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## POWDERKEG PODCAST TRANSCRIPT: RODNEY WILLIAMS

**Intro:** Rodney Williams is the Founder and CEO of LISNR, one of the most disruptive companies in the IoT, or Internet of Things, space and the world of mobile connectivity. You can find Rodney on Twitter ([@rodneymbwilliams](https://twitter.com/rodneymbwilliams)) on twitter and on his company website, [LISNR.com](https://lisnr.com).

And he's got a cool story, because he spent 4 years at Procter & Gamble as a brand manager and is most noted for being the first marketer there to co-write digital patents. So he has some powerful perspectives on corporate innovation.

In my conversation with Rodney, he shares his greatest lessons in marketing, hustle, and leading corporate innovation that has the potential to disrupt massive industries. You'll hear about what one tech entrepreneur learned throughout his business education, starting with his childhood startup, his 4 degrees (including two masters), and real-life experience at working at one of the world's largest companies.

LISNR was launched in 2012 around the core premise that sound can do more. More specifically, using sound to connect more people and devices in ways that had never existed before.

LISNR has grown into the world's most advanced ultrasonic technology. Their team has created an ultrasonic or inaudible technology; a communication protocol that sends data over audio. They use ultrasonic audio called [Smart Tones™](#) to transmit information. They've accomplished functionality that engineers and innovators said was impossible.

LISNR is seriously one of the most disruptive companies in the IoT (or internet of things) space. They've raised nearly \$15M in capital and have won awards such as a [Gold Lion @ Cannes](#) for Most Innovative Mobile Technology and [CNBC's Disruptor 50](#).

And he's done all of this headquartered out of Cincinnati, Ohio. Yes, he's a fellow midwestern entrepreneur, so we were like kindred spirits from the first second of this interview.

Rodney is an innovative strategic thinker who is obsessed with the ways technology will improve our everyday life. He has 4 degrees but most notably two masters, one of which is an M.B.A. from Howard University.

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**Matt:** Rodney, thank you so much for being here. Really excited to talk to you about what you're doing with Lisnr and the tech community there in Cincinnati but first I want to take it back to the early days and when I say early days, I mean early, early days. Where did you grow up?

**Rodney:** I didn't know you were going that early.

**Matt:** I'd like to keep you on your toes.

**Rodney:** Well, I'm originally from Baltimore. I actually grew up in Baltimore. So, I went one away to college. I'm originally from Ravens Town and I love blue crabs.

**Matt:** I love Baltimore. I've actually spent some time out there recently with a guy named Mike Binko who kind of runs the startup tech community out there and I was really inspired by just all the entrepreneurial activity. Do you ever get back to Baltimore?

**Rodney:** Well, my family is still in Baltimore. I'm heading that way for Holidays. So, I'm there pretty often.

**Matt:** Very cool. So, is university kind of what took you to Cincinnati?

**Rodney:** No, I actually moved to Cincinnati due to Procter and Gamble.

**Matt:** Very nice.

**Rodney:** I got that job post graduate school and I went to the Midwest and I've somehow still stuck.

**Matt:** So, did you know that you had the entrepreneurial bug when you took that job at Procter and Gamble?

**Rodney:** Yeah. I mean, I think I've always started things.

**Matt:** What's your earliest memory of starting something up?



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**Rodney:** I mean, since day 1. I mean, my mom used to own a beauty shop and I used to lease magazines to folks that come in and I was like six years old because I had all the cool magazines. I mean, I've done businesses throughout high school and college. That's how Procter and Gamble actually started to recruit me or got a whiff of me because of a company that I started that was an early CRM company that did well. I'm not really an entrepreneur. I think when you're from a certain community, you got to figure out how to seize opportunities and I tend to do that.

**Matt:** I love it. I love the idea of leasing out magazines. Did you have a bestseller?

**Rodney:** I did. It was really about understanding [inaudible]. My mom, she was older. So, all the magazines were to an older demographic and I kind of had all the kid stuff. I had like the scholastics and I just had all the kid stuff. Few people who get that. If you go to video shop, you're going to bring your kids.

**Matt:** That's smart.

**Rodney:** Long story short, I would get about a dollar a magazine.

**Matt:** That's good money, man. That's good money.

**Rodney:** I know. You had to give it back and it was awesome.

**Matt:** So, did the marketing research inform your foray into you to the CRM technology platform?

**Rodney:** Yeah. I didn't study marketing until grad school but I was a finance guy but I've always kind of driven by the market information. What started it in college was when Facebook opened up to our university and if you're around before that in the university in every party, everyone communicated to you would be at the school newspaper and the school email was okay but it didn't really have CRM programs to tell it who you are, your major, etc., not at that level. So, I thought that was an opportunity with emails. So, actually myself and my best friend, we started collecting emails pretty much any way possible and as we would collect these emails, we're were creating databases where if you had an event or a party, that's kind of how it started, we could email 50% of that dormitory. We had a group of 30,000 students.

**Matt:** Wow!

**Rodney:** It's like us taking that and going to businesses and saying "Hey, instead of writing that 800 to a 1000-dollar ad in the school paper every week, you could pay us 300 bucks and we're going to bring in more traffic to your store, etc., etc. So, it kind of grew into that and kept growing and eventually we were like "Let's get rid of this thing."

**Matt:** That's awesome. I bet the school newspapers loved that.



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**Rodney:** I never cared, I don't know. It's one of those things that catapulted me into marketing and I went and got my MBA and started to think about "Wow! That's what I was really doing and an early age." And then using technology to what I would call ... I mean, I think technology just completely opens up opportunity within seconds and it's just about seizing it for a moment.

**Matt:** Absolutely, man. And I'm a kindred marketing spirit over here although I did not get my MBA. You seek a little bit of a divide sometimes in the technology world, looking at higher education as a waste of time or the only way you can get into business and learn the ropes. Talk to me about what that MBA meant for you in terms of how you've now scaled your business at Lisnr and the business you were growing at the time.

**Rodney:** Yeah. One of the things that I always say is that I don't think there's any right way, you founder story versus another founder story or your career path versus another one. I mean, I think if anyone kind of tells you has the best approach, I think it's all kind of BS. I think what's important is that you've got to figure out what's the best approach for you and I think that's more important than what's the best approach. I mean, it was incredible for me and everything was a learning ground for me. I did four degrees before going to work but I worked all throughout school in government and Procter and Gamble and then and then I went after Procter and Gamble because it's learning ground. I mean, that was like MBA part 3 or 4.

**Matt:** Yeah, master class in marketing, right?

**Rodney:** Yeah and it was just incredible. Yeah, fortunately, I think I have a competitive advantage when I compete with technology companies that don't know ... The list of top technology companies, they all at some point resort to making him money off marketing. Even Zuckerberg just called Facebook a media company now and I laughed. So, at some point you have to hire a bunch of folks like me. Now, it's rare that folks like me can also create things and not just make things better or evolve things. So, I think for me it's just been a complete competitive advantage because I just understand the nuances of media and marketing and audience and consumer behavior insights. That's like the blood or the vein of why technology exists and I think more people should pay attention to that connection.

**Matt:** Talk to me about what you learned in your MBA and getting your MBA in marketing. What's one thing that you got through your education there that you wouldn't have gotten and have been able to apply to your businesses if you hadn't gone the MBA route?

**Rodney:** So, here's the mad scientists. I didn't get my MBA in Marketing. My MBA was in Finance.

**Matt:** I love it. I love it.



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**Rodney:** I figured I was good at marketing. So, when I got my MBA I was like “I’m not going to concentrate in Marketing. I did Finance” but I did another Master’s before my MBA and it was a Master’s in Marketing. Sorry, I broke the question in two parts.

**Matt:** No, I appreciate that.

**Rodney:** What did I learn in my MBA or what did I learn in the Master’s degree?

**Matt:** Let’s go with one of each.

**Rodney:** Yeah. I think the Master’s in Marketing kind of taught me what really Marketing is and I think there’s a false definitions like a lot of perceptions of what people mean Marketing is. It’s not creating a commercial or coming up with a cool campaign. That’s what creatives and your agency folks do. I’m not an agency guy. I can never at an agency. Marketing isn’t your social or your website, none of that. When you look at the core of even Procter and Gamble and why I went there, this is why marketing [inaudible], they wrote the book called ‘Product Management’ which is why every CEO has ever existed at P&G has been a brand marketer. Now, marketing to me is really taking a product or a brand and to me they’re equal, they’re the same thing, and utilizing pretty much every consumer or customer facing moment to effectively what I would call deliver your solution and that’s what it is. So, that means packaging. That means what it does, how you communicate what it does, what it should do. That means R&D. That means innovation. I mean, that means everything. I was brand manager at Pampers even at my young age and I’m sitting with the product guy trying to understand that the next release of the product is the right product. I don’t think so because again I know the consumer more than anyone. I’m supposed to. So, you can’t just make a product for babies and moms if you’ve never really been there and experience what happens when a mom becomes pregnant, etc. So, I look at the same way with technology or any product or any brand that you’re marketing. I think great marketers have the ability to influence everything because they have to or it doesn’t make sense.

**Matt:** Well, it’s an incredible perspective to have coming into Procter and Gamble and obviously it’s a great culture fit for the way P&G approaches their product marketing and their business in general. What did you learn from Procter and Gamble that you didn’t have previously?

**Rodney:** Yeah. One of the biggest [inaudible] is that I didn’t learn and I didn’t know that much and my MBA kind of set me up for this really. I like to think that I learned how to operate a business and I know that’s like “How does you learn that in a classroom?” If you thinking about MBA, I mean, you learn how to model, you learn how to forecast, you learn about P&L, you learn really at a mass scale the way you should think, the way you should problem solve, lot of case studies. So, that was really important. When I went P&G, it was like I was catapulted into real life case studies and that’s what it was. I mean, you show up. They had you over a big P&L. I think my first P&L was 30 or 40 million dollars and that part of the business I needed to run and I had goal also to grow that part of the business 2% to 6% that year and I had to use everything in my, what I would call, my resource to make sure that happened. So,



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everything from a great campaign and working with your agency to give you a great commercial to working with your retailers to see how you can get more distribution to deliver those numbers, to figure out how to save money, maybe I can save money on the amount of money I'm spending on marketing or maybe I can spend more to drive more velocity. Maybe I can do all types of things. Maybe I can reduce the diaper count from 36 to 32 so that moms can use them more. I mean, I'm just saying. Literally you are doing everything. Everything is an option for you but, yeah, I mean that's running an entire business, meeting with different cross-function – the Finance team, the Product team, the PR team and kind of like managing an entire piece of company and trying to deliver results every year. That's what I learned at P&G that the product or brand could be anything for me because I wasn't a dad and I'm still not a dad. So, that's irrelevant.

**Matt:** So, you're at Procter and Gamble and I appreciate you sharing that because a lot of us from the outside probably wonder what it's like to be at that Fortune 100 company, what it's like to take those case study lessons and apply them in the real world with that massive budget that you had to 2 to 6X your earnings. Did you ever feel like your entrepreneurial nature made it difficult for you to operate within the culture of such a large company?

**Rodney:** Yeah, yeah.

**Matt:** Can you tell me about a time when that was challenging for you?

**Rodney:** I mean, I've got a famous rant that happened at P&G and I'm like ranting, I'm standing up in my cubicle and I'm ranting and I'm like "I'm caged!"

**Matt:** Can you start the story over again because you kind of cut out?

**Rodney:** Yeah, I stand up in my cubicle. I don't know exactly what sparked it but I was trying to push through an agenda, something innovative of course and groundbreaking because I like think that that's what I was doing and I'm getting a lot of pushback and I stand up and I had to yell out like "I'm caged! What am I doing here?" and my boss's boss like my boss's boss's boss just happened to be walking near and he comes over and he looks at me and I was just like "You know, I don't even care." I just didn't even care. So, yes, the answer is yes.

**Matt:** Don't leave us on the cliffhanger there. What was the outcome of that outburst and moment of clarity?

**Rodney:** Nothing. I mean, I mentioned I think I left maybe four months ago or later. Whatever the case may be, I think that's what corporate America tends to do, right? They teach you how to push the Button A and they want the best Button A process. Now, the reality about innovation and people who ask questions and people who change, they ask "Why are we still pushing the Button A? Maybe we should like pay someone else to push it. Maybe we should have on demand people that push it. Maybe



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we should do something different because I don't think pushing it is the best use of my time." And that's the problem with corporate America today where the innovation may lie is that they're training us to be really good button pushers versus training us to also ask "Should we still be pushing the buttons?" And I just think that's just a problem with any corporate monsters that have their own issues. I mean, when I look at some of the talent that has – I'm just most familiar with P&G – but some of the talent who left, I mean, I never worked with more smart people than I've worked at Procter and Gamble. I mean, they were incredible talent. So, wherever they are, they're making an impact. That's something. Unfortunately, the guys that get weeded out are the guys that are not going to sit and be caged.

**Matt:** Absolutely. I appreciate you sharing that. I can't imagine being in cubicle nation quite like that. I haven't been in the belly of the beast that much but clearly you're very entrepreneurial and learned a lot from Procter and Gamble but I'm also glad to hear that you're not caged anymore. Tell me about how you ended up starting an audio technology after working at a Fortune 100 CPG – consumer packaged goods – company.

**Rodney:** Yeah. Could you repeat the question?

**Matt:** Sure. How did you go from working at a Fortune 100 CPG company to starting your own audio technology business?

**Rodney:** Yes. I think while I was there, like I said, I did everything technology way to break the business and what I mean by break the business is make it better. So, I was known there, I wrote three patents where I was there. I was the first marketer to have digital patents that were actually doing something for the company. When I fell in love with P&G, when I fell in love with the concept [inaudible], the only reason why soap operas were called soap operas is because P&G created soap operas to sell more soap. I wish everyone did that. So, I wish music business created streaming platform to sell more music, not innovators or I wish why did they stop? So, I made it my own personal pursuit to create things and build things in technology. So, I was really diving and using technology to separate myself and my part of the business from my peers. Now, in that mix there were a couple of patents I got a chance to just be at the forefront of what we were doing from a technology standpoint and I started to get obsessed with not necessarily sound but more so how can we effectively communicate to consumers better and what is available for that to happen, right? You got all the Wi-Fi's and data but do I know where consumer is, do I know that they're walking by that banner, do I know that they're watching that television show or looking at that commercial? Now, the one thing that's pretty present that we kind of forget about is all of those places have sound and I kind of got stuck on this idea that I think sound can do more. At the time there was a couple technology companies that were doing things with sound that I thought was all neat, that was all cool and that's kind of what started it. In the beginning it was much more about kind of took an idea around using sound to test consumers, bottled it into a music product and licensed the



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tech to go out and do it. We eventually figured out we could do a lot more, make it a lot better and that little pre-packaged use case was just the beginning and that's how this thing all started.

**Matt:** There's a lot of people who probably have a safe secure job similar to you had there at Procter and Gamble and they've got an entrepreneurial idea that they want to go and pursue probably similar to you had at the time. What was it that got you to burn the ships and just go full force to pursuing your dream with Lisnr?

**Rodney:** Yeah. Sometimes I call Lisnr magic at lot and ever since day one we have been making magic and I think it's just been magical. So, I don't know. What I would tell you what I did. I had the idea, I built a team, learned that, figured out I couldn't do this on my own and I didn't know my team. So, I essentially only knew one person in a five-person team that became my founders. I convinced a group of strangers essentially especially to come follow this dream. We did a startup competition and we did really well. Investors were interested. I started to build rapport. They said "You go out and do X, Y, Z. I'm going to fund you." It took three months to do X, Y, Z. So, when I showed back up, they funded us and me in particular, I told myself "I'm going to jump ship if we can get funding. I'm going to jump ship if we can deliver on X, Y, Z and a time period that makes sense." And then the biggest thing that I understood about any startup is that speed is everything, right? That's what separates what we do versus what a huge company does. I mean, they're going to spend a lot of time making the decision to go after it versus we can actually go after it. So, I knew if we could use our speed and get through some of those early things, we would get the traction that we needed to get funding.

**Matt:** How do you balance that speed with accuracy? I mean you've got all this training from your MBA and from Procter and Gamble with projections and modeling. Do you throw all that by the wayside and just focus on speed or is there some kind of balance that you're playing there?

**Rodney:** I think you do enough, whatever enough is but you don't do a drop [inaudible] more.

**Matt:** A minimum viable modeling.

**Rodney:** Yes. You just do enough. I mean, we're looking at a new business model, for example, not a new business but a business but we're trying to analyze a new product vertical for our tech and we have an incredible business development intern out of Berkeley and the model was so complex and it was fantastic, it was beautiful. I don't know how long it took but, again, I was like "You probably could've spent ten minutes on it."

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Rodney:** Because I could take these three numbers and multiply by these three numbers and it equals a big enough number. And you could point to the sources. You didn't really have to go through like six or seven different tabs and all this but I think that's what separated me also at P&G. I wouldn't spend time



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doing all that. I would do what was minimum. What was the minimum thing I needed to show my manager for him to be excited about moving forward with this option?

**Matt:** And it sounds like you really had a knack for pitching your ideas and getting people to rally behind them. Did you have a particular pitch? You said that you went to your investors or your soon to be investors and they said to you “If you do X, Y, Z, then we’ll invest” and then you went and did X, Y, Z. Do you remember what your pitch was for Lisnr at the time?

**Rodney:** Yeah. I think the right answer also and I got to mention it is that if you pay attention or if you hear anything like I learn a lot and I’m okay with that and I think people need to really understand that I’m learning. So, going through startup competition which is very similar to Startup Weekend but a bit little more intense, you’re meeting investors, I didn’t pitch the company for the first like month because I didn’t know how to pitch a startup and I would watch pitches all day. I would watch. I would sit in investor meetings and this was with the little startup competition. I mean, I was just learning. So, number one, I think it’s important for you to learn enough, stop learning more but just enough. So, eventually I learned enough and when we showed back up a couple of weeks later to that investor, I mean, my pitch was solid, right? I think great team, we want to use audio to connect to consumers, we’re going to do so first by creating a music application where based on what you listen to you’re going to get X, Y, Z. This is why it’s different than our competitors. This is why we can win. And what do you need to see for this to be attractive? I think it’s much more about that. And granted you’ve got to put some spin on it, put the shiny suit on it but coming out of that you start to hear ... Investors will tell you what’s making them feel risky about the investment. They will say “I don’t like it” or “I’m concerned about your team” or “I’m concerned about these customers of these types of customers” or “I’m concerned about your business model,” wherever they’re concerned about. I think, if you make an active approach to address it and maybe you’re not successful at everything you try but you’re successful at a piece of it and then you keep doing that, then what I would say is then they’re starting to get excited. And I remember at first it was like “Is there any IP around what you’re doing?” And I went out and we did hire a firm, we did an IP search and submitted a provisional patent. They said “I’m concerned about the music industry. You probably need some type of significant partner.” I flew out to LA, it killed my resources but it came back home with a signed contract from Atom Factory and Naz. And then “I’m concerned,” whatever your concerns were. And then my next meeting was great – “So, you brought up four key points that I want to make we address today.” And I would just go down the four points of how we address them. And then I love hype. Hype is really important after you’ve addressed your four points. My hype at the time was we were headed back out to Silicon Valley to a pitch competition and it was being judged by Tim Draper at Draper University. And I said that “If we win, we will go [inaudible].” We did win.

**Matt:** But you didn’t head to the valley.

**Rodney:** I didn’t head to the valley.



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**Matt:** Why not?

**Rodney:** Well, those investors were CincyTech. CincyTech is a firm out of Cincinnati. It was an early stage investor and they stuck to their word. We had delivered on the things that they needed to see. So, we got the term sheet from them and they made the investment.

**Matt:** I love CincyTech and I love the branding and the whole CincyTech ecosystem. I want to make sure we have time to talk about that but I'd love to dig in a little bit more on the Lisnr expansion and growth. Can you talk to me post funding what was your first big execution with the business?

**Rodney:** So, what I can say is that since day one we were working with a technology in its infancy, right? And it's easy in theory but difficult in application and execution. What I mean by that is how do you sell it, how does it work, where does it work, what does it do and I think our first big execution that everyone high-fived is that we did a light show in front of you know 30,000 fans for Swedish House Mafia in LA, no connectivity and we synchronized everyone's phones simultaneously. That was our first big one. And we started to have a number and music, left and right, but every single time we deployed, we were breaking the tech, breaking the tech. So, we knew the tech, what I would say, was weak first and we needed to make it better. How that evolved is we really started getting obsessed with the ultrasonic audio portion, not the application of the tech and saying "Hey, can we make it more stable? Can we make it more reliable? Can we actually add data?" And those are the questions that we kept asking ourselves that eventually got the interest of our series A investors and then mainly I would bring up a chart and I would say "You know, our application is doing okay. You know, it's grown in downloads, the reason people are using it but here's our technology product group and here's how many people want that." And we actually had signed contracts to deliver SDKs and APIs and it changed the company. People don't know that we really made our mind up to be much bigger than music really, really and it was like the end of 2013. The reality is that it took us a year of that to get the technology stable. Then we joined RGA Techstars and everyone was weirded out because we were a connected device accelerator and everyone was like "Why is Lisnr joining a connected device accelerator?" but they got it. They knew we were trying to use audio to drive data connectivity between devices and that music application was just one use case of it. There were ten other use cases that were even significantly more impactful. So, that was an extremely important part of what happened with Lisnr. I mean, I got to meet with incredible founders, our business model changed, our tech grew, we started to work with hardware companies and chip manufacturers like Intel and we started to do things like that which started to propel the technology. When we graduated out of Techstars, we became a CNBC Disruptor 50 at no. 12. Intel and Qualcomm and all of these really true technology companies wanted to understand what we're up to. And that's really how things kept growing.

**Matt:** I'm curious to know, Rodney, and I might be missing part of your back story here. Audio is a whole new field for you. Is that correct?



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**Rodney:** Yes just as diapers were.

**Matt:** Yeah. So, how did you develop your expertise in that industry?

**Rodney:** I think I focused on what I needed to focus on and what I needed to focus on is what audio should do and I needed smart people around me to tell me what it can do and then I needed people around me to show me how to do it and there's another important part of this whole discussion and it is the talent that I've been able to attract to the organization. I think it's completely separated us. One of our first two hires is the key inventor of our technology. He was a PhD candidate, Electrical and Computer Engineer obsessed with audio, loves what we were doing but he thought he could make a better version. Later on in our growth I went after a seasoned, he was a former CTO, a former CEO, he's had two exits, he is a San Francisco player and he was the GM of a 250-million-dollar business unit, a company called Gracenote. You guys at Indianapolis should be familiar with Gracenote.

**Matt:** I worked with Scott Jones on a previous venture.

**Rodney:** He lives in Indianapolis, right?

**Matt:** Yeah he does. Well, he's in Hawaii now but he's still got a place here in Indy.

**Rodney:** Well, someone introduced me to Scott and I drove up to Indianapolis and sat down and met with Scott for an hour. He didn't know yet because we it didn't go anywhere but yes we have a number of Gracenote employees at Lisnr now.

**Matt:** That's good. That's great. He's an incredible asset to the Indiana tech community and I had a lot of fun running a spinoff startup for him out of Cha-Cha which probably at the time is what he was working on when you met with him and he's just been incredible investor, mentor to many entrepreneurs here in town. Sorry to hear that that connection didn't go anywhere but maybe we need to reconnect you guys.

**Rodney:** He was a nice guy. I mean, beautiful home and I had a great time meeting with him but, again, you never forget those conversations. Coming out of that conversation, Gracenote was the company that we put at a pedestal. They had figured out how to sell something very similar to us across the market. And they had limitations that we didn't. I mean, they were a validation for us and for me to be able to talk to him about some of the challenges and some of the things they faced, regardless of what my intention was for that meeting it was incredible.

**Matt:** Yeah. For listeners who don't know who Scott Jones is, inventor of voicemail. He inevitably sold the patents to that and invented Gracenote which kind of powers all of iTunes and some of the other music platforms which ultimately sold to Sony, I think. Invented numerous other technologies but I'm glad to have that mutual connection.



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**Rodney:** Definitely. And most recently just sold to Nelson.

**Matt:** Absolutely.

**Rodney:** So, I hope he's still tied to that.

**Matt:** I don't know, I think he's got a lot of ties to a lot of technology companies.

**Rodney:** I think so.

**Matt:** Well, so, talk to me about what Lisnr is doing now. I'm really eager to hear. I mean, it sounds like you still reinventing the company, finding new opportunities. What's next for you?

**Rodney:** Yeah. No, not reinventing. I hate words like 'reinvent' or 'pivot'. I always tell folks Google didn't reinvent themselves when they decided to make a mail client given that they were a search engine and they didn't reinvent themselves when they wanted to make an operating system. No, we're evolving and innovating. I mean, what we have today is just an ultrasonic protocol. We created a protocol based off of audio that you can't hear, to humans it's completely silent, completely safe but we can transmit small pack of the data every second both single directional bi-directionally at the same time.

**Matt:** Why would we want to transmit small packets of data?

**Rodney:** Well, think of other protocols that transmit small packets of data. Near Field Communication, Bluetooth, RFID, Zigbee, Wi-Fi, right?

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Rodney:** You need all of these protocols as ways in which devices can talk to each other or interact with the environment around it, for example. So, you use protocols for everything. Now, just think about the proximity protocol landscape. NFC Bluetooth is the most known. They all are very, very hardware dependent but they also are very, very limited in what they can and cannot do. So, if you look at our progression, single directional use cases where like we would play our ultrasonic technology, we call them smart tones and we would tell a device what to do. So, that's a song telling a device to light up. Let's say you walk into a store and it's telling your device to show your coupon because you're near something. That's single directionally using sound data telling your device what to do. So, it's not recording audio. It's not taking a snippet of audio and checking the server. The data is actually being pushed through the sound. So, that's why it can be actually accurate. That's single directional. Now, bi-directional or what I call local tone generation is the ability for the device to actually say something back or say something itself. So, the device can then create a smart tone and include a data packet. It can then tell that to another device and then that other device can then say something back. So, Matt, when you go to our office today, you walk up to doors, every employee has a smart tone that's tied to them that is a key that opens that door. Again, just like in an RFID or card we're using a completely offline



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data transmission tool that's secure to unlock that door. Now, even focusing on locking the door, I mean, that can be any door. That can be a car. That can be your password to your device. I mean, that can be anything that you need to identify you and then finally authenticate you. Now, what we also did was like "Okay, that's great. We allow things to talk to you and talk back." Then we said "Hey, can we introduce multi-channels within the bandwidth. So, could we create two channels?" Number one, if we have two channels, we double our data throughput but then we could start to do tokenization and handshakes that are completely asynchronous and allow us to do more advanced authentications. So, everything from contact-less payments to mobile tickets to industrial use cases where you have device to device authentication, I mean, that's the world that we're getting into. I mean, we have companies launching using us and mobile wallets to using us for mobile tickets instead of QR codes, etc. All of the most advanced companies that are trying to change the way we shop, purchase, open doors, IoT, device automation, office automation, they're all either testing us or piling us or launching with us in some capacity because we are better connected that is now hardware dependent. We don't need that NFC chip. We don't need that Bluetooth chip. And we're great what I would call addition and I'll give you an example. Just say you're home. You have your favorite speaker and you have multiple friends over. So, if multiple friends want to play in your Bluetooth speaker today, you literally have to Bluetooth sync each consumer and in the near future you'll have an app that you open up and the app will recognize all of the players and all of the speakers and you can just toggle between players and speakers and all of the credentialing and authentication is going to happen through audio versus Bluetooth because Bluetooth's number one limitation is multi-connectivity within a single environment, you get a lot of interference and in that case we're almost like a gateway or at least call us router, for example. Now, like I said, I can dive into all different types of verticals and why but at the end of the day it's more convenient to the consumer if it's better and it's faster and it's all of those things.

**Matt:** It sounds really exciting. I'm eager to get my hands on some of the technology. So, I may have to drive down to Cincinnati and scope out some of your tech if you're not too high security about letting people play with your latest and greatest innovations.

**Rodney:** No, I'm not at all, even to the listeners. You can go to Lisnr.com, request access to our portal which is a development portal. As long as you have a use case and you want to test something, we'll give you 30-day access for free and it's pretty much easy. If you ever come visit our office, we actually will send you your own smart tone that will allow you to enter for a period of time or it may be single use, depending on how much we trust you but I think it's compelling that I think a company that's doing something really innovative is sitting right in the Midwest in downtown Cincinnati.

**Matt:** I think that that's really cool, man, and for listeners that maybe aren't familiar with just what a thriving startup and tech ecosystem there is in Cincinnati, tell me why you're not in San Francisco or Boston or New York.



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**Rodney:** So, we're holding on for dear life but I'm going to tell you this. I think there's no better place to start a company, I don't think. The numbers will show you that there's a significant amount of seed and early phase funding there, you can talk to all investors in that community within a day in a couple hours, cost of living cost per engineer, talent, you're getting really strong talent for substantially less and I actually think the workforce thing is actually going to be more happy. You're an engineer coming out of college. You can start at Lisnr and buy a home and buy a car day one, if you like. You're not going to be able to do that in San Francisco. I'm not a fan of San Francisco. I'm just not. I think as a kid the first thing I ever recognized about technology was that it evened the odds. Me with my laptop could be anywhere and create anything and I think that's really important that I think we all need to understand is that the future of innovation is that it will be everywhere. I mean Magic Leap is in southern Florida, one of my favorite companies, right? I mean, who would have thought that. Oculus was in Orange County. Everyone hears about the sexy ones that pop up in San Francisco. I mean, there are some really big names in all other parts of the country. So, I'm an advocate of everywhere else. I think as we look for our future, I mean, we're growing and our talent sometime tends to be pretty specific. So, we do have an office in San Francisco, we do have an office in New York, headquarter in Cincinnati. I think as we continue to grow, it would always be a question of when and where and how but I'll go with it definitely. I'll stick around as long as we can.

**Matt:** I love it, man. If people want to find you online, where should they go?

**Rodney:** Go to Lisnr.com but honestly my handle is pretty much everywhere as RodneyBWilliams on LinkedIn, on Twitter, Instagram or on anywhere. I'm pretty accessible, yeah.

**Matt:** Thanks, Rodney. I really appreciate you sharing your story and sharing why you're so passionate about getting this kind of technology into the hands of consumers, into the lives of consumers and I'm eager to see how you continue to grow and scale from Cincinnati and wherever the company takes you, man.

**Rodney:** Awesome. I appreciate the time and the conversation.

**Matt:** Likewise, man.