

*This interview was edited for brevity and clarity.*

[00:00:00 Dave Bayless] Gareth, what does GAP Consulting do, and whom do you seek to serve?

[00:00:06 Gareth Pronovost] Well, we started as Airtable specialists, Airtable being software in the no-code space that allows you to build relational databases to store your information, but it quickly grew from that to this idea of allowing people to build an app to run their business. So, for us, that's not only storing the data but also building a front-end interface to that data so that people can interact with it and also automation, so that when data goes in or out of the system, it's going somewhere useful. We're helping our clients create no-code apps at a fraction of the cost so that they can organize, automate, streamline their businesses.

[00:00:46 Gareth] The majority of our clientele is small business owners who are in service-based businesses themselves. That's not to say that we don't work with the enterprise client on occasion, but the vast majority of the folks who are leveraging the power of no-code tools really comes down to these SMBs, these small medium businesses that realize they have some workflow issues, some operational issues that they can streamline, and they look to no-code solutions to get those results.

[00:01:16 Dave] What's in the wind that has created this need and opportunity for using tools such as Airtable to automate workflows?

[00:01:27 Gareth] That's a great question. You know, the perfect marriage between the need and the availability of the tool, because for decades, people have talked about building an app to run their own business. But for most, it's cost prohibitive. But with no-code technology, the cost of developing these types of solutions is reduced by a factor of 10x because coding isn't required. What is required then becomes a true understanding of the process, which, ironically, so many businesses don't have. Once that's solved, then it's a simple enough issue to build a framework to support that process and then automate that process using no-code tools.

[00:02:13 Gareth] When I began to be exposed to some of this latest generation of tools in the last few years, my immediate reaction was without the need to be a programmer, anybody can do this. What I found over time is that to be able to create automation, one has to at least be able to think programmatically, even if you're not a programmer. What's your experience in how to help people think systematically and programmatically about their businesses.

[00:02:45 Gareth] Yeah. So, from a high level, my experience is not from a computer tech background whatsoever. And I think that that allows me to actually come at this with fresh eyes because I've struggled with the very need that my actual clients are struggling with. I have these what I like to think of as great ideas you know, "world-changing ideas," that if only I knew how to program, I could have built a solution that fixed this, or I could have taken this further or created an MVP to test this idea. But because I don't come from a tech background, it's never been within my reach to do so. So, when Airtable got on my radar, when automation became something that I started to leverage in my teachings, it immediately impacted me on a personal level, because I too struggled with those problems.

[00:03:41 Dave] You've mentioned Airtable as a foundational tool. Why Airtable and what other tools do you see as being particularly useful and exciting right now?

[00:03:53 Gareth] I think that in order to build a solution to optimize a workflow, we really need to talk about three fundamental pieces that are required. Number one is a way to store your information. This is where Airtable immediately comes to mind. Number two is a way to automate the process so that data is coming in and out of that storage in a way that doesn't require administrative, repetitive tasks to be done because if we have to rely on administrative, repetitive tasks, then, of course, we haven't streamlined much at all, and things are still going fall through the cracks. The third element is a way for people to interact with that data. Interfaces are what comes to mind, and there's a large number of different types of interfaces that are available.

[00:04:47 Gareth] So, the total tech stack for me in order to build a true app, that's going to streamline your business process: data storage, I recommend Airtable. I would build automation in Airtable where applicable, but, if Airtable doesn't talk to something then, in that case, we're going to need to go outside of that environment. So, I go into Zapier or Integromat. For interaction or interface, I rely heavily on Airtable interfaces, but again, if I have to go outside the environment, I'll go to Softr.io, they allow for great portals, or I'll go to Stacker.app. Those are both third-party tools that interact specifically with Airtable databases.

[00:05:27 Dave] Let me change gears here and talk about a topic that's near and dear to my heart: client communities. When and why did you launch your Airtable mastermind group?

[00:05:40 Gareth] I initially launched it as a way to help people who I wasn't able to serve with the other service offerings that we had. The lion's share of our revenue comes from building bespoke solutions for our clients. High ticket offers, we're talking like five figures, sometimes more, but not everyone has that budget.

[00:06:04 Gareth] It also defeats the purpose of no-code tools. The allure is, hey, you don't have to know how to code in order to build something. I feel like I'm serving my greatest purpose by helping people learn how to build these things. I'd much rather teach someone to fish than fish for them. I started the mastermind community as a way to service that need.

[00:06:28 Gareth] I built a course that included some weekly coaching. This evolved into two separate products: a course, which is a standalone course, and then a mastermind community that includes weekly coaching. With our newest evolution of our mastermind community. It's not just me anymore offering the coaching. I'm really excited. Actually today, one of my consultants is hopping in for the first time and she'll be offering a webinar in a group coaching format on a topic that is over my head. Being able to offer even more to the community in this way is really exciting.

[00:07:08 Dave] Tell me more about the very recent restructuring you did with your community. You, in essence, doubled the subscription price and, at least as I perceive it, made a concerted move to move yourself out of the spotlight to some degree. What prompted that, and what do you hope to allow the community to achieve in its latest iteration.

[00:07:31 Gareth] I want the members of the community to feel like they really have support in learning these things that they're interested in, presumably Airtable, automation, front-end interfaces, all of these things that are floating around in this no-code space. Previously, I felt like we had a many-to-one relationship where people were sending questions to me, asking me to solve them, and it was less of a community and more of a one-on-one consulting model.

[00:08:03 Gareth] While that's great, I think that the best learning comes in a group. Advanced as I may be in some areas within this no-code space, I'm certainly not the only expert out there. So, leveraging the power of a group is where we're really going to allow everyone to truly level up.

[00:08:23 Dave] I suspect that over time, people will be asking higher gain questions of you.

[00:08:30 Gareth] When people are newer members, they have a tendency to look for answers to their immediate needs. "Something's broken. Fix the broken thing." As people evolve, their questions are more conceptual. "Help me think about this in the right way. How do I approach this in a way that will solve the problem?" So, yes, I have seen that.

[00:08:56 Dave] Not only do you serve small to medium-sized service companies, you are a small to medium-sized expert services provider. What, in your experience, is special about business development for firms like yours?

[00:09:16 Gareth] I think the piece that was so hard for me to wrap my head around for the longest time was sharing my message. It was almost by luck that I stumbled upon YouTube as a mechanism for attracting new business. Without a steady stream of leads and people interested in your service, no business will ever grow. But for the longest time, I personally just felt afraid of putting my work out in the world. For fear of judgment, for fear of letting people down, or having people think that what I had to share wasn't valuable. I think that paralyzed me for a long time as an entrepreneur because I didn't allow myself to grow. So, making that leap and putting our content on YouTube to actually showcase for people how they can use these tools, that was a pivotal moment in my life and in my business evolution, because from there everything grew. So, from a business development standpoint, I would definitely look at how they're attracting new leads as the number one item on my list.

[00:10:32 Gareth] We started working primarily with bespoke solutions. That was an intentional decision because it was a high-ticket offer. I can use that profit from that initial revenue stream, and I can focus on building knowledge products, like a course, like a coaching community. I think if I had started with a coaching community, I don't think it would have been successful. I would've given up a long time ago. There's so much to learn, so many things to understand. It's hard to cultivate a community. It's hard to build a course. There's a lot of effort upfront that you have to put into it and you don't see an immediate payoff. If I didn't already know that there was a demand for this, I may have given up a long time ago.

[00:11:15 Dave] So, one last question. What was it that enabled you to get over your reluctance to share what might be considered your best ideas in a very public channel like YouTube?

[00:11:31 Gareth] Like so many people, it was because I got kicked while I was down. I wish that I could say that I had this fortitude inside of me, but it was actually circumstance that drove me to it.

[00:11:45 Gareth] I'd been working as a financial analyst in a startup in downtown Denver. Loved my work. Took an unexpected layoff. A month and a half prior to that layoff, my wife and I had just bought our house and announced our engagement. So, had a lot of expenses coming up that I didn't know how I was going to pay for.

[00:12:05 Gareth] As a financial analyst, I was incredibly comfortable in Excel, and I found some temp work getting paid roughly the same amount per hour, but very few hours. So, my income took a serious hit. Ultimately, that company that I was doing temp work for fired the person I reported to and offered me his job at a 30% cut from what he was earning. So, they wanted to give me the same responsibility with dramatically reduced pay and less title. And that didn't sit well with me. I already felt like I'd been kicked down because of the fact that I'd been laid off, and here's somebody who wanted to take advantage of my financial desperation.

[00:12:45 Gareth] I was so disillusioned with going to work for someone else that I said, you know, I bet I could put out videos on YouTube and show people what they need in order to run a better business.

[00:12:59 Gareth] I'll tell you my first few videos, they're terrible. There's no way that anybody puts anything out in the world for the first time and is good at it. But I allowed myself to get over that. I just accepted that they were going to be bad.

[00:13:16 Gareth] What's worse is not taking the chance. What's worse than putting out content that you're not proud of is going back to work for those people who were trying to undercut you. At least now you're your own person. And that became my mantra, and it wasn't long before things just really took off. I was really lucky.

[00:13:39 Dave] You got to work through the suck.

[00:13:42 Gareth] You got to work through the suck.