

William Glass of Ostrich and The Silicon Alley Podcast

Speaker1: [00:00:04] This is the Investor Connect podcast program. I'm Hall Martin. I'm the host of the show in which we interview Angel Investors, venture capital, family offices, private equity, and many other investors for early stage and growth companies. I hope you enjoy this episode. Investor Connect is a 501 C three nonprofit dedicated to the education of investors and startups for fundraising. Please consider donating \$100 to the program to help others in their investor and entrepreneur journey. You can find the donate button on the Investor Connect org website. Hello, this is Hall Martin with Investor Connect. Today we're here with William Glass, CEO and co-founder at Ostrich and host of the Silicon Alley podcast Glitches Ostriches, a financial fitness app for low and middle income families who need a simple way to start improving their finances in order to live happy and fulfilling lives. The Silicon Valley Podcast. You'll hear from a variety of entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and top performers about their journeys and personal finances. William Thanks for having me on your show and thank you for joining us today.

Speaker2: [00:01:13] Yeah, thanks. I'm excited to sit down and switch sides. We had a great conversation on angel investing and I appreciate you having me on your show as well.

Speaker1: [00:01:21] So where does this podcast find you today?

Speaker2: [00:01:25] So I am in Queens, New York.

Speaker1: [00:01:27] Hey. Well, great. Well, let's talk about New York and what is currently happening in the world of Silicon Alley. After the pandemic, how is it the same or different than before?

Speaker2: [00:01:39] Yeah, I mean, I think that there's been a lot of people moving in to New York City. It felt like. Everything going on in San Francisco with COVID. For whatever reason, we ended up having a lot of influx of especially engineering talent, which I think is really interesting. And I mean, everything's hot right now in Web three, so a lot of Web three specific focused companies, builders, entrepreneurs. And I think that's really the big change that's happened since the pandemic.

Speaker1: [00:02:10] And what about the traditional fintech and other applications going on? Did you see an exodus or a shift in temperament about those other applications?

Speaker2: [00:02:21] I think there's still a lot of excitement. It seems like there's this proliferation or this not proliferation. There seems to be a clear line between some venture capitalists that are really excited about Web3 and they've kind of gone all in. And then others that are more we're pure play web too, and there's still a lot to be figured out in that space. And so core fintech is still very, very strong. And so there's a number of a number of investors and entrepreneurs in the fintech space. And I felt like it's just continued to grow stronger and there seems to be a little bit of a blending. From a from an from a company perspective of people thinking about web three applications in their quote, web two fintech companies.

Speaker1: [00:03:01] So for those Web three applications, what's the driving trend? Is it fintech plays or is it enterprise software? What do you see the most focused on?

Speaker2: [00:03:12] Infrastructure. So right now, I think if you've been if you've noticed anything in the Web three space, the experiences aren't great from a customer user perspective, right? I mean, spending hundreds of dollars on gas fees on Ethereum to go buy a picture, you know, Nfts and things like that. It's just not a great experience. And there are a lot of early adopters that are really, really passionate about it. But what we're seeing is a big focus on infrastructure. I've seen some interesting projects around Empire Dao as well, which is trying to build like this in real life building ecosystem of Web three companies. They've got Web three sponsors and they even launched as a DAO to raise capital. They did go to traditional venture capitalists as well, but there's all these people that are focused on infrastructure and providing the things that are needed, both from a technology perspective and Web three, as well as like bringing the resources needed to help support new applications in this space.

Speaker1: [00:04:04] It always takes infrastructure to build interesting applications on top of it later. So you need a good, robust structure. What inning are we in the infrastructure space? Is this the first inning or the fifth inning or the ninth inning before you think it'll switch over to applications and pure plays?

Speaker2: [00:04:22] I mean, I'm really not probably not qualified to give a really good response, but it feels like we're still early innings and, you know, inning two or three maybe. I mean, it depends on where you are in the space and what you consider mass adoption. But I think if you just look at the overall adoption of Nfts as a cryptocurrency just in the general population, that's a good indicator that the experiences we're seeing, adoption, we're seeing interest, but there's no real applications at this point. So I think we're still pretty early right now.

Speaker1: [00:04:53] But it's just like the Web two world and the dotcom phase. There was a lot of great applications that came out well ahead of the infrastructure, and we all know how that story ended, for the most part, not well. And so I think maybe people have learned you really need a robust infrastructure before you try those things. And so we'll see see how well we do on this next round with that memory we have there as well. But let's switch focus a little bit and talk about ostrich. You're the co founder there. It's a fintech application. Why did you start it?

Speaker2: [00:05:25] Yeah, I started it because I saw the impact that financial stress and anxiety can have on families. So my parents got divorced because of money. And 2008, when the housing bubble burst, their relationship burst along with it. They didn't have a way to communicate about financial goals. And ultimately it was just too much of a stress and strain on their relationship. And so left an impact on me and seeing that my family wasn't the only one but wanted to find a way to actually solve some of these real world problems that. You know, not helping people achieve financial goals, providing a pathway structure causes. And I'm sure you probably saw the story about the Robin Hood trader, the 20 year old who didn't understand options and there was an error on his screen. He thought he was three fourths, \$1,000,000 in debt and committed suicide. And in reality, he wasn't. But he just did understand how options worked. And there's you know, you could blame Robin Hood from how they charged everything. But reality is that we're not educating people and providing pathways and there's real world consequences to it. So that's where the idea and the kind of motivation to build ostrich came from.

Speaker1: [00:06:28] And so where does it fit into the financial landscape? Is that wealth management? Is that personal finance or how do you position it?

Speaker2: [00:06:36] So we are clearly we're purely in the personal finance space and we're really focused on helping people take actions. So there's plenty of companies out there and folks in this space that do a great job of aggregating data. They can help you budget, they can help you invest more quickly. And there's all these sharper tools, but no one's really focused on the actions of how do we get people to actually take that first step in the space that's going to help them achieve their financial goals. And that's where we focus. And the way we go to market, though, is as an employer benefit. So we are selling to companies who want to support their employees in a meaningful way. But we really focus from a community perspective on helping people take action, and we use what's worked well in the fitness industry. Between Noom and Strava and use social accountability to drive that encouragement and action taking.

Speaker1: [00:07:22] So what's the most important lesson you've learned in this area around fintech?

Speaker2: [00:07:27] I think it's it's hard.

Speaker1: [00:07:31] Right? I think if you've been in the.

Speaker2: [00:07:33] Fintech space, you probably know that. But but it's it's definitely not easy. And that's just in terms of the fact that it's so crowded, it's so noisy. A lot of people use the same language. But if you look at what the products that say they do the same thing, do they? They don't. But the communication to consumers is all very similar. Like you could go right now and go look at the advertising for the top probably 1015 personal finance apps and they're all going to look the exact same. You can just replace the company name and they're going to look the exact same.

Speaker1: [00:08:05] Well, it seems like alternative finance is having a great play because in the the finance industry is heavily regulated, which means it's very hard to move it to the next level. We're watching this play out in the web3 defi bitcoin space where there's tremendous forces changing regulation and it almost it's like nuclear war is sometimes in the press, but it's just hard to change regulations. And what do you see coming up in the personal finance space?

Speaker2: [00:08:35] Yeah. I mean, I think you mentioned obviously regulation right now in Web three is really interesting. We'll see what happens with some of the decisions that and conversations that are happening at the regulatory level. I think they need to be there in order for us to get to a point where we can start making better decisions. I know for ostrich, we're not focused on providing financial services, which allows us to stay away from that regulatory side. To some degree. We're focused in on the action taking encouraging and focusing the like on the psychological behaviors, which is a completely different problem set. Then just being able to get regulatory approval to provide a better investing product or a better savings product or a better debt paydown tool. So ours is more on the consumer side when it comes to challenges than it is necessarily on the tech stack and regulatory concerns around around financial services specifically.

Speaker1: [00:09:22] Well, as you launched Ashridge, what was the one thing you didn't expect happened that did?

Speaker2: [00:09:28] One that it would take as long as it has. So, you know, I think that's there's a misconception there. We bootstrapped, used no code low code tools to prove out and build out the product. And then just it took way more time to recruit and build up the team and then ultimately get to the point where we are today. But I think it's been really helpful because we've had more time to figure things out, talk to customers, understand how the product is different, how we can actually provide value in a unique way. And through that, we've been able to get some really awesome partnerships with like AARP and some other well known folks in the education sector that we wouldn't have been able to do otherwise. But that was a huge misconception, is just like, you know, we're going to start something as a first time founder and it's just going to take off to the moon. And that is the furthest thing from the truth.

Speaker1: [00:10:15] It was a common myth about the personal finance area. Were there any myths that were dispelled when you actually launched your app into it?

Speaker2: [00:10:25] I mean, I think. I referenced this earlier with just like how how it seems like there are so many different companies that are doing different things and people all have this great intent, but all the products end up being the same. A lot of the feedback that we get from venture capitalists are just playing models that have they've already seen work in other areas.

And so you start to look at all the companies in the space and a lot of them look very, very similar because the advice is always the same. Whether that's because it works or because that's just the other companies that have tried, other things have fallen out. It's really interesting. And I think that's something that's that we've learned going through this process is that. You know, a lot of a lot of companies start to look very similar in the personal finance space, and they start adding the same types of products and services. But it's because of the way that the business models are set up, in our opinion.

Speaker1: [00:11:21] Okay. And what online information source do you find most helpful in your work with ostrich?

Speaker2: [00:11:27] Yeah. So I'm a big fan of Not Boring. I'm sure you've probably heard of the not boring newsletter. That's really interesting when you think about cool fintech applications, and I think Packy does a great job with that. With that newsletter, I spend a lot of time consuming content from different creators. So like there's a group called the Financial Independence, Retired Early Community, the fire community, and they put out some really interesting things. And it's just a different lens of people that have really bought into this idea of financial freedom in a very unique way. And so consuming some of the content in that space is really interesting to compare it to what you see from traditional narratives. So like Fin Con, there's a lot of creators in that space that I consume information from. And so yeah, I think those are those are a couple of sources that are that are valuable.

Speaker1: [00:12:14] Great. Well, you see a lot of different business models and applications, both in the fintech space and then with the Web3 world we talked about. But if you could start a business tomorrow, what would that business be?

Speaker2: [00:12:26] It would be in the web3 space. I think that there's an opportunity to help onboard people into nfts and Web3 through things that they already use and the digital ticketing space. I don't know if you saw there a John Oliver. We're recording this now and the end of March, but there's a John Oliver episode last week tonight that talked about Ticketmaster and how it's one of the most hated companies out there. But they've got a monopoly because everyone essentially has a stake. Concert. The actual concert venues, the recording labels, like everyone essentially has a stake, which is why you have these exorbitant

fees. And it's just a terrible experience. But I think there's a real big opportunity because people are used to consuming tickets in a digital format anyway. And so if you can create that in an FTX, you have cool artwork where you're able to bring in other art, and that becomes now a collectible. I think there's some really interesting things that you can do around that. And then having teaching artists how they can connect with their communities in a really unique way that builds the brand that they want to. It just creates a really cool ecosystem. So that would be what I would start trying to start another company today, right?

Speaker1: [00:13:33] Do you think the WEB3 will be the mechanism that puts creators back in control of their art and their IP?

Speaker2: [00:13:40] I think to some degree I think it'll shift it, but I think there's always going to be a challenge with distribution, right. Even if you think about the Web3 space today, Opensea has a monopoly on the NFT marketplace. So like, yes, they're not centralized, but they are centralized. Right. That's where most of the offers happen. So there's an opportunity and it does give creators, some say, but I still think you're going to have some of the same challenges we've always had where it's going to be distribution, discovery. So I think there is an opportunity, but it's hard to say that it will shift all the way into the creator's favor. I think we're on a pendulum, so it will swing towards creators and artists. But. It's hard to say.

Speaker1: [00:14:21] Great. Well, you also run the Silicon Valley podcast. I was on it earlier this week. It's a great show. What do you attribute your show success to?

Speaker2: [00:14:30] I think having great conversations with folks like U-Haul. I mean, there's a lot of things that I know that I don't know and a lot of really interesting people building cool products and businesses and so being able to talk to them. I mean, I started the podcast out of my own need to connect with other entrepreneurs. I didn't have a huge network, didn't have a huge network of investors. And so what's the best way to get someone like yourself on a on a call rather than trying to pitch you something probably too early or, you know, have an ask that isn't quite clear. It's like, let's have you on the show. Talk about your expertise that's going to add value. And that's been a really great experience where I've been able to have some really awesome conversations with really smart, unique folks that. Provide value both to an audience, but also personally to myself.

Speaker1: [00:15:12] And what would you give to a podcaster who may be listening today? What would you tell them to be successful or how to be successful as well?

Speaker2: [00:15:20] I would say, don't try to do too much. I'd say focus on who it is that you're trying to serve. Is this going to be just for entertainment? Is it going to be an education podcast and then focus on that and go really deep on that, identifying who your customer is. And for me, creating Silicon Valley, that was essentially folks like myself. And that's been really helpful because I've been able to connect with other entrepreneurs. So being able to really hone in on that piece of it and not get bogged down in equipment and lighting and what should I use to record? Like, that's great. But at the end of the day, like focus on the actual content value creation and then you'll figure out that you need to upgrade your microphone when you had bad audio one time and you'll figure out you need to figure out a better scheduling system when people don't show up consistently to your show. So like you'll figure out the rest of it as you go, but really focus on that core customer who you're creating the podcast for and go from there.

Speaker1: [00:16:13] Great. Well, in the last few minutes that we have here, what else should we cover that we haven't?

Speaker2: [00:16:18] All, we've done a quick rapid fire round of a of a lot of different things. But I think I would just challenge the audience to think about. How can we create impact from an obviously my focus coming from the personal finance space. Our mission is to improve global financial well-being. So how can we actually take these tools, these investments that we're making and have it translate into having real results that matter in the real world, whether that's lowering socioeconomic inequality, being able to support people that haven't traditionally had support from the financial sector, and how do we actually translate to real impactful experiences? I get really sad when we see proliferation of buy now, pay later and things like that that don't necessarily have end users in the best interest, but they can create a ton of value for folks. But we're essentially just having the debt cycle get recreated in a different format. So I just challenge folks to think about how can they, with whatever they're doing, whether it's from an investor perspective, it's an entrepreneur perspective, how can they have an impact that goes beyond just the dollars and cents?

Speaker1: [00:17:25] Great. So how best for listeners to get back in touch with you?

Speaker2: [00:17:29] Yeah. I'm active on LinkedIn and Twitter, so. William Glass Ostrich. If you search those terms, I'll pop right back, right up. You can also send me an email if you want to. I'm open to that William at guitar. And yeah, happy to have conversations with folks, whether it's about entrepreneurship, tech, personal finance. I'm happy to support and just try to help give back to the ecosystem.

Speaker1: [00:17:55] Great. We'll include that in the show notes. We want to thank you for joining us today and hope to have you back for a follow up soon.

Speaker2: [00:18:00] Yeah, thanks so much. All this is a lot of fun. I appreciate it.

Speaker1: [00:18:04] Investor Connect helps investors interested in startup funding. In this podcast series Experience, investors share their experience and advice. You can learn more at Investor Connect dot org. Martin is the director of Investor Connect, which is a 500 1c3 nonprofit dedicated to the education of investors for early stage funding. All opinions expressed by hall and podcast guests are solely their own opinions and do not reflect the opinion of Investor Connect. This podcast is for informational purposes only and should not be relied upon as a basis for investment decisions.