP has been the one of the unlocks to make that happen. So you know, I'd be crazy if I brought you on — you know, an executive from the largest beverage company in the world — and did not ask about alcohol more specifically. And so I'm curious, what trends that you're seeing in the alcohol industry, product trends, sales trends, digital trends, anything cool that you're excited about that you're seeing at the moment?

Jason Lambert [00:33:10] Yeah. I mean, look, first of all, I think for us it's wonderful because actually BEES is starting to expand our product offerings and offer many CPG partner products as well. But I'll speak to the question of like beer and the alcohol industry, and of course working for AB InBev, and the world's largest brewer for so long, I'm a beer lover. I think the one thing that is an absolute truth and a fundamental truth is that the beer category continues and demonstrates a growth and resilience. So we kind of think about it across, like, "share of throat," meaning what are consumers drinking. Is it wine? It is spirits? The beer category continues to grow. It continues to be incredibly healthy. As I mentioned at the beginning, it's natural with all natural ingredients. It's literally four ingredients. It's wheat or barley, hops, water and yeast, and it's inclusive and it's hyper-local.

Jason Lambert [00:34:08] What we always say is in the beer that you're consuming today is very likely those local natural ingredients and is really enjoyable. So I think there's a great amount of health in the market generally. I think we've seen a lot of incredible innovations coming out of the

beer category over the last five to 10 years in the U.S. I mean, we're both sitting in the United States, so this is actually somewhat U.S. specific, but we saw amazing innovation with the growth of the craft category and then followed by the growth of craft, which is just kind of moving into different beer styles, right? You have lagers, and you have ales, and like within lagers, the typical or the most traditional, or the pilsners, you know, Budweiser and these types.

[00:34:54] And so moving into ales and IPAs and having those grow and meet the consumer demands for maybe the higher taste palate — that's when we saw what was, actually, an amazing innovation, which was seltzer. So seltzer is beer. It's fermented in the same way. It's actually brewed. And so we saw the seltzer category take off. Now what we're seeing consumers in the United States now trending towards is convenience of packaging. So Anheuser-Busch is doing an amazing job of actually continuing the growth of the core category. And that's Bud Light and Budweiser, but really looking at Michelob Ultra as a massive growth player within the portfolio. But then we're also focusing and going where consumers want — which is ready-to-drink cocktails, things like Cutwater, which is one of the fastest growing ready-to drink cocktail brands in the U.S. So it's a pretty exciting place to be. And I enjoy being an intern in the taste-testing department to give people an idea of whether or not it's good or bad.

Billy Fischer [00:36:01] Somebody's got to do it. One of my favorite things about beer in its most simplest form is like the seasonal element, at least for me. You know, I'm kind of coming out of either light beer or hoppy, fruity IPA season, and more into the harvest beers. And then soon, the darker, thicker Christmas vibes will start to happen. And then it kind of all circles back again. But yeah, it always gives me that feeling of the season.

Jason Lambert [00:36:30] Yeah. And we always talk internally and of course we have some of the best marketers in the world and the commercial folks, our CEO talks a lot about this, but it's very much like the brands meet the occasion. Consumers enjoy the brands through certain occasions. And that's exactly what you're talk about. What are we going to have Thanksgiving? What are we doing for football Sunday? What are we doing for Christmas, and all that stuff?

Billy Fischer [00:36:54] Yep, it's cooling off. I've got my flannel on. My wife's making chili. I'm like, "I've got to go get a harvest beer today." So it's just a requirement. Well, Jason, this was an awesome conversation. Super interesting. I think B2B commerce is something that we need to talk about more and give more credit to because it's really, really innovative and interesting. I love to just ask a few exit questions that are less about your day-to-day job. One thing that's super interesting about you is you're an adjunct professor at Columbia, which was awesome. And how did you get interested in and doing that, and how did you get started, and what do you teach at Columbia?

Jason Lambert [00:37:34] I am an adjunct professor for a course called Introduction to Product Management at Columbia Business School. So I was an alum of Columbia as an engineering student. I always laughed at that. I was like, "Engineering is hard," as I saw the business students doing fun networking things and really like learning some other stuff. But as I started to grow my career here, and run product for BEES for a while and now in this role of running our innovation unit, one thing became clear as I was talking to not only folks within our company, but certainly outside of our company. It's that product management as a function is as a relatively new thing, right? I think it's only maybe dates back 20 years. I think the allure is around Marissa Mayer at Google, etc. But, the concept is really applicable everywhere, right? It's how you build, design, think about user research, think about customer focus, and then put the technology in the market, and then get the feedback and all these things. And so I became obsessed with that process and just found a lot of passion and energy in like sharing the processes that existed. And so as we were hiring a bunch of people in, we were connected to some of the business schools that are in our focus area, and I just started talking to a few of the professors there, and I was like, "What are you doing to train the next generation of great product leaders?" Because as organizations ... Those folks coming out of school have this amazing accreditation. And then we kind of receive and train and really bring them up to that. And, there just happened to be a mutual opportunity with it. Like, look, "We'd love to have you come in and share your experience and your expertise," and it's just been awesome. I love it.

Billy Fischer [00:39:30] That's great. Sounds like WillowTree needs to get in on the hiring some of the the product students coming out of Columbia. So it sounds like the right mindset. My colleague Billie, she always has this question that that she typically asks, and the way she phrases it is we love to invite our guests to talk positive trash about a brand they love. So another way to say that is what is a brand that you love? We talk a ton about loyalty and we obviously talked a ton about e-commerce today. Is there is there a brand that is just you're a huge fan of and passionate about?

Jason Lambert [00:40:04] This is a challenging question to ask of somebody who works for a company with over 500 brands in the portfolio. And I'll bring up a controversial one, considering we both sit in the United States, which is, in my opinion... Corona is the single greatest brands on the planet. I mean, why I say it's controversial because we actually don't own it in the U.S., we own it outisde of the United States.

Billy Fischer [00:40:25] Okay. I didn't know that.

Jason Lambert [00:40:25] But any time I enjoy a Corona outside of the United States, it immediately takes me to a beach. And it's like, "This is living," the tagline, and it's just incredible. It brings you to a happy place all the time.

Billy Fischer [00:40:38] My brother in law, he has this thing that we make fun of him about where in our family chat text, you know, he's at a beach and he's taking a picture of a Corona in the sand with the lime. And it's like, you know, that's the exact point, like who does that? And that's the brand that feels like, "I'm at a beach right now living the dream."

Jason Lambert [00:40:57] That's it. Yeah. And you don't even need to see the sand or the water or the sky. You just need to see the bottle of the lime hanging out. And you're like, "There it is."

Billy Fischer [00:41:06] Yeah, I know that sounds good. And it's not Corona season here in Ohio, but maybe if I could get myself somewhere, I would definitely love to enjoy that.

Jason Lambert [00:41:14] It's Corona season all the time. That's the thing. It'll take you to the beach every day.

Billy Fischer [00:41:20] Exactly. I think it's supposed to be cold this week. And so I might need might need to ditch the harvest beer and and go with a Corona. So awesome. Well, Jason, thanks so much for joining us here on Room for Growth and sharing some of the experiences you've had. I look forward to having our listeners listen to this and start thinking about their next move in the B2B e-commerce world. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Jason Lambert [00:41:44] Awesome. Yeah, Billy, thanks so much for having me. And of course, on LinkedIn or if anybody has any questions, always feel free to reach out. We do a lot of awesome stuff. We have a lot of apps and services, but also we're here to elevate the entire ecosystem. To your point, B2B has been left behind for far too long and we're here to help drive that change. So thank you so much for having me.

Billy Fischer [00:42:06] Great. Thanks, Jason.