



**CG GARAGE PODCAST #275
JODY MADDEN
CEO, FOUNDRY**

How do you keep people positive during times of uncertainty? Foundry CEO Jody Madden reflects on 20-years in the VFX industry – and prepares for future shifts.

In this podcast, Foundry CEO Jody Madden discusses how interesting new approaches to working may come out of the COVID situation, as well as how her experience at DD and long-distance management of Foundry have prepared her for managing people through times of uncertainty. She also tells Chris about Foundry's history as a DD off-shoot and how it's preparing for a shift in the way media is produced and consumed.

Contents

[Sharing knowledge](#)

[The unsung heroes of VFX](#)

[Foundry history](#)

[How to CEO from afar](#)

Useful links

[Foundry Insights Hub >](#)

[Foundry: Imagination Engineered >](#)

[Magnopus CG Garage podcast >](#)

[Vicki Dobbs Beck CG Garage podcast >](#)

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols You've listened to some of these podcasts. You said you listened to the one with Vicki, right?

Jody Madden I have, yeah. I listened to the one with Vicki, and then of course I listened to the one, the Magnopus takeover with Sally and team. That was good. You were definitely outnumbered.

Chris Nichols Yes. No, in fact, I am wearing a Sally Slade t-shirt today.

Jody Madden I love that. That's good.

Chris Nichols Which, it says "300 Rose" on it. We were celebrating when we were leaving the old facility, commemorating that day. I figured this would be a good shirt to wear today.

Jody Madden That's a good one. I like it.

Chris Nichols Yeah. That was a good podcast. Sally is a very, very bright girl. I've known her for a long time. Her and Kat and Emily were phenomenal on that episode. I loved-

Jody Madden Yeah, that was great.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I just actually sent them a video about how to play Dungeons and Dragons online, now that, the same situation.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols Anyway. We're doing that. I don't want to get too much into that. I want to get into you. Obviously, I met you over at Digital Domain, when you and I were both there. It was my second tour of duty at Digital Domain. You have a very, very interesting background. I was always fascinated by your leadership style at Digital Domain. I was very, very impressed by it. I always wanted to know more about you.

Chris Nichols This is a great opportunity to let people know about it. All I know is that, you started at Stanford, but did it start before that?

Jody Madden Stanford's a good starting point. Gosh, yeah, it's hard to believe that I graduated more than 20 years ago now. Yes, it started at Stanford. Grew up in California on the central coast, went north for school. Of course, at that time, mid, late '90s, everyone coming out of Stanford was focused on the internet boom. It was the early employees of Google, the guys at Yahoo who'd come out of the dorm. Not unlike some of the stories Vicky told, on going some of those interviews, that I met with people, and the fit just didn't seem right. My background was not in engineering, and it certainly wasn't in art either. I was from an English lit and communication background.

CHAOSGROUP

Jody Madden I studied social science. When I got out of school, I knew I wanted to stay in the Bay Area. It was around that time actually that Lucas had announced the building of the Lucas Digital Art Center, and that they had gotten approval to build the studio, at the Presidio.

Jody Madden At that point in time, I thought gosh, what an incredible place with a fascinating mix of talent, and this intersection between technology and art was always something that was fascinating to me. Ended up thinking about grad school for a bit, decided against it. Realized I would be a terrible teacher, and sent in an application for a PA job. Of course, I got turned down. Got the usual, "Sorry, you're not qualified to do this," and then you go back wondering, "How do I become qualified to become a PA?"

Jody Madden But I ended up actually getting called back for a job that I didn't know what it was at the time. It was a digital resource coordinator job. In fact, it was about working with the internal teams that were managing all the digital resources for ILM at the time. Everything from disk space to all of the O2s that were on artists' desks, to the render servers, the big old Origins, back in those days, two decades ago. That was my first job.

Chris Nichols Wow. That's a lot of technology, to throw at you all at once, isn't it?

Jody Madden It was. It really was. That wasn't ... It was fascinating though. I think seeing what it took to produce at that point in time, visual effects for film and commercials 20 years ago, and the dependency on technology, and the intersection with the creative teams, was fascinating to me. The groups of people continually pushing the boundaries, all the things that teams take for granted now, basic, not having enough disk space for a single shot, and having to write things out to tape. Yeah, it was great to see how far the teams could push the technology that we did have, both hardware and software.

Chris Nichols Right. Yeah. What was your feeling about going into all this technology? Was it something that you thought about, like oh yeah, I really want to get involved in how to get all this tech to work? That's a lot of stuff to deal with, right?

Jody Madden It was. I think it was actually, it was how that came together in service of the creative and the intersection with that, and the business, and how those things all aligned. I think from even an operational perspective, how you dealt with competition for all of those resources, and what that meant over time, and how it was managed across teams, both from the early stages of bidding, all the way through delivery. Those were fascinating problems to me.

Jody Madden I was given the first opportunity I had at managing a team about nine months later. To your earlier question about leadership, managing a team was never something that was a goal for me at all. In fact, I think my immediate response when asked to do I was, I wasn't interested. I was quite happy alone in the corner

CHAOSGROUP

doing my job. That didn't last for very long though. Ended up enjoying it quite a lot.

Chris Nichols Yeah. It's funny, I think there's some people who are reluctant to be leaders, and then there're some people who are wannabe leaders. I think the people who're reluctant sometimes realize that they have a skillset that they didn't realize. The thing that I think is really good about some of the leadership skills that I saw in you is that, you went in there with the idea of the team working, not you working, right?

Jody Madden Absolutely.

Chris Nichols When the team does really good things, then you get excited about it, because you've made a really great team. I think that's a difference, and that probably makes sense that you were reluctant to be a team leader, because I don't think that wasn't, "I want to be a leader." It was like, no, you want to make a team, and it was fun doing that.

Jody Madden Exactly. I think that was, I was fortunate to be given that opportunity, at all of 21, I think at the time.

Chris Nichols Wow.

Jody Madden To see how fulfilling that was. It really, exactly as you said, it was about enabling other people, and enabling people to do what they're great at. It had nothing to do with what I could produce myself. That was I think probably one of the most important lessons in any sort of management or leadership role, it really was about removing blockers for the team, and ensuring they had everything they needed to be successful.

Jody Madden I think in some ways, because I was fortunate enough to then, in following roles, have the opportunity to work with engineers, truly, people whose jobs I'd never done myself and wouldn't have the capability to do, it forced me in many ways to focus on the connections. Figuring out how to accelerate their work, figuring out how to better align them with what we were trying to achieve as a business. Because I couldn't get into the code, I couldn't debate with them how a rack was going to be built in the data center.

Jody Madden It was really ensuring that their strengths could shine, and that they could really add value in the most important way possible. I think being positioned in a role where you can't do a job yourself, it sets you down a path in an interesting way to approach it. Yeah, that's really been the common thread, in gosh, the eight roles I had there at ILM and Lucasfilm, all of my roles at Digital Domain, and really what led me back to management at Foundry.

Chris Nichols Yeah. Let's also, you said you're 21-years-old, you're a woman in the tech industry, and you're going into a leadership position. There must've been some challenges in that position, as a young woman?

Sharing knowledge

Jody Madden There were. I think also at that age though, it's the lack of experience to know any better. Perhaps, there would've been more fear had I been, had a bit more years behind me. I think the benefit of youth and perhaps lack of fear at that point, because everything is so new. I think one of the most amazing things, and I know you hear this all of the time in your interviews, the willingness of people to share knowledge in this industry is truly exceptional. People that are the best at what they do, their willingness to share knowledge, and their patience and willingness to share with a 21-year-old kid in a job maybe she shouldn't've even been in, is really exceptional.

Jody Madden I feel lucky to have been a part of that everywhere that I've worked. Now, partners, customers, our team, that's really, it's an exception that you don't see that. I think in general, approaching a situation or a team with the attitude that you're there to support and enable them, I think that's a much easier approach than if it were about me. I think what you were highlighting before about some leaders wanting, whether it's the spotlight or the focus to be on them and what they're contributing, that's never been my approach, and it's nothing I would be comfortable doing anyway. I've been lucky enough to work with people that can create things that I could never have the capacity to create on my own.

Jody Madden To have a part in supporting that, enabling that, ensuring they have what they need to be successful, and getting things out of their way, that's the most satisfying thing I can be doing.

Chris Nichols It sounds like, based on what you were saying that people are willing to share a lot of knowledge, it sounds to me like you're basically asking more questions than giving answers.

Jody Madden Absolutely.

Chris Nichols Which is a good thing.

Jody Madden Absolutely.

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols Yeah. I guess, you're right, if you trust your team, then you're basically going to rely on them to give you answers, rather than you giving them the answers they need to hear, right?

Jody Madden I'm interested in those intersections as well. I think we have such incredible experts in particular areas, whether that's deep creative expertise, deep technical expertise, people that're running businesses, and a lot of times, people have by definition, in their roles, spend a lot of time in their functional area. I was always fascinated by the intersections of those, and how they came together.

Jody Madden I think when I look back on the opportunities that I was given, the vast majority of the roles didn't exist in their current form before I stepped into them. They were born out of business need, at a particular point in time, or growth in an organization, or across organizations. Getting to focus on what a team needs at that particular moment, to be best connected to the others that're going to help make the larger group succeed, I think was a great place for me to focus my energy, and incredibly fulfilling.

Chris Nichols Right. It sounds like you really found your voice in the way that you want to be able to find your leadership style over at Lucasfilm. That's great. How did that lead you to Digital Domain?

Jody Madden My last roles at Lucasfilm at the time were with the systems operations engineering group. They were incredible. During those years, building Lucas Digital Art Center, the consolidation of the technology across the Lucas companies, the opening of the animation studio in Singapore, there's a lot consolidated in those last few years.

Chris Nichols Yeah, that's a lot. Yeah.

Jody Madden At that point in time, the CTO, VP and production and visual effects supervisors (Kim Libreri, Cliff Plumer, Mark Miller) when they left Lucasfilm to go to Digital Domain, I was curious to see what challenges they were taking on. Being in the Bay Area, we were always one step removed from the industry in LA. I was curious. About a year later I went down to visit. There were similar problems of scaling the organization, lots of work had been taken on, as you know.

Jody Madden It had always been a successful team at DD, because of the talent there. I think the teams were exceptional at pulling together, and had history, to do incredible work. A lot of the support structure to continue scaling wasn't in place at the time, and it seemed like something that I could help with. So I made the decision to leave the Bay Area.

Jody Madden In 2007, I moved down to DD. Right around the time *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* was going on, pre-*Tron: Legacy*, that group of shows. It was after

CHAOSGROUP

almost eight years in the Bay Area, I got to see so much. It seemed like a new challenge.

Chris Nichols Yeah. It was definitely really interesting to me. Obviously, I've been to DD a couple of times. The first time I was there was still during the Scott Ross days, and then I went back during the second version, and was there during the transition to the third version of DD. Which, you were a part of that. That was an extraordinary challenge for that company and for you guys as management.

Jody Madden Absolutely.

Chris Nichols And sitting here as an observer, I think you remember, what was so incredible to me, was the fact that you guys had these open forums to tell us what was going on. I was always one of the first people to raise my hand, as you probably remember, because I was very curious-

Jody Madden That's good.

Chris Nichols ... about how this was going to affect everyone. You guys were always very forthright about what was happening, and this was a real challenge, and how we were going to deal with the looming idea of bankruptcy. Because this obviously happens to a lot of visual effects companies.

Jody Madden Yeah.

Chris Nichols I got to say, the fact that we went through that entire transition and not a single paycheck got skipped, is incredible, and is a testament to the leadership that was happening at that time, because that was not ... Just wouldn't seem possible that we could do that, and we did. Obviously, it's long gone, the story's passed and everything, everyone's moved on and everyone's in great shape right now, but that must've been a real challenge for you as someone from business and from management point of view. How did you deal with that?

Jody Madden It's a great question. Looking back now, gosh, seven-and-a-half years later, there's still lessons that I learned then about transparency and information share in the face of uncertainty, that I've reflected on a lot in the last 90 days. The team of people at DD, and the team in Florida, as well, facing uncertainty about bankruptcy and job loss, and the impact that that has on someone's livelihood, and their home and ability to pay rent, that's real, and brings together a team of people in a way that few other things do. This recent crisis, health on top of that, and wide economic impact, the common word there I think is "uncertainty."

Jody Madden More than ever, being able to share the information that you do have, being able to be quite clear about what you don't know, and not trying to pretend to have all of those answers. I'm sure that during that time, you and others asked questions and we had less answers than there were questions. The entire team working together at that point in time was one, to share as much as humanly possible,

CHAOSGROUP

two, to protect as many jobs as possible, in the service of being able to continue to deliver the projects we had, and deliver for our customers on the commitments we made, so that we would make it to the other side and be able to win more work and continue on, and that DD, albeit in a different incarnation, would exist when we got to the other side.

Jody Madden When you're that aligned on goals, and they're so clear at every single level, it really does bring people together. Whatever the hours are, when you're that aligned, in a way, it simplifies things. The noise really, really drops away. It's all about taking care of those priorities. There's nothing else left.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I think there's a thing specifically, transparency as you mentioned is so important, because you may not know and sometimes, that's not necessarily something that you want to communicate, but sometimes, it is. I don't know, and we don't know, but we're going to come out of this together, because then, the team that's behind you is going to trust you and say okay, we'll do what we can, to do what we can to preserve what we can.

Chris Nichols The transparency was incredibly refreshing, to be honest, because that doesn't always happen. Some people are like, "No, everything's going to be okay," and then suddenly, the rug gets pulled out from under you. That's just not fair.

Jody Madden Yeah, it's a surprise.

Chris Nichols Yeah.

Jody Madden No.

Chris Nichols It's hard.

Jody Madden People need information. I think in any situation, whether it's a crisis situation, facing a bankruptcy, someone even interviewing for another job, they need information to make decisions. It's my job to help provide that information. In the case where we were at DD, if that meant the information to take another opportunity elsewhere, to preserve their livelihood and a paycheck, they needed the information to be able to do that. I found in my career, supporting people by giving them the information to make the decisions they need to make for themselves long-term, it's always paid off. Withholding that information, I've never seen it happen that way. Yes, it was an intense time. I was very, would never wish that on anyone, any organization to go-

Chris Nichols Neither would I, yeah.

Jody Madden ... through that. To come out the other side with people that genuinely tried to work towards the same goal, in the best way they knew possible, it was the best outcome we could hope for.

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols Right. Absolutely. I'm sure, we're going to just back-and-forth a little bit, but I'm sure that obviously, from that period, like you were mentioning, you must've learned so much, how to deal with crisis, in some ways, that it's an unknown. For example, like you said in the last 90 days, something no one would've anticipated, if you told them six months ago, has happened, and completely disrupted the entire economic system and social situation of the entire planet. Somehow, we need to figure out how to adapt to this new world.

Chris Nichols Did you think what happened, like you said, what happened during that time of crisis at DD, has given you tools to help you deal with today? What have you been able to use?

Jody Madden I think what I learned during that time at DD about how uncertainty would impact different people in different ways, I think has been extremely valuable. I think the complexity of what we're all experiencing now, as I said, both at a public health crisis standpoint and a global economic crisis, all at the same time, but then different groups of people experiencing that differently, and at different times, depending on where you are in the world, what part of the industry you're in.

Jody Madden There's a lot to that. I think over the past few months, first and foremost, again, you focus on the health and safety of your team. There's nothing more important than that, because at the end of the day, if they aren't taken care of, at a human level, number one, nothing works, and two, we certainly can't be there to support our customers, support their transitions in what they're going through over that period of time.

Jody Madden I think it's being respectful and empathetic where any one person is on a given day, because there's good days and there's bad right now. While we see some customers and we watched our team in APAC actually start to come out of the other side, and see green shoots of recovery, there's other team members and other customers that are actually entering into the most uncertain time, uncertain at a personal level, uncertain if jobs are going to be there, and when the work's going to run out. It's a bit of a roller coaster in that way, and I think remaining centered on those priorities and again, information share, because nobody knows right now.

Jody Madden Gaining new information and applying that, and refining that, refining our path forward, I think more important than ever. Being willing to make decisions and work towards a particular direction, without having all the information. Because no one has it right now.

Chris Nichols No. They don't. It's got to be challenging, because you have to adapt very quickly. People-

Jody Madden Absolutely.

Chris Nichols ... a lot of technology companies suddenly had changed their policies about certain things in a matter of days. That's challenging, to put that into practice. You can say something, "This is what we're going to do," but actually doing it is a lot more work than that. That must've been a real challenge for your team, right?

The unsung heroes of VFX

Jody Madden It was. I think interesting being a UK-based company, going through the whole process we went through, actually for GDPR a few years ago, and the focus on data and privacy, actually was a great training ground from a-

Chris Nichols Interesting.

Jody Madden ... policy standpoint, infrastructure standpoint, all of that bar that we had to meet there. Of course, since then, we've had acts in California, for consumer privacy, et cetera. It actually raised the bar in a really healthy way for the organization. I think for us at Foundry, the challenge that we weren't ready to go fully remote for, that we really spent those last, I would say, the last four weeks before I made the decision to close the remaining four offices, it was, as you would expect, it's the performance workstations that teams were dependent on. Not unlike you guys, when you're doing builds across three OSs, how you support that in a fully remote environment, is a challenge.

Jody Madden That's really, gosh, the unsung heroes, the folks in IT and DevOps that never get credit for anything. It's when they really shine, working with the engineering team to pull it off. Relatively quickly, once I made the decision to shut down the offices, the teams were able to test and were getting builds out the door. It's not perfect, certainly, and it's not running at 100%, but they are making it work.

Chris Nichols Yeah. It's true. When you ask that in the middle of developing a new version, or doing beta testing, whatever you're doing, and then suddenly, you ask your IT person to basically change the tires on your car while it's still moving, and that's really-

Jody Madden And moving fast, and I don't want to slow down.

Chris Nichols And moving fast, yeah. I would say, oh, yeah. It's a real challenge. I don't know how people respond to that. It's really tough. I think that there are a lot of people out there that need to be credited, or at least celebrated for the work they're doing, because obviously, a lot of people in the healthcare industry need to be

CHAOSGROUP

celebrated for the work they're doing, but there're people in the IT department that are keeping people's jobs, just by-

Jody Madden Absolutely.

Chris Nichols ... being able to make that happen. Those people need to be, they are a part of the economic solution that's going on right now. Also, keeping us safe. That's really, you're absolutely right, that we should be celebrating those people.

Jody Madden Yeah. They've enabled this flexibility that is keeping so many people working. Without their expertise and getting this set up, we wouldn't be. There's a lot of people besides everyone of course on the front lines, that are keeping us up and running right now. Overall, I think again, when the priorities are so clear, and so much of the other noise drops away, and it is about coming together and supporting our customers and helping them get remote, and get set up via VPN or a different license, or whatever it takes to work in this newly flexible environment, being able to do that.

Jody Madden There's something really powerful about that focus as well. I think the way that people are willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt, and come together as a team, has been really impressive.

Chris Nichols There's a friend of mine who doesn't like to drive, but decides he's going to take the train from Duarte to Santa Monica, it's two and a half hours each way every day. It's five hours on the train that he does, and suddenly, now he's working from home, and he goes, "Oh my God, I just saved myself five hours of commuting that I don't have to do anymore." He goes, "I don't know why I would ever go back to work, why can't I just do this all the time?"

Jody Madden To doing that, yeah.

Chris Nichols Do you think that in the end, while this has been very tough, everything else, we're going to learn a new way of working, that may actually be better for some people?

Jody Madden I think your friend is onto something there. I think what we've learned in these forced experiments, if you will, about ways of working, about how to do be most effective as a team, whether that's a development team, whether that's a product team trying to do discovery, or a marketing team running a digital event, and in fact, they're actually reaching 4000 people instead of 400, because of the way they approach it, there've been a ton of learnings already to come out of this.

Jody Madden Even as simple as how we run a meeting with a distributed team. I had someone tell me the other day, who's always actually a remote worker, and said, "For the first time, I really feel like I'm part of a team because it's a level playing field. I'm not the odd man out anymore. The way that we're having to work together changed the dynamic." I thought, what an interesting insight into how we can

CHAOSGROUP

change even how we run a meeting, to create greater opportunity for everyone's voices to be heard.

Jody Madden Yes, I think in the short-term, there's learnings I know we're already applying both internally in how we interact with our customers, and long-term, I think as we all gain more clarity on what this means for long-term changes in the industry, how we engage with each other, I do think there'll be more. I think they'll continue to be revealed over the next three, six, nine months.

Chris Nichols Yeah. It's funny, because there's things that have happened, that people say would never happen. Because they're forced to happen, they did happen. We proved them wrong. It's like, "We'll never be able to work from home because we're working on all these very secret movies." Guess what? If you have no choice, then you are. You found the solution somehow. Then suddenly, they're like, "Oh, that's okay, that's possible."

Chris Nichols I think it's interesting to think about the idea of remote work, because not everyone is going to have the kind of work that you need for using Nuke or Katana or whatever. It's going to require high-end computers, it's going to require a lot of power to do that. If you're working from home, you don't necessarily have that ability to have a \$10,000 or \$20,000 box sitting at your desk.

Chris Nichols Remote work is going to become interesting. Remote working into that, and the idea. Cloud has become, obviously, we've been dealing with Cloud at Chaos Group for a while. Just the idea of understanding how people can interact on the Cloud is fascinating. I'm sure this is something you guys have been exploring for a while.

Jody Madden It has. Even for a period of time there, we had our team focused on Athera, and specifically, a full Cloud platform, end-to-end, and made the decision last Fall to actually pivot away from a commercial offering. We found in the market that it was too early, and really, where our customers were at then and where we continue to see for the near term, at least, is it's more of a hybrid environment. Rare is the case where it's a production that's a true Cloud environment. Everything from workstations to your license servers, to storage, vendor processing, databases to make it work.

Jody Madden While there were people that successfully delivered visual effects that way, that wasn't the first step. However, a lot of those learnings, and even over the last three or four months, as we've seen studios go to this remote setup, largely through remote workstation, through VPNing in, simplest solution of course, because all of their infrastructure already exists. I do think to your point about performance workstations, and people thinking differently about that next round of capital investment, what about virtual workstations? Because you are paying as you go on that, if you know what kind of spec you need to do that type of work, how important is it to have that anymore?

CHAOSGROUP

Jody Madden As people go into this next cycle of investment, how do they change where they really invest? Is it important to have just core infrastructure and everything else is elastic on top of that? At the end of the day, if you figure out how to move the data around, does it really matter? I think if you asked most of our customers right now, if there was one thing they could've changed going into it, most of them would tell you they wish they had a better pipe into their studio, to move the data back and forth, because everyone is remote.

Chris Nichols Yeah. We were joking, it's like, "I'm surprised the internet hasn't broken." I was like, wow. I'm also really glad; about six months ago, I ended up getting fiber for my house. I'm like, I'm just going to go ahead and get fiber, and I'm like, I'm so glad I have it-

Jody Madden Wise decision.

Chris Nichols Yeah.

Jody Madden Very wise decision.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I'm really ... I'm glad I have it now. It is interesting, because then it becomes, then it's the idea was, you may remember back in the early-2000s, the idea was that, having a big computer is not going to be as important as having a fast internet connection.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols If you can use a Chromebook and do everything on the Cloud, remotely, then it's fine. Then it just comes down to having a nice keyboard and a nice monitor, and the rest is all remote.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols I think it's interesting, because tools like Nuke are critical. The first time I learned to do compositing, I knew a little bit of After Effects before that. The first time I really sat at a real compositor was at Digital Domain, with Nuke before it was a product that came out. I was sat there, and it was just a blank gray screen, and you had nothing. You had one node in the middle that said "Viewer." I'm like, how do I even start?

Chris Nichols It was fascinating to me, it suddenly explained how you build and you build. It became so liberating to think about that tool, because it really is so complicated, but it starts with nothing. You just build this mesh of ideas as you go through. It's like a brain map. When I saw node-based compositing, that was my first experience in it in Nuke. I was like, this is really amazing, what it can do.

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols It can be the most simple thing possible, to the most incredible comps I've ever seen. Learning from composers and all of those things, is such an important role to play. Do you see tools that you guys are offering, obviously are very big in the visual effects world, but do you see them have a bigger role in the overall computer graphic world, that is going to affect more than visual effects and other things.

Jody Madden Yeah. It's a great question. Actually, following a bit of the people and some of the products, we've actually spent a meaningful amount of time in design lately, particularly with the Modo team, and that was always part of that business, going all the way back to Luxology, and not unlike Chaos Group, outside of visual effects and animation, I'm sure there's some overlap in customers there. Particularly right now, this drive towards digital product creation, and what that means in footwear, accessories, consumer packaged goods. Now, more than ever, there's an interest.

Jody Madden There already was. You'd see in our case studies, looking on our website, work that we've done with New Balance and others in this space. I think the demand for that particularly given what we've experienced, is only going to continue to increase. All of these big brands around the world have had innovation agendas for a number of years now, working at different rates. They're the same people that we would see attend SIGGRAPH, because they will participate in the wider CG space, but not necessarily visual effects and animation per se, but many of those people in those organizations, this is their background. They came from worlds where pipeline was important, the ability to translate data across applications was important, the ability to maintain quality of visualization throughout a process was important to them, and all of these things are equally applicable in enterprise design.

Jody Madden Yeah, the design team with Modo and Colorway, I spend quite a lot of time there. It's actually interesting to see the overlap, both in people and product, and process to some extent.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I find it fascinating, I remember, obviously, you have a lot of similar customers in different areas. I remember talking specifically to a customer, they were talking about using Katana in the automotive design world, I'm like, why would you use Katana? It just didn't make any sense, because I always had this vision of what Katana is for, or what it was designed for. Then suddenly, I was like, oh no, I needed it because I need to create all these different configurations of a car, of every single possibility. It's like, oh, yeah, Katana's perfect for that.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols I didn't even think about it.

CHAOSGROUP

Jody Madden Yeah. When you distill it down to what a rules-based workflow does, that was non-destructive, rather than starting from a place of lighting and look-dev, yeah, the application is certainly interesting there. We do, we do have customers in those adjacent spaces to us. Not a huge focus for us with Katana, but we definitely have interest and do have customers in that space.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I think it's interesting, just to think about what that means and how that works.

Jody Madden Yeah.

Chris Nichols We skipped a little bit forward, but I want to go back a little bit about Foundry and how Foundry started. Obviously, you're the new CEO now, you've been there, which is great. Congratulations, I haven't said that before.

Jody Madden Thank you.

Chris Nichols Very, very excited about that happening. Given us a little bit of a background about the Foundry, and how that company started, and what led it to be the company it is today?

Foundry history

Jody Madden Yes. Foundry, founded in 1996 by Bruno Nicoletti and then Simon Robinson, our co-founder who's actually still with us today, and started as a plugin company. I was actually a customer of Foundry buying plugins for the Saber Group at ILM back in 2000. When the big inferno systems back in the day ... It really, really focused on plugins for those early years, on into early 2000.

Jody Madden I actually, when I moved to Digital Domain in 2007, my first office there was actually the D2 software office, which is really where Foundry, as part of DD, and Nuke came together. I guess it was 2008, ownership had changed a few times, the company had grown, Foundry was actually part of DD, and then there was a management buyout around that time. At that point, Foundry separated, Nuke and D2 software out from Digital Domain, Foundry. Really, then, taken over, of course, Jonathan Egstad, Bill Spitzak, the original authors, working very closely with the team, then in London, Foundry.

Jody Madden That's when the separation really started. Yeah, 2007, 2008. That same time period. Nuke of course, flagship product, and then beyond that-

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols That was a very important product, very important product, because that was the only real solution that was emerging at that time, right?

Jody Madden Exactly. It was the end of Shake. There wasn't another commercial solution out there. Various companies had their own internal compositors, but yes, this was the next big thing. In many ways, I think everyone believed that by removing it from one house, it was going to give it new life with Foundry. Then, the opportunity to accelerate development, make it a commercial product we support, with the commercial software company, that was the critical step in ensuring its ongoing growth and adoption across the industry.

Chris Nichols Right. That was a big deal. Then, Foundry continued to get new software from that point, right? Katana and then what was the other one I'm thinking of-

Jody Madden That's right. Katana and Flix, from Sony, and then Mari texture painting from Weta.

Chris Nichols From Weta, right. Basically, it seemed that some of these big studios were eager to pass on some of their proprietary software to the Foundry. What do you think the motivation was there? It's like, we don't want to develop this anymore because we might as well just give it back to the community? Was it that, or was it just too much work?

Jody Madden Probably a combination of all of the above. Getting software through the transition of an internal product, and what is used for all of the use cases, even in a studio that has film, commercial products, animation and visual effects, to be a viable commercial product, it's a lot of work and a lot of support. Those were even before the days where we were trying to standardize on reference platform every year, every other year.

Jody Madden If that is not your core business, balancing the priorities of an internal studio, and anyone else external, it's really hard to do. In some ways, they're competition perhaps, for the same type of work, depending on who you are in that ecosystem. I think the opportunity to not only have someone else take on that IP, continuing developing it, even if they want to continue developing internally, it also helps seed the larger industry with talent, that becomes trained on that product, which as we all know, at the end of the day, if you don't have artists trained on your products, it's really going to limit how flexible you can be, both in the work you can take on, your ability to give artists the opportunity to move between projects and facilities.

Jody Madden That knowledge base in the industry is really important. I think moving it outside, moving that IP out of house, the talent component is just as important as the long-term engineering and support.

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols Yes. I got to say, the transition of Nuke from the in-house software that was Nuke, where all I had was a gray slate and a dot, and I had no idea where to go from there, to becoming the product it is today, where there's got to be a transition where I don't have ... An artist that wants to learn Nuke doesn't have the gift that I have, where I can just go to Jonathan Egstad and ask him, how do I make this work? Because that's what it was like at DD. He invented Nuke and he told me how to make it work.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols Someone doesn't have that ability. You have to create a whole new interface, a whole new way of thinking, a whole new way of adapting this specific in-house software to be more commonplace for people to learn and use. That's got to be a transition that's going to be tough, right?

Jody Madden Absolutely, because you're transitioning from, even in the case of DD, the type of work we were known for, the type of work that was done in-house, that Nuke was fine tuned for, once you move out of that, and have different use cases, what you're trying to accommodate in flexibility of workflow, user interface as you already said, performance, support on all OSs; the wider that market is that you're trying to serve, it definitely introduces new challenges. Equally, I think the refinements that come with that kind of focus on UI, interop with other products, even now with standards, I think they benefit all users from that perspective. I think our approach has always been and continues to be: We serve customers. The ability to pick and choose what products are going to be in your pipeline is extremely valuable.

Jody Madden That flexibility to work well with other products that are common in our industry, and people that we all partner with, that's really important, and I think becomes of utmost importance when you take a product out-of-house, as we did with Nuke.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I think it was definitely, you saw the transition. I remember being at DD, people were always like, "This doesn't look like Nuke." It's like, it's not ... You can't just give someone a blank slate and a gray dot and say, "Good luck." You have to give them something that works ... It's a very different world.

Chris Nichols It's funny, because what I love is that I can actually, in Nuke, I can actually change it to be just exactly what I just said.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols That's an interface that I can still appreciate. It is a really powerful tool. Obviously, with things like Mari and Katana, and Modo, and all the products that you guys do, you're definitely the high-end of visual effects, in terms of that work. You guys have really focused that, and on those customers, and those customers' needs. It's pretty impressive, what's been going on during that time.

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols You started off as part of operations at Foundry, is that correct?

Jody Madden That's right. Though, it wasn't intentional. It was supposed to be for a week-long stay.

Chris Nichols Really?

Jody Madden Yeah. Actually, two days. When Bill Collis and Simon, our co-founder, Bill was our CEO at the time, called and said, "We know we need some help, why don't you just come over to London for a few days to help out? Just meet the team." Because I had never actually been over to London to visit. The time that Foundry separated from DD, and I was at DD for the next five years, a number of those with you, we kept in touch. They would come by the office. Of course, we were customers at DD then. We were a customer again.

Jody Madden At any rate, I agreed to go over to London and visit for a few days. Really, it was getting to spend time with the team that I realized how much I missed the industry, but specifically missed technology. In my roles at DD, they transitioned away from pure technology roles, focused on software and hardware and systems, to roles focused on artist management and studio management.

Jody Madden While I loved them, and it was great to see the picture, I remembered everything I loved about technology in those few days in London. When they said, "Why don't you stay for a while?" I said, actually, I live in Austin now, not in London. "Just come back for a month." I went back for a month, and a month led to six months, which led to a COO job again. Then that few years past, I agreed to stay on, moved through various roles, products and customers. Frankly, similar to my roles at DD and even prior to that, ILM and Lucasfilm, largely jobs born out of business need, for the work we were trying to do with the company at that time, and it actually wasn't until stepping into the CEO role, this past summer, that I realized, I hadn't actually stepped into a job that existed before I had it, since my first role.

Jody Madden A bit full circle, 20 years later.

Chris Nichols Yeah. That's interesting. Okay. You say you live in Austin. Now, you still live in Austin, and that's great. Love Austin.

Jody Madden I still live in Austin. Longest stretch, I've been home in seven years here.

Chris Nichols Right. That's great. What led you to Austin?

Jody Madden It was when I left DD, gosh, that was the end of 2012, post-bankruptcy, new team was set up, knew I wanted a break, wasn't sure what I was going to do next. Actually, coming to Austin to visit friends, it had that creative talent and technology that I really liked about the Bay Area 20 years prior, but was small. It

CHAOSGROUP

had a very small town feel, similar to where I grew up. It still had all of that potential. Because I wasn't sure what was going to be next, it seemed like, there's going to be something here. That was it.

Jody Madden Moved. Moved without a job. Was enjoying that break, when Bill and Simon called from Foundry.

Chris Nichols Wow.

Jody Madden Then seven years passed, and here we are. Been commuting ever since.

Chris Nichols I love Austin.

Jody Madden It's pretty good.

Chris Nichols I love Austin. Yeah, I used to live in Houston for a long time. I used to go to Austin. It's great, obviously. There's a lot of creative stuff going on there. It's a pretty town. Weird things like the bat bridge, all that stuff. I love that. Which is by the way, if people don't know, there's a bridge in Austin that houses, I think about five million bats that live underneath the bridge?

Jody Madden Yeah.

Chris Nichols When the sun sets, they all come out at once, and it's the most beautiful particle system you'll ever see. Just this cloud of bats-

Jody Madden It is gorgeous.

Chris Nichols ... that comes out. It's really pretty to see that.

Chris Nichols Since you live in Austin and you're working for a company in London, and you're the CEO, you seem to have figured out remote working pretty well, I'm sure at this point, right?

How to CEO from afar

Jody Madden I think I'd've given you a different answer, depending on the week before all of this. Because we have such a distributed team, and a distributed customer base. There's almost 300 of us. There's the London office, Manchester, there's about 20 people in the Austin office here, support and sales, small team in Sydney, of course the team in APAC. Then our customers are distributed.

CHAOSGROUP

Jody Madden Between time in London, time on the road seeing customers, the home base, I think particularly over the last three years or so, has become less relevant, to be perfectly honest. I think it would've been more difficult, had I still been on the west coast. I think what you do, covering 10 hours, I don't think I can do that.

Chris Nichols 10 hours is a lot. No.

Jody Madden Not enough overlap. Whereas central time zone; six hours with London, great amount of time with the west coast, overlap with Australia, APAC. There's no mistake, a lot of companies have their Americas operations here, because it's pretty nice coverage.

Chris Nichols Right. It's true. My day starts about 6:00 in the morning when my alarm goes off, and I have 15 emails or 20 emails that I have to answer right away. It's a little tough. Then you have to do it all by 10:00, otherwise, you're not going to get an answer until the next day. That is a little tough.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols But, it's still manageable, you can work with it. The hardest part of remote working is time zones. It's also very liberating. The same thing, one of the things about this podcast, I always wanted to do them in-person, as I've mentioned before, and that's why I was waiting for you to come to LA at some point. That's changed our situation. Then suddenly, I said, we're going to have to find a solution. I found this remote podcast system. Suddenly, so many more people are coming out, and saying, "Yeah, sure, I'll do that."

Chris Nichols I just got an email from, or I've been communicating with Andy Lomas-

Jody Madden Oh, that's great.

Chris Nichols Because he's done some amazing research in deep learning and aesthetics, and I saw his paper about that. I was like-

Jody Madden Yeah, he's got great artwork, too.

Chris Nichols ... let's just do a podcast. Yeah.

Jody Madden Yeah.

Chris Nichols Let's do a podcast with him. He's like, great, I'm in London. I was like, we'll work it out with the time zones and it's fine. If you're willing to become a little more flexible, you could actually reach out to a whole lot more people.

Jody Madden You can.

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols You're right, though. Central time zone, that's pretty good.

Jody Madden No, it's a pretty good setup. I think the way the team has been flexible, not just this, but I think the interest across the team also in getting out into the market with our customers, and not just product people and sales, but developers, product designers, over the past few years, I think one of the learnings from being at DD and before that, in the Bay Area, when people weren't connecting or able to problem solve quickly, there was always something so powerful about having a developer go sit next to an artist, that was using their product.

Jody Madden I remember Craig or Doug would have someone do that at DD. It was like, get out of your desk, walk over, and find out what's going on. What you can learn by sitting next to someone for even an hour, without even talking or asking questions, just observing them use the product that you're working, and the challenges that they hit, it's so valuable. I think, when I think about how I would replace some of that engagement right now, those are some of the things I've been considering, because I do think for product designers or engineering teams, that access to customers, it's so important. It's really important.

Jody Madden I think not having that opportunity, it's just tough over long-term. I think while we can all be great on Zoom and on video, and we're better connected than ever, how do we find ways to fill in the gaps that would've otherwise been filled by in-person interaction and communication?

Chris Nichols Yeah. That's true. What do you think, what are some of the things that you believe are going to be the future of what we're doing in terms of the technology and stuff? Specifically in the visual effects world, because I think that's something that you guys play such an important part in. Do you think there's going to be some new ideas, some new paradigm shifts that're happening in the next few years? Obviously, everything's changed now. There's a lot of questions we don't know the answer to. Do you think that there's going to be some ideas of what technology's going to become in the next five years or so?

Jody Madden I think the overall focus of the industry on both efficiency at scale, because the demand for content, even through this, continues to be high, and will continue to be, and what that means for people in visual effects and animation, as it relates to performance, as it relates to freeing up artists' time more and more, through more innovative workflows, not necessarily full automation, but everything that machine learning can bring us, and tools to make artists more efficient, I think all of those things continue to become more important.

Jody Madden When I think about the longer term horizon and enabling technologies like machine learning, where our research team's been spending some time and is doing more work beyond the open source server they released, but getting that actually into nodes and products, so that it's useful for artists, real-time is part of workflows. Not just as a technology in and of itself, but from a standpoint of

CHAOSGROUP

accelerating decision making, and where does that live in traditional workflows and change it, and how does that change pipelines long-term?

Jody Madden Then of course back to this remote working, and focus on how to accelerate for our customers, greater flexibility in hybrid environments. What does that mean for data, what does that mean for having a distributed pipeline in teams of people, and how do we ensure our existing products now, and next generation products, are prepared to not just survive in that environment, but actually make artists even more able to spend time doing what they want to do? That's on creative processes, not on repetitive work.

Jody Madden I think those three themes, overarching, our own strategic plan, and where our initiatives were for 2020 and continue to be, I don't see those changing. In fact, as I reflect on the things that, when I kicked off the planning process with the team last September after stepping into this role, everything that we talked about that was important in three, five years and beyond, if anything, what has happened over the last three or four months, has only solidified the importance of all of those things, and that longer term investment, beyond what's on the roadmap for this year.

Jody Madden How do we ensure that we're well-placed to support our customer base long-term in that way? Definitely more on that soon.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I find it a little bit ironic that obviously, it's sad that a lot of productions, a lot of work has stopped, and people have had a hard time dealing with that. At the same time, the demand for content has skyrocketed, because people are stuck at home. Suddenly, there is this huge demand for content, and the world has to adapt to what kind of content they're consuming, or what that world is like. I've been sitting here thinking, this could very well be a very disruptive, something that was, I believe, was inevitable in terms of the film industry. The inevitability that traditional filmmaking, movie theater experiences are going to be disrupted heavily by that.

Chris Nichols At the same time, the demand for people to see high quality content is still very high, and the world of streaming is obviously going to change a lot, what that new landscape is going to look like, and the kinds of content that people expect. Obviously, what do you think that the world of streaming changes how you view the technology you're working on, going from traditional film stuff to more of a streaming and online world? Do you think that that changes the way technology adapts itself?

Jody Madden Perhaps for us, less so, because we're a bit one step removed. I think it's the overall demand and increase for content, that's driving this need for efficiency, the ability to move data, not just within single studios, but multiple studios. The ability to do that efficiently, scale the need for consistency of visualization from start to finish at the earliest stages of pre-viz through virtual production if you

CHAOSGROUP

will, through delivery, the challenges of data and carrying data through pipelines end-to-end.

Jody Madden Those things, whether the content is viewed in your living room, or in a car on an iPad, or in a movie theater, is less important I think, for us in that way.

Chris Nichols Interesting, yeah.

Jody Madden I think of course, in the near term, as we talk to so many of our customers, it's a bit of a mix of impact with, of course, many in animation still busy and working, albeit remotely. Others of course doing post-work, have enough to keep them going for a period of time. Some months, some longer-

Chris Nichols Until the next batch, right.

Jody Madden ... some shorter. Exactly. I think what happens in this quarter and into Q3, probably greater unknown, as we start to see things perhaps recover more into Q4. I think that big question about live action production, I think we've all been hearing about some of the projects moving entirely to animation, while they figure out what that looks like in the future, that's a big question mark for me. What does live action look like?

Chris Nichols I think it's fascinating. Yeah. I remember the time when the writer's strike happened, and all of a sudden-

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols ... they came up with this new idea called a reality show. All of a sudden, the reality show, we thought it was just going to be there to stave off the entertainment industry, but it stuck around. I have this feeling that animation is going to be a new medium that's going to emerge, it's not a new medium obviously, but it's going to become more important as people decide, we're just going to continue working with animation. I don't think live action's going away, or will go away.

Chris Nichols I think animation's going to have an important role in our future.

Jody Madden No, I completely agree. It's certainly what comes out of this, and the inventiveness that I think we're already seeing from a number of our customers. Yeah, really, really impressive. I think even just from a creative standpoint, and rethinking what their approaches were to some of these projects. Lots of learning to be done.

Chris Nichols Yeah. I think it's amazing. I think it's really cool that while we're struggling to figure out how to deal with this situation, I think that we're going to come up with some very interesting ideas. I really am glad to have companies like your company and my company's like, "Let's figure out what we can do to make these

CHAOSGROUP

customers happy, and to be able to continue to make great content, because there is a demand for this stuff." There's a demand for high quality work.

Chris Nichols And, the fact that we can enable both our customers to work from home, is also a big deal for us.

Jody Madden It really is.

Chris Nichols Thank you for doing that.

Jody Madden No, when I saw your response, I also of course loved the picture of Vlado's dog on the website. The way the industry has come together, I think, number one, the resilience, and two, just the willingness to try to work together to make this all work, for however long it lasts, and to be flexible with each other, and whether that's supporting students at home right now, that are outside of school, and want to learn and work on our products, and the skill-up events that a number of us I know are holding, to supporting the commercial work that continues on with everyone remote.

Jody Madden It's so important, because it does take everyone working together to get to the other side of this. That, in the silver lining's group, I think that to me, day-to-day, through all of the challenges that we're facing, is the best part.

Chris Nichols Absolutely. My wife's a Flame artist. She's home right now, unfortunately. Her Flame is locked up in the building. She says, "I think it's a good time for me to brush up on my Nuke skills."

Jody Madden Love that.

Chris Nichols She's like, "Let's learn some Nuke while I'm here." I was like, great. We'll set you up with that.

Jody Madden Exactly.

Chris Nichols You guys offer that ability.

Jody Madden Absolutely.

Chris Nichols That's really helpful.

Jody Madden No, it's good. It's really good. No, I think what everyone ... The amount of learning actually that's been happening while people are remote has been so impressive to me. Not just our products, but just in general, people, the interest in picking up new skills and skills development during this time, I think, to mix up the time at home, it's just been really impressive to see. I love that.

Chris Nichols Yep. I'm picking up, tying flies, that's another thing I'm picking up on my free time.

CHAOSGROUP

Jody Madden To go fly fishing?

Chris Nichols Yes.

Jody Madden I like that. In LA?

Chris Nichols Yeah. Just something ...

Jody Madden Really?

Chris Nichols Yes. Actually, you're from the central coast actually, you can actually fly fish in the surf, it's actually the most challenging fly fishing I've ever done.

Jody Madden Really?

Chris Nichols Yeah.

Jody Madden It's cold out there. Yes, I was born in Lompoc. I know that neighborhood, and surfing's cold. That is not a beach.

Chris Nichols Yeah. No, it's tough. There's some very interesting things down there. There's a great community that I found online that helps you figure out what kind of materials. All of a sudden, this whole other world has appeared, that would never had happened if I hadn't just, meh, I'm just going to pick that up. Yeah.

Jody Madden That's impressive.

Chris Nichols Yeah.

Jody Madden That's really impressive. That's good learnings right now. I think the work that people've been doing, besides the crafting of models at home, and the enormous amount of cooking that's been happening-

Chris Nichols Yep.

Jody Madden Yeah. all the projects coming out of people's homes right now, it's pretty impressive to see. That's the first time I've heard creating flies for fly fishing.

Chris Nichols Yeah, it's fun. It's fun. Thank you so much for doing this. This has been an amazing talk. Always great to hear from you. At some point, when things do settle in and you're able to make it out to LA, or I come to Austin, I'll definitely want to stop by and see each other in person, that would be great.

Jody Madden I would like that. Now, yeah, I expected us to be doing this in LA, around an NAB trip. I'm glad this worked out. It was really good to see you.

CHAOSGROUP

Chris Nichols Yeah. Perfect. All right. Thank you so much.

Jody Madden I can't believe you're almost at 300 podcasts. It's impressive. I look forward to the 300th.

Chris Nichols Thank you. Me too. I can't believe it either. Every time I see the number of the episodes, like, what? Yeah.

Jody Madden You're going to get there faster than you think now that you have people signed up from all over the world.

Chris Nichols Yeah, it's true. It's true. Thank you Jody.