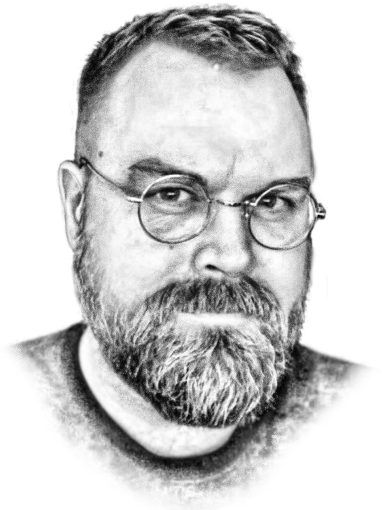
Heath Johns



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I'm a full-stack developer, sometimes manager, sometimes executive.

What makes me different is the depth of that stack, and that I've spent most of my career working directly with founders. I have a business degree, understand strategy, and speak the language of risk, reward, and investment.

Building technology is about trade-offs: with a high-level understanding of the business goals I can surface only the important decisions. We spend more time communicating ideas, less on details.

It's also not uncommon that a small change on the business side has large effects on the technology side, and vice versa. Sometimes a small bit of code has a dramatic effect on a business process, or a slight adjustment in strategy significantly reduces or even eliminates a coding project. My "bilingualism" lets me both identify and execute on these opportunities.

I've spent 27 years at work in tech: I'm as comfortable with transistors as I am with user engagement metrics, and every level in between. There's no need for roads - drop me on the map, tell me where we're going, and I'll get us there. If there's a river, I'll build a bridge; if there's a mountain range, I'll find a pass.

Frontier Marketing, 2011-2022

Frontier began as a group of consultants (marketing, design, writing, and tech) working together to elevate non-profit fundraising, coordinated by Benjamin Johnson (my former co-founder - see below). My role there is hard to pin down - certainly I did tech work, but a just as large part of my value was in helping establish culture, mediating and advocating amongst the group, being part of strategy sessions - both fundraising and for Frontier itself - and covering many of the gaps that exist in any startup.

The technology I built at Frontier was similarly diverse. We proudly advertised that our fundraising was data-driven, and it was my job to back that claim with code. I also designed, co-built, and managed Glass Register, a spin-off company that bridges the gap between non-profits and the fintech services of Stripe - we processed $45 million in online donations while I was there.

Because Frontier is a marketing, not tech, company, I saw my job as a unicycle maker: use the least amount of materials to do the job. You can replace code with design, and I leaned hard on that to create results well out of proportion to the size of the codebase and how long it took to build it. This resulted in a light-weight and flexible foundation that translated directly into client happiness.

I'm proud of my time at Frontier, and my part in taking it from startup to acquisition.

A-Power Computer, 2010-2014

I learned two skills at A-Power: how to be a great consultant, and how to deliver using a legacy code base. I stepped in during an emergency at the request of Tony Tsao (who I met in university) and ended up staying to keep things patched up and running smoothly.

This wasn't a full time job, and it was during this period that - in the absence of any pressing practical needs - the breadth of my technology experience widened. I built both analog and digital electronic devices, learned microprocessor design, and branched out into more theory-heavy programming languages such as Haskell. I also used this time to engage with Frontier while it was still getting up on its legs (hence the overlap in years).

Urbantastic, 2008-2009

This is the first startup attempt by Benjamin Johnson and myself (and what ultimately lead to Frontier). The big idea was microvolunteering: using the power of the web to connect skilled people with bite-sized tasks at non-profits.

Often the hardest thing to figure out, especially in technology, is what people really need. At Urbantastic we realized that non-profits didn't need a technology-enabled micro workforce, but something much more basic: money. That ended up being the big idea for Frontier.

The famous upside of failure is wisdom: during that year we found and filled every crack in the road from idea to getting a product in front of people, and in doing so the lessons of entrepreurship became ingrained in how we thought about almost everything.

CinematX, 2007-2008

As VP of Technology at CinematX I managed a group of five developers: translating and mutally advocating between them, the founder, and the venture capitalists who were financing the whole thing. We built some great technology on a tight timeline, but ultimately didn't find a product/market fit.

Royal Roads University, 2005-2006

The Bachelor of Commerce in Entrepreneurial Management degree from Royal Roads is an accelerated program that would normally take two years but is squeezed into one: they do this by upping the course load and omitting the summer break. I was also able to convince the university that my work experience with startups was equivalent to the prerequisite first two years of study that they normally require.

My time at Royal Roads filled in a lot of blank spots in my understanding of how to create and run businesses - I've subsequently used everything that I learned at there: from organizational behaviour to marketing, accounting to strategy.

Various, 1995-2006

I held three fairly ordinary developer jobs during this period - two at startups (5-10 people) and one at a large company (EDS); the longest was 5 years, the shortest was a year-long contract.

I also tended bar, picked fruit, did some 3D animation on contract, and for an interesting week helped out in an opal mine.

Soft Skills

- Consensus-building, productive empathy, and compulsive clarification.
- Mentoring and dev whispering.
- Self-direction.
- Group dynamic gap-filling.

Hard Skills

- 23 years experience with Unix (Linux, BSD).
- 100k+ LOC in Rust, C, Python, JavaScript, Common Lisp, PHP.
- Particular experience with network protocol design and implementation, financial processing, UI and UX, electronics (circuit design, PCB production) and microcontroller programming, digital signal processing, and working with large and flawed data sources.