



## SEASON 3

### EPISODE 17

[INTRO]

**[0:00:05.8] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome back to Happy Porch Radio. The podcast for progressive agency owners and web professionals. Season three is focused on the growing number of agencies who are making the world a better place.

We explore what this even means, why is it different from any other agency and how can it be reconciled with the real-world challenges of running a profitable agency? Join your host, Barry O’Kane as he speaks to leaders of agencies who are driven by verify use to positively impact the world around them.

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:43.7] BOK:** Welcome back to Happy Porch Radio and now sadly this is the last episode of Season Three. We’ve heard from so many truly inspiring people and agencies this season and there are many more I would love to speak to. Maybe I’ll have to come back to that in a future season. Please do drop me a line if you think that is good idea or a terrible one.

Or, if you have any feedback at all. You can reach us via [happyporchradio.com](http://happyporchradio.com). In this episode, I speak to the incredibly driven founders of Wholegrain Digital, which is a WordPress agency in London that are on a mission to not just create world class websites but to create a more sustainable and equitable world. Vineeta and Tom share their story and their positive energy in such a wonderfully open and honest way and listen out to the energy in their voices when they talk about their desire to constantly improve.

One cool thing we discuss is their journey to becoming a B corp. Why they did that and the impact it has had. So let’s meet Tom and Vineeta.

[CONVERSATION]

**[0:01:50.7] TG:** I'm Tom Greenwood, I'm the co-founder and managing director of Wholegrain Digital, a WordPress agency based in London and founded in 2007.

**[0:01:57.6] VG:** I'm Vineeta and I co-founded WordPress web design agency called Wholegrain Digital. My main function in the business is to generally manage the team and design projects whether that be internal or external within the business

**[0:02:12.3] BOK:** Thank you so much for coming on the show, I realize you got up early in the morning to do this for me so I appreciate that a lot.

**[0:02:18.4] TG:** That's alright.

**[0:02:19.6] BOK:** I'm really excited to hear about Wholegrain and as we were talking just beforehand, what I'd like to do is kind of follow the journey through since 2007 and because I know that last year, you became one of the few B corps in the UK, so let's come to that later but that's part of something I'm quite looking forward to, that part of that conversation.

Let's start at the beginning, what started Wholegrain? Where do you guys meet and how did the whole thing start?

**[0:02:44.1] TG:** Vineeta and I met when we were doing our graduate jobs in Hampton. I realized that she worked in Telco but we both lived in Hampton when we first moved into a shared house together and we fell in love. I'd always said that I wanted to run my own business and I was on a two year contract so I was thinking, "Well, I'm at the end of that, it's a good time to take the leap, otherwise I'd get another job and I'll probably be stuck in it for years."

We were chatting about it one day and I said, you know, "I'm going to do this, I'm going to start a business." I didn't really know what it was going to be at the time and to my surprise, Vineeta was like "Yeah, okay, let's do it. I'll quit my job as well."

**[0:03:24.3] VG:** I quit first.

**[0:03:26.3] TG:** Yeah, actually, you quit yours before I finished mine which was amazing. I was really fired about sustainability, it had always kind of being a passion of mine, at university I studied design and I focused on sustainable design and that's kind of what I've been doing in the job that I was working, which was nothing to do with its web or anything, it was – I was actually designing fire places and heaters.

**[0:03:52.6] VG:** To make them sustainable.

**[0:03:53.6] TG:** To make them energy efficient and so I was doing competition or through dynamics analysis of like all of their heat flows and everything and that was interesting but I figured designing fire places was not really, it's not going to change the world and I wanted to do something that was more aligned with my own interest.

We actually decided that – it was 2007, there was a lot going on at the time, a lot of excitement there, green business and sustainable design at the time and what we noticed was there was a lot of people with really good ideas, really good intentions starting businesses or designing produces that were supposed to be more sustainable.

They just had no idea how to present themselves, everything was like eco this, eco that and green this, green that.

**[0:04:40.9] VG:** And font was bad, the design was bad, it was really sad because you wanted these businesses to progress.

**[0:04:46.6] TG:** Yeah, and they were the sorts of things that would appeal to people like me who are like really into this sort of green stuff but I realized and Vineeta could see, if you really want to sort of change the market and move things with sustainability, you need to get things into the mass market, it's great to have those niches as a starting point because they'll always –

You need those hardcore green consumers to actually kick things off but at the end of the day, you need to make things – that was our intention starting the business. We felt like this was something that we could help with and so we actually started a branding agency with this

specific intention of working with these types of positive businesses to figure out how they can present themselves in a way that's honest but appealing to a wider audience. It was hard.

**[0:05:38.8] VG:** It was hard also because they were not the people who had the money.

**[0:05:42.3] TG:** Yeah, those were the smaller green business we found were actually really enthusiastic and really kind of receptive but didn't have budgets to pay a branding agency. You know, maybe we were a bit naive at the beginning but what they all said was, like what we will spend money on is a website because we know we need a website and that's going to be one of the main ways that we present ourselves to the public.

If you can do one of those, we'll pay for it and so that's how we changed quite quickly from being a branding agency into a web design agency and we were originally, we actually were not originally called Wholegrain, we're originally called Scamper and –

**[0:06:23.5] VG:** Yeah, which we thought was not very good branding name.

**[0:06:30.0] TG:** The irony is that we were a branding agency that was not particularly well branded.

**[0:06:36.1] VG:** Others thought we were but we didn't think we were so we needed to move on and change ourselves and to words about, the more websites we made, the more we realized that people who had WordPress as their CMS were happier and it was like, the stars were aligning for us where WordPress was getting more and more functionally better and we were gaining more expertise in it.

It just felt like if we continue down this path we will make better websites for better clients with something that's open source and they have more control over and so on and so we sort of just changed the way our business worked and just dropped all of our services and said, we're just going to call ourselves Wholegrain Digital to encompass everything that we do, the wholesomeness that we want to create in this world and somehow, Wholesome Digital didn't have the ring to it.

We went on to call ourselves Wholegrain digital and dropped the Scamper branding completely and overnight, I have no idea how that happened, overnight, we had the confidence and more people came to us for more websites. We did more positive work since.

I think so. Not that we ever did any negative work, that was one of the ethical principles. We have a very strong ethical policy, all leads that come through the business go through our scrutiny, don't they?

**[0:08:02.5] TG:** Yeah.

**[0:08:04.4] VG:** That's how Wholegrain came about.

**[0:08:06.6] BOK:** Yeah, that's brilliant and you do your website has very clear statements of those things which is amazing and I'd like to talk a little bit about how you articulated that. But that story's brilliant. You start off with a visionary, I want to have my own company and I want to align it to my values, how nerve wracking or how difficult or how brave a leap did it feel to go out and go, "I'm going to setup this agency" and then to switch quite quickly to focusing on the web design stuff.

Were you feeling confident all the way through, you know, "We're going to keep going and it's all going to be good," or was it fairly scary?

**[0:08:38.8] TG:** It was pretty scary, I'd say, the first three years were pretty touch and go and –

**[0:08:44.3] VG:** It also aligned with the financial crash in 2008 so people would use that as an excuse for small businesses to keep discounts and so on.

**[0:08:52.8] TG:** Yeah.

**[0:08:53.3] VG:** It was hard the first three years.

**[0:08:55.6] TG:** I think that there was a lot of using that as an excuse, so I think we met a lot of businesses were – you knew that actually, it wasn't really a problem for the time but it was like, it was just a card that everyone was playing. "Oh the financial crash, give me a discount."

Yeah, we were kind of just living off some savings really and trying to scrape together enough clients to keep us going. When we decided to change to Wholegrain from Scamper and focus purely on WordPress, that was actually where it stopped being nerve wracking.

We just had this confidence that this was the right thing to do and this is what people wanted and it was literally – I mean, as Vineeta said, it was almost overnight. I mean, we literally changed our entire brand in a weekend, we just decided one Friday that this is going to happen, this is what we're going to call ourselves and we designed our brand identity, we designed and launched a new website.

**[0:09:49.6] VG:** Our website on Sunday and Monday, we were Wholegrain.

**[0:09:52.8] TG:** Yeah, Monday, it was like, we send an email newsletter out to all of our clients saying hey, this is what we've done.

**[0:09:58.4] VG:** Some of them straight away hired us.

**[0:10:00.3] TG:** Yeah, some of those who strayed away came back and said "Hey, that's really interesting, yeah, we like what you're doing, we need a website, WordPress sounds great, let's talk." That was really the point in which it started feeling like it all made sense and we had that confidence.

**[0:10:14.2] VG:** Yeah, it didn't change any outtakes, it was actually improvement of ethics and reminding ourselves why we are here and giving the services that we knew now we were fantastic at and can actually promote those businesses for greater good, yeah.

**[0:10:31.2] BOK:** Yeah, that's brilliant, really like the fact that you said that gave you more confidence. Quite often when I speak to small business people generally but agency owners,

the journey to focusing, to sort of narrowing and having a clearer definition of who they are, they find that scary rather than confidence building.

I think it's really cool that you said, "This is it," you both used the word confidence so that's brilliant. You said it didn't really change the ethics or the purpose behind what the work that you were doing or the why with what work you were doing.

Did you have – as we said you've got this clear statement of values, of who you are and the kind of filtering process for your clients and so on, projects, sorry. Is that something that was that clear right from back then or is it something that's grown and sort of changed or clarified over the years?

**[0:11:18.6] TG:** I think it's always been, and it's always been fairly clear in our heads and even at the beginning, you know, we were talking very openly about what we wanted to achieve in terms of trying to use business as a force for good and help positive organizations to kind of compete in the marketplace.

We were quite open about that but it has really crystalized over the years, I think we've got a lot more clarity about what that actually means, it's tangible actions that we can take. I think we've also learned a lot about the limitations, maybe at the beginning it was easy to kind of think "Yeah, we're going to be all sustainable."

Then, like gradually over the years, you sort of realize, "Actually being sustainable, the intention is easy but the reality is really quite challenging." I think that that's something that we kind of battled with along the way but we will still gained maybe a little bit more opportunity myself a bit more understanding of other businesses of why they may have good intentions but they're not as perfect as people like me might think they should be. It's a journey you have to go on.

**[0:12:25.9] VG:** That's why we have positive screening, negative screening for the leads that come in. So positive screening is actually trying to see if they are promoting a healthy and natural environment such as clean energy or nontoxic goods but as negative screening, are they promoting fossil fuels or alcohol or GM products, GM modified products, the tobacco.

There's a clear distinction between positive screening and negative screening when the leads come in and we actually have a discussion in the team because everybody in the team is so well aligned with the ethics of the business, they will actually voice their opinion if they will or won't work on the project. That gives us quite a clear indication that we don't even sometimes have to touch the ethical policy, it's just the way team reacts to the projects, yeah.

**[0:13:12.6] TG:** I think coming back to your question, you know, in the early days, it wasn't written down, it was just for a need to know, we would just make a judgment of like do we take these people, what we feel comfortable working with or not?

Gradually as we've grown as a business, we've realized that we need to really clarify who it is we want to work with so that it's not just in our heads but even our team members can understand clearly, these are the people we want to work with, these are the people who really won't, who we don't want to touch.

As part of that by writing it down what has opened up is that actually, there's a huge gray area that we've got like this green list of needs to speak about which is a positive screening of organizations that we think are really going to make a genuinely positive contribution to make the world better.

Some of those are profit driven businesses, they're doing something good, some of those are nonprofits. Then there's the red list which is all the stuff we just don't want to touch because we just feel like that's actively making the world worse and we don't want to be part of that but it's a huge gray area in the middle where you look at a business and you think, "Well, I don't know, to be honest."

**[0:14:15.5] VG:** "We weren't doing anything bad."

**[0:14:18.3] TG:** Yeah, that's just the kind of the run of the mill business and you know, maybe they do some good things.

**[0:14:22.9] VG:** Somebody needs –

**[0:14:24.1] TG:** But their mission is not. Someone needs that product or service but their mission is not necessarily it's changed the world. Those often end up being the ones which are kind of – call them like Robin Hood projects where you know, it's like we're working with something we don't approve of.

You know, it's find something we do. But we're working with things which we think you know, "Okay, maybe this isn't going to change the world but they've got a decent budget, they're nice people and if we make some profit on this, we can actually put it all to something that we really believe in."

**[0:14:55.5] BOK:** Yeah, Robin Hood sort of encapsulates that very truly. I guess this two-part question. One, in the early days, did you find it hard to say no to projects if you were also sort of basically trying to make the bills and pay the bills.

In the early days and second part of the question, has that changed now as you sort of become established and stronger in who you are?

**[0:15:19.7] VG:** I think it wasn't as hard to say no because we were slightly, you know, in your 20's, you have this undeterred confidence of things that are going to work out until they don't but in a way, you push through. Even though it was very hard, we had very clear messaging even then our website on how we work with ethical businesses and positive businesses and I still remember a company calling us that are very well-known magazine company.

That wanted to do rebranding of their tag line and they said, "We don't recycle our magazines, will you still work with us?" I found that statement really hilarious but then, I suddenly realized, the reason they were talking about it was because after clear messaging on our site. In a way, it was easy to screen the leads because what we were saying on our website aligned with some people and the ones that didn't align, didn't get in touch.

Screening was much easier since the beginning but when they did get in touch, we would be, although it was hard, we would turn the lead down very politely saying how "We're here to do something else and perhaps we won't be the best digital partners for yourself."

That same thing hasn't changed today. Today we have, touch wood, better clients, more money and more budgets.

**[0:16:41.4] TG:** I think in some ways, it has actually changed, it's got harder. The reason it's got harder is because we specialized in WordPress, it has diversified the tile of companies that approach us so in the early days, when we were just talking about sustainability and branding and so on.

It was really focused that our leads were only people who were interested in that whereas now, we'll get companies who they just want WordPress specialists and they're not necessarily so interested in the ethical side of things and those are the ones that are more challenging. What's particularly harder is that I think in those early days, although we had no money.

We didn't have any overheads and the value of each project was quite small, so to turn somebody down it was like "Okay, yeah, we're not losing that much." Whereas now, if we turn somebody down, there is financial pressure. We've got like a team of 18 people and you know, their salary's got to be paid every month and sometimes those projects that come in are quite sizeable I mean, we get a variety size of projects. But I mean, last year, we turned down a contract that was worth six figures.

**[0:17:49.6] VG:** Twice actually.

**[0:17:50.6] TG:** Yeah, they actually came back. God. They made me go through this again.

**[0:18:01.0] VG:** We're not that large and for a company to turn somebody like that down but we knew we can't do this, we just can't do this.

**[0:18:05.8] TG:** Yeah, that was one of the ones where we did go to our team and we talked to them about it and said, "Look guys, how do you feel about this, is this something we should be working on?" Everyone was like, "No." It was pretty clear, they just didn't want to be involved in it.

**[0:18:18.0] VG:** I think it was more gray than –

**[0:18:20.2] TG:** It was yeah, it was in the gray area.

**[0:18:22.6] VG:** But still not interested.

**[0:18:23.6] TG:** That was what made it harder in a way that it was in the gray area so it wasn't like, "Oh we can't work with you because we have a list of industries we won't work with," it was actually, they're on the gray area but you know, in our guts, we just feel this business isn't right and when we talked to the team, everybody basically said the same thing.

You know, they don't want to come to work every day and work on that project.

**[0:18:43.5] VG:** That was what would have happened because it would have been an all-consuming project.

**[0:18:48.5] TG:** Yeah.

**[0:18:49.4] BOK:** That's a story that can't be – the strength, both of what you're wanting to do and the team, everything comes through with the story like that, we've got a very clear no, I always think, it's easy to say yes to money now and then worry about how to fix it but it's long term strength to say no to that kind of no. I find it hilarious that you had to do it twice.

**[0:19:09.5] VG:** Actually, when they came the second time, I just didn't want to tell Tom because most of the leads come through to me. I actually thought, "Should I just reply and leave it?" But it would have been wrong not to involve him.

**[0:19:22.5] BOK:** Now, you've mentioned the team several times, at what point did you start recruiting and start actually building a team?

**[0:19:28.2] VG:** Right at the beginning, we knew that they have some skills we didn't have. We could do the design, we could do the project management but we couldn't code, well, Tom could code a bit but not well. We had to hire freelancers –

**[0:19:41.8] TG:** I think any of our developers if they heard the statement “Tom can code a bit,” they would just laugh.

**[0:19:49.1] VG:** I agree. Most of the coding elements, we knew that we had to hire somebody who could write a very clean, efficient code and although, my background has electronics and coding in it, the technologies have moved far beyond. We just decided that right from the beginning, we’d hire contractors and freelancers unless, we have the capacity to hire somebody in house and so we did. We always had somebody on the other coding for us but as time went on. I think – was it 2011, 2012 we started hiring employees as such.

**[0:20:24.0] TG:** Yeah, I think so.

**[0:20:26.1] VG:** It just grew by about two to three every year and we are the size we are now.

**[0:20:32.0] TG:** It’s been fairly organic since then.

**[0:20:33.6] VG:** Yeah, two or three people a year.

**[0:20:35.2] TG:** We found to be honest, I mean, we found actually, once we started having people in house, that was probably one of the scariest leaps we did take. I think it was just a big mental barrier. You know, it’s a big responsibility to have employees on payroll.

**[0:20:50.5] VG:** And the idea that somebody could go and show your employment contract to get a mortgage.

**[0:20:55.6] TG:** Yeah.

**[0:20:59.6] VG:** That really freaked me out.

**[0:21:00.4] TG:** Yeah, I think we put it off for a little while because we were just too scared of that but once we did take that leap, we realized that actually, it was a positive because those people really did feel like they were part of the team and we’re working on something together and there was a commitment to it on both sides that was really healthy.

**[0:21:18.7] VG:** I mean, it's just so lucky that the people who approached us and the people we have hired, right from the beginning, they're so aligned with what we think, what we want to do and they are attracted to the brand because it aligns with their personal values. So they're not going through a hot cool, hot cool feeling when they're coming from their home to a workplace there actually swimming happily between the two, which is great, yeah.

**[0:21:45.5] BOK:** Now, you said, when they reached out to you, they contacted you, or came to you, how did that recruitment process work because it does sound that you've got a really aligned team. Is that something that's happened just because as you say, people have come to you because their interest in the way you presented yourself?

Or has there been a recruitment process we've had to go out and hunt people?

**[0:22:05.5] TG:** Until fairly recently, we never actively recruited anybody. We get a fair number of applications just anyway from people who like the look of us as a company and may think that it's something that I'd like to be a part of and I think we're lucky in that respect.

Until fairly recently, we were quite passive about it, we would basically just wait and if somebody came through the door that we felt like yeah, they have something, they were a great fit, they're a great person and they have something to offer, then we'll just take them on. But more recently, within the last two years, our business reached a stage in terms of the type of projects we were doing, the type of clients we had while we realized that if there's a skill scout that needs filling, then it needs filling.

We can't just sit around and wait. Yeah, we've been kind of learning the recruitment process over the last couple of years. And part of that is trying to filter those applications. So you know obviously putting job ads out. We're required to try and get the applicants but actually still communicate who we are and what we're all about and filter these applicants so that we don't just get people who have the right skills, but we also find people who are aligned with our values. That is quite hard because it is a bit like turning down projects.

You find candidates that you think, “Well they probably do the job fantastically, but they might not be the right cultural fit for us” and so in those cases, we still have to turn them down and just be a bit more patient and wait until we find the right person. I think that pays off in the long run because it builds some really strong team culture and not everybody in our team necessarily has exactly the same values as to myself or Vineeta, they all have their own views on things.

**[0:23:53.2] VG:** They’re passionate about something Tom, or they have their own passions.

**[0:23:56.8] TG:** Yeah the overall point is that they are really positive people.

**[0:24:01.0] BOK:** Yeah and Vineeta you just said they are passionate about something. So that sounded like that’s a really important like you would almost use that as a recruitment criteria?

**[0:24:10.0] VG:** Yeah, I think you have to be passionate about something positive. It doesn’t matter if that’s about reducing plastic waste, or reducing the number of toxins in the environment or in the soil, or wanting to raise your children in a positive way. I don’t know what that would mean but it’s different for different people but there’s so many things that people can be passionate about.

That if we expected them to be like us we wouldn’t have the diversity that we have today because Tom’s passions, extreme passions I would say about the environment, don’t necessarily align with somebody else’s passions about something else.

**[0:24:49.1] TG:** They might be more interested in community projects or something.

**[0:24:52.6] VG:** Yeah, social injustice. There are some people that are about reducing social injustice and so be it. I would rather them do something positive and move the world towards –

**[0:25:02.7] TG:** I think it’s the more good everybody has – the things that they are more fired up about and I guess that’s the point but yeah, everyone should have something. If we all have something that we’re passionate about to make the world better and make a positive contribution, then as a community we’re all going to be moving the world in a positive direction.

**[0:25:20.2] VG:** Yeah.

**[0:25:21.4] BOK:** And so do you ever have disagreements? Whenever you have these conversations about the grey area projects that you talked about within the team, are there ever people pulling in different directions?

**[0:25:30.3] VG:** I don't think so because although it sounds a bit dictatorial when it comes down to if Tom and I don't agree at a project taking on then it won't happen. But at the same time it depends actually what the project is. I don't think anybody has anything against any projects in the team unless they are really negative but if Tom and I don't think they are aligned with our values then we'll probably turn them down, is that fair?

**[0:25:57.2] TG:** Yeah, I would say we are generally fairly on the same page as each other.

**[0:26:02.4] VG:** Yeah.

**[0:26:03.3] BOK:** Yeah, very cool.

**[0:26:05.0] VG:** We're just trying to think of examples and I couldn't find any so you're right, yeah.

**[0:26:11.4] BOK:** Excellent, now there's two other things that I'd like to touch on. One is something you said earlier in the conversation Tom, about sustainability being an easy intention but then having to turn that into concrete actions and the second thing is B Corp and your journey towards becoming a B corporation. Well first of all, how did that come about and how or why did you decide to look at B corp?

**[0:26:36.1] TG:** Yes, so it was exactly that that I think we'd been going for about nine years and I'd always been every year trying to look up what we are doing as a business and how we run the business and what the potential impacts of that might be and trying to ensure that we did everything as positively as we could – reduce our resource consumption, trying to use renewable resources as possible, minimize waste and all of those sorts of things.

But then I watched this film called “The Future Of Energy” which is a documentary about renewable energy and at the end of the film, it had these actions and one of the actions was “If you own a business become a B corp.” I had no idea what this was so I just thought, “Okay that sounds a bit weird” and I don’t think I even looked it up at the time.

**[0:27:22.8] VG:** Then ECOBA, our client ECOBA asked one of our contacts at ECOBA, Pete, asked me, “Would you be interested in becoming a certified B corp?” and I don’t think he knew if I was going to say yes or no. I just got curious and I came home and told Tom about it and we still didn’t look it up.

**[0:27:45.1] TG:** I think I looked it up and I looked at the website and I thought, “I still don’t really get it” and then yeah, I was looking at renewable energy suppliers because I was trying to encourage our team members to switch their harm energy supply to renewable. So I was researching all the different options of companies they could go with and one of the ones was a fairly new company called Bulb and they’ve got it slap bang in the middle of their home page.

There’s that proudly “We got our certified B corp” and I just thought this must be something interesting. So, I went back to the B corporation website and I saw where it says, “Take our assessment online” and –

**[0:28:19.8] VG:** And six hours later.

**[0:28:21.1] TG:** It was a Saturday morning. I was eating my breakfast and literary I was stuck there but yeah, it probably five or six hours, Vineeta couldn’t move me. I was doing this assessment because you can use their assessment tool for free before you even enter the official process.

**[0:28:34.9] VG:** It’s called B Assessment, yeah.

**[0:28:36.1] TG:** Yeah, B Impact Assessment, yeah. It’s really nice they designed – I was just hooked on it because it was asking me questions that were challenging me and some of them I could answer easily and I was like, “Yeah we do this and it’s good and great!” You know it would give you a few options. A lot of it is multiple choice, some of it you have to actually write an

explanation or something but a lot of it is multiple choice and so you can generally just intuitively see.

Well I know that which is the best option, I know which is the worst but you've got to be honest about where you are and a lot of them I couldn't tick the best option and that was what hooked me in. I was like, "Well that's not right. We need to be pushing ourselves to always do the best we can in terms of sustainability and positive impact," and so it gave me a focus to really raise our game basically and so I decided let's take this seriously.

We are going to go through this process thoroughly and we are going to take some time, and it did take about six months for us to get to the point where we could actually certify, and a lot of huge investment and actual time in those six months to change certain things we were doing and document things we were already doing because a lot of it is, "Yeah, we do that" and then someone says, "Well prove it" and I will prove it. So actually having to go away and say, "Well I should be able to prove that."

There should be a tangible way to say "Yes we do this" and to be able to measure it because if you can't measure something then you can't really improve against it. I think that's where the B Corp certification is fantastic for is that it holds you to account. I think when you are running a business, you can think you are doing things in a positive way but you never really hold yourself to account. It's very easy to say, "Yeah I am doing the right thing," and I think that's what's nice.

When you have somebody who's independent and who is an expert in that field, that the people who do the B Corp certification they are experts in the environmental impact, social impact and they are probably a lot more knowledgeable than I am. So to have them hold this to account I think has been really valuable and I think it's been a great learning experience because you can then compare yourselves against something.

**[0:30:49.8] VG:** And you have to certify every two years. So you go through the same process, once you certify B Corp doesn't give you this license to call yourself a certified B Corp. It's going to be again coming around in about a year from now. We have to do the test.

**[0:31:04.7] TG:** To standard, yeah. We'll have to re-certify that so it keeps you in your toes and

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**[0:31:09.9] VG:** It keeps you in check which is a good thing and also, the scoring system although it looks straight forward, it's very hard to hit the score. So the first time we took the assessment I think we just scraped by and now we are in a passing mark, is that fair?

**[0:31:29.1] TG:** Yeah so you have to get. So I don't know how you're familiar with it but basically there's up to 200 points that you could score and you have to get 80 to get certified which actually sounds quite a low score but in reality, 200 is impossible like if you ask them in open you say like no one is ever going to get 200, they just not.

**[0:31:49.2] VG:** The best score is I think equal to the method in the US who did the assessment and they came to 143. They are the best in this.

**[0:31:58.9] TG:** Yeah so that gives you an idea of just how tough it is and we thought well "Yeah, 80 out of 200 that can't be hard." I was a bit cocky at the beginning. I was thinking, "Well I know there's a lot of things in this assessment that maybe we need to improve on but I thought 80 surely can't be that hard" and when I finally – I mean it took ages for it to actually get to the point where we had completed enough of the assessment to actually get a score that we could work with.

**[0:32:23.4] VG:** To 94 is it?

**[0:32:25.0] TG:** No, originally we were under 80 and we had to some – yeah, we did have to raise our game and then we got to the assessment stage and there was we got a few points knocked up because we were using an office space that we knew it was powered by renewable energy and that is one of the reasons that we'll work. That we would use that as our base in London and we knew it was because we had spoken to the property manager and they were showing us.

You know this is the tower we use as well where we get the energy from and so on and so it was something that we already were doing but when we came to the assessment, they said,

“Well you need to actually submit hard documentary evidence that your office space is powered by renewable energy.” And we went back to the building manager and they just couldn’t be bothered basically. You know it was a big tower block in London and they just were like, “We don’t have time for you.”

Even though they had shown and been quite helpful the first time around. The second time around they were like, “No go away we’re too busy” and I kept asking and kept asking and I just couldn’t get this document. So the assessors basically said, “Well look, we just have to knock this whole section off and say that you don’t know where your energy comes from.

**[0:33:38.7] VG:** The same thing with water consumption, we couldn’t prove it.

**[0:33:40.5] TG:** Yeah, there’s a lot of things that actually are really challenging if you don’t necessarily have control over every aspect of your business and in our case where we use shared office spaces and those shared spaces are a part of larger buildings in London that have centralized facilities, it’s really hard to actually measure certain things that you wish you could measure like water consumption and energy consumption. So it was hard but we scraped over the line in the end.

Because they actually came back and they said, “Well even though we’ve knocked that off, there’s a whole section of the assessment that you didn’t fill in.”

**[0:34:14.9] VG:** That was embarrassing.

**[0:34:17.5] TG:** I think it was the section about the positive impact of the clients that you work with. I don’t know what but there was something about the way it was worded that we felt like –

**[0:34:27.6] VG:** We don’t have a primarily charities yet but we’ve got lots of charities we work with but it wasn’t like that.

**[0:34:32.7] TG:** I don’t think it was that. It was that I think the way the question was worded implied that you were manufacturing a product that had some source of specific ethical like core environmental benefit and actually I misunderstood the question and when it came down to it,

that was one part of it but the other part it was like “If you are doing some client services, what sort of companies are you helping and are they purpose driven organizations?” And that was really interesting for us.

Because that made them made us go and back and measure because we have this screening that we do for our clients. It made us come back and actually calculate, “Okay out of all of our turnover what percentage is actually from the people in our green list versus grey or red” and it was about 50/50 green to grey, which is something that we are trying to improve now and expand the green. But that was kind of eye opening to actually measure that because now it’s become a focus for us to say, “Well we have actually measured it now, we need to improve it.”

**[0:35:35.0] BOK:** That example really helps. I am thinking about the value of it basically. So what you are describing there is it a kind of helps you move even further to that purpose or the “why” that you have anyway and it allows you to as you say, holds you accountable and it requires measurement and so on which is obviously really powerful, particularly when you’re trying to do and move in that direction anyway.

Do you think now that you have this certification then you’ve got the badge in the site, are there any other benefits to becoming B Corp? What happens now that you are apart from sort of redoing the thing and using things like you are saying it helps you move and measure and move those things, what are other broader benefits? Because that’s what B Corp talks about in the community and things like that.

**[0:36:21.6] TG:** Yes, so the community is actually fantastic and it was something that we were kind of blind to it until we actually got certified because then it all started from this Saturday morning where I started clicking around on the impact assessment online and it just became this kind of – I was a bit tunnel visioned. I was like “This is something that it is so challenging. It’s challenging to myself that I just have to push forward and we have to improve and we have to go through this process.”

It was only when we popped out the other end of the process that we were like, “Oh there’s this whole community here of other businesses” and it’s really been fantastic. I mean they do a

whole load of events and I think the best one so far for us was the – I don't know what it's called but they do a retreat.

**[0:37:04.5] VG:** B Together.

**[0:37:05.2] TG:** B Together, yeah, that we went to last year. It's a two day retreat and you're there surrounded by other business leaders or managers who believe similar things to you but if they believe the business should be something that can make a positive impact in the world and they might have different perspectives on how you do that but ultimately, you have that shared value and everyone from a whole range of different industries.

And they are all doing things their own way and it's just firstly I think it's just a massive kind of confidence boost to think that A, we're not completely crazy. We're not the only people that think like this. There are all these other people but then you actually get to share ideas in the time and people are so open and so well committed. There's a sort of circle of trust within the B Corp community that people were very open about the inner workings of their business and really because they want to help each other succeed because they believe that you're trying to do something good.

We are trying to do something good, let's help each other. Whereas I think sometimes in business people can be a bit cagey because they feel like there is a sort of competitive advantage to keeping things close to your chest.

**[0:38:12.5] VG:** I think B Corp community believes in the true principle of win-win.

**[0:38:16.6] TG:** Yeah, they really do. They believe in win-win.

**[0:38:19.3] BOK:** Yeah, that does sound really cool and that's a really inspiring and challenging journey they have gone through.

**[0:38:23.7] TG:** Yeah, it's been fantastic and I think now we are feeling – we're just over a year since we actually achieved certification and I think –

**[0:38:31.8] VG:** Tom's got the bug again.

**[0:38:33.3] TG:** Yeah, it's like I feel that we really are at the beginning of the journey. I really believe certification is the beginning. It's not, "Oh we're certified now. It's done." It's actually like no, we have reached some sort of minimum standard and now we really have to keep pushing ourselves to keep improving.

**[0:38:50.3] VG:** Yeah, this month I will sign up for the 1% for the planet in our 11<sup>th</sup> year – no, it's our 12<sup>th</sup> year of trading starting this month. So now, it's become one of those things in my head as March starts approaching. "What have we done, what have we achieved this year? How have I not found something more positive to do?" And although Tom keeps plugging and chugging away at finding ways to make the business better, I think I like to collect certificates.

**[0:39:17.2] TG:** Yeah and I should say, I mean I should emphasize that although the impact assessment a of it is multiple choice, it shouldn't be treated as a box ticking exercises. It should be taken seriously. It's so much hard work, there's no point going through it if you are just going through it to tick the right boxes and getting stuff. You should be doing it for the right reasons and so if you find something in there that you think, "Okay we need to improve on" then I think it is better to just actually focus on.

Like why is there a difference between these options? Why is this one better and why should we do it around and just thinking "Oh fine, we've got to measure this so that we can tick the box." I think it's really better to embrace it and say "We are going to measure it so that we can improve" and I think everybody within – I don't think you'd get through the assessment if you didn't believe that.

**[0:40:04.1] VG:** There's thousands of businesses in the UK currently in the assessment.

**[0:40:09.0] TG:** Yeah, I think something like that are actually in the pipeline. I think there is over a 1,000 UK businesses that go in through the process and there's – I'm not exactly sure what the current number is but it's –

**[0:40:18.9] VG:** We were 129<sup>th</sup> or 127<sup>th</sup>.

**[0:40:21.8] TG:** Something around that yeah and so I think there's probably around 200-ish in the UK currently certified. So it is still quite a small number but I think it's going to grow quite fast.

**[0:40:31.4] VG:** As a global movement.

**[0:40:33.2] BOK:** Yeah, cool. There is so much there and half of me I was starting to look at the time. We are running out of time unfortunately and I didn't even get to talk to you about some of the projects and the work that you are actually doing but just before we finish, I do have one last question or one last thing that I would like to hear about, what's the future for Wholegrain Digital?

**[0:40:50.9] TG:** I think one of the big parts of the future and what we are focusing on this year is greening the internet and this is actually something that came about partly through the certification process with B Corp is that I feel slightly embarrassed that I hadn't realized what a huge impact the internet has in the environment. The internet is 6% of global carbon emissions which is equivalent to the entire aviation industry and people think of flying as being one of the worst things for climate change.

**[0:41:22.3] VG:** Being a website is pretty bad.

**[0:41:24.1] TG:** Having a website turns out to be pretty bad too, obviously it's all relative on an individual level but if you actually put it all together, the total aviation industry is equivalent to the whole internet and it's also roughly equivalent to the entire emissions of Germany which is one of the worst pollutants in the world is like 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> I think in terms of how much carbon they produce in all countries. So it's a huge issue and we specialize in WordPress.

WordPress powers 30% of all websites. So if you think about that, you can't literary do the equation of saying, "Well 30% of the emissions are from WordPress," because a lot of it is from data intensive services like streaming music and streaming video on Netflix and Amazon Prime.

**[0:42:09.9] VG:** TV binge.

**[0:42:10.6] TG:** Yeah but it opened our eyes and I think our whole team is really getting behind this now but we've realized that we need to be taking leadership on this issue and actually trying to move the whole culture of web design. Someone is actually looking at when you design a build or maintain a website or own a website, you've got to be thinking of the amount of environmental impact. How much energy does it use? What are the carbon emissions?

Where is the energy coming from? And it is quite hard, you know a lot of hosting providers it is very hard to find out where the energy comes from and in terms of actually measuring the energy consumption and the emissions is that there really isn't a tool that you can use to do that and actually one of the things that we have been doing over the past year is developing that tool which we are releasing, as a sort of version one website carbon calculator but it is really hard.

Because as I said, if you can't measure it you can't improve it and so I think the thing for us is to really release this tool, improve this tool and educate people and hopefully then people will start to actually take positive steps forward to actually bring the emissions of their websites down overtime. I think that is something that we can really lead the leadership on as a team.

**[0:43:20.3] VG:** What we generally try to aim to do is all on our Goodness page. So if you went to [wholegraindigital.com/goodness](http://wholegraindigital.com/goodness), it will show you all of the actions we're taking, currently what our measurable goals are, what our mission statement is. I think it also links onto our values page but it's for us and our team to keep ourselves in check. Sometimes you have to write things down to be accountable for them because goals move and you need goals by a certain year but you also need them written down, so that you can check them out there, yeah.

**[0:43:55.9] BOK:** Excellent, that was going to be my next question so [wholegraindigital.com/goodness](http://wholegraindigital.com/goodness). As usual, I will link to that and to a few other cool pages on your site and to B Corp on the show notes at [happyporchradio.com](http://happyporchradio.com). Tom and Vineeta, thank you so much. There is so much more I would love to go into more depth but maybe we'll have to do that another time.

**[0:44:13.5] TG:** Yeah.

**[0:44:13.9] VG:** Sure.



[0:44:14.2] **TG:** Sounds good.

[0:44:15.1] **VG:** Lovely to chat.

[0:44:16.4] **BOK:** Thank you both.

[0:44:17.2] **TG:** See you Barry.

[0:44:17.7] **VG:** Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:44:20.6] **BOK:** You can get all the links and notes from this episode on [happyporchradio.com](http://happyporchradio.com) where you can also find out how to send us questions, feedback and get involved in the conversation about this series. If you enjoyed the show, please share with anyone else who might enjoy it too. Thanks for listening.

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