

# WaitWhat: Bringing an entrepreneurial mindset to business builders everywhere

The groundbreaking  
*Masters of Scale* podcast  
becomes a “daily practice”  
learning application.

Wait  
What

The creators of *Masters of Scale*  
leveraged Toptal experts to create  
a globally accessible platform  
designed to share the wisdom  
of the world’s most influential  
founders and business leaders.

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—

Deron Triff  
Co-founder, WaitWhat

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## The Client

WaitWhat, creators of Masters of Scale, is a media invention company recognized for high-quality, genre-defining content and technology products designed at the intersection of daily habit and human potential.

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## The Challenge

Eager to curate and adapt the most incisive wisdom from its vast library into 10-minute daily practices for business leaders, WaitWhat required an inventive team to meet their exceptionally high standards of quality and impact.

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## The Services

Toptal Projects  
Toptal Developers

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## The Result

In fewer than seven months, the Toptal team in partnership with WaitWhat, delivered a fast and powerful minimum viable product (MVP) that brings an entrepreneurial experience to WaitWhat users around the world.

# Changing the world, one talk at a time

**In 2004, June Cohen became the fifth employee of a then little-known company called TED.**

In the 11 years that followed, she helped launch TED Talks—the renowned short-form lectures about big, life-changing ideas—making the conference presentations free to the world. Deron Triff joined the team in 2011 to head media partnerships and distribution, where he helped scale viewership up to 100 million views a month.

At TED, Cohen and Triff quickly discovered a common passion for creating idea-oriented content that was designed to be delivered

across multiple platforms. The two united over a concept they call a “Wait, what?” moment—an instance that stops you in your tracks, ignites your imagination, and just might change your life, according to Cohen.

**“What excites us is creating inventive content.”**

– **Deron Triff**  
Co-founder, WaitWhat

The pair launched media invention company WaitWhat in 2017 with a singular goal in mind—harnessing the contagious emotions of curiosity, wonder, and mastery in entirely original media formats to elevate human potential.

“What excites us is creating inventive content,” says Triff. “We wanted to develop that outside the talk format.”



June Cohen

## Calling all entrepreneurs

WaitWhat was an immediate success with the launch of the business and leadership podcast Masters of Scale, hosted by LinkedIn Co-founder Reid Hoffman. Hoffman, along with leaders from companies such as Slack, Facebook, PayPal, Netflix, Starbucks, and Nike, discuss key insights into how companies successfully scale.

With a custom soundtrack, deft humor, and commitment to a 50/50 guest gender balance, Masters of Scale has become the go-to resource for founders and entrepreneurs, winning the Webby for Best Business Broadcast three times and nominated for a fourth award in 2021.



While Masters of Scale originally launched as a podcast, WaitWhat’s founders always planned to create cutting-edge delivery platforms for their content. “In order to help entrepreneurs and founders here in the United States and all over the world, extending that core body of content into different formats and

experiences is what gives it its real power, its real potential for impact,” Triff says.

To achieve this goal, the WaitWhat team required a delivery mechanism that was unbound by limits of geography, wealth, or perceptual ability.

The answer, Triff realized, was an app that would break through the traditional barriers of information dispersal. In accordance with WaitWhat’s philosophy, Triff wanted an inventive, high-quality product that was distinctive, beautiful, and provided a seamless customer experience. With a timeline of seven months and a lean budget, his team sought a partner who could bring their idea to fruition.

# Constructing creative confluence

**WaitWhat had a staff of 25 at the time, with limited engineering and product management resources. Triff knew he needed to find a partner that would share the team's high standards.**

"I did quite a bit of research, because quality is so important to what we do," Triff recalls. "And there are so many organizations, both small and large, that provide developers. But we needed a partner that had done the heavy screening or curation process to identify talent that would meet our standards. And, Toptal's methodology gave me confidence that we had the best chance

of getting an A-team brought together quickly."

Dave Mayer, a delivery manager at Toptal, assembled a team of two back-end developers, two front-end developers, an agile project manager with mobile app experience, and a design lead to support WaitWhat's initiative.

WaitWhat leaders wanted to fully integrate the Toptal team into their organization, so they could share the company's philosophies that drive exceptionally high-quality output.

"It was close to miraculous, I would say, in terms of how this team cohered and how quickly we moved, and the culture that we built with your team," says Triff.

Brian Pagán, a design lead in Toptal's talent network, says it was evident from the beginning that WaitWhat had a clear sense of what they wanted while at the same time

also being open to innovation.

"They almost had a moviemaking philosophy, which really resonated with me," Pagán says. "They had a vision, but we were all tasked to contribute to that vision in our unique ways."



Deron Triff  
Co-founder, WaitWhat

## Building a better product through experimentation

**With the teams fully integrated, the Toptal team spent the next two weeks in deep discovery with the WaitWhat stakeholders.** "They had a whole Excel sheet with requirements, but they were extremely open to our input. It was fun for us to adjust it and have conversations, challenge things, and try to prioritize needs and wants," says Pagán. "During the discovery phase, we worked together to fit their huge vision into a budget-conscious MVP that could be built within a certain amount of time."

Wins came early and often in the process, most notably the leveraging of React to optimize the app on iOS. "We were doing a React Native app and focusing on iOS. But one of the developers knew React Native exceptionally well," says Justin

Whittaker, the Toptal team's project manager. "We were able to surprise and delight WaitWhat by delivering iOS and Android at near parity relatively quickly."

The team also configured and customized a content management system (CMS) within a matter of weeks. In addition to content management, the CMS also enables the creation and scheduling of push notifications and emails.

"We had two back-end developers and two front-end developers, but whenever the back-end developers didn't have work, they just did front-end work," says Pagán. "Neither of them had ever done any React Native programming at all, and they just picked it up. We needed to get this done and they had some time,

so they went in and they made it happen. It was amazing."

Whittaker says that commitment to experimentation and adherence to an agile process ultimately allowed everyone to do their best work and deliver the most impactful product possible. "That was a big deal for

**"That was a big deal for us, to have that freedom to create, to iterate."**

— Justin Whittaker  
Project Manager, Toptal

us, to have that freedom to create, iterate—put it in front of customers early and if it didn't work the first time, try it again."

# Leading and coding with ethics

**WaitWhat has a strong commitment to ethical business practices and ensuring all users are treated with humanity and kindness.** Pagán says incorporating that ethos into the app was a key component of the build. “One initial research insight was that folks in rural communities often rely on mobile internet, which can be quite expensive in places like Africa, India, or the rural US,” he says. “We designed and prioritized implementation of an offline listening feature. This allows people to download as many lessons as they can when they have access to Wi-Fi, so they can listen to them when

access is restricted.”

The team also designed the app to be easily used by people with disabilities. “From the very beginning, we designed the app to be accessible for people with cognitive, vision, and hearing impairments,” Pagán says. The app includes full transcripts, which allow users to read the content instead of listening to it. The app’s visual design complies with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) at the AA level, meaning the color contrast, font sizes, and element spacing are usable for people with visual impairments and mild dyslexia. The minimalist design is also useful

for people with cognitive impairments, limiting the amount of information they have to process at any given time.

**“From the very beginning, we designed the app to be accessible for people with cognitive, vision, and hearing impairments.”**

– Brian Pagán  
Design Lead, Toptal

“Our Toptal team proposed these ideas to WaitWhat, and they enthusiastically embraced them in the name of empathy and inclusion,” says Pagán.

## Delivering WaitWhat’s “most effective tool we’ve ever created”



**In fewer than seven months, the app was ready to test.** “They wanted to bring this vision to life in a way that’s realistic, that could be done within a certain amount of time,” Pagán says. “They understood that it

wasn’t going to be the end-all-be-all. They wanted to have an MVP that they could launch and learn from, that allows them to get feedback from the market—that will allow them to get a real understanding of how this app is actually going to help real people and how they can further develop it in the future.”

The WaitWhat team is ecstatic with the results.

“The app is probably the most effective tool we’ve ever created to help busy founders and executives inside of Fortune 1000 companies access the key ideas and the richest learning moments across 120 episodes of *Masters of Scale*, including the full-length interviews, which are 90 minutes long,” Triff says. “What we’ve done in the app

is we’ve designed around the idea of a daily practice, which is a 10-to-12-minute listening experience that is designed to help you cultivate the entrepreneurial mindset. And this is something that is not taught in school. This is something that is learned through lived experience, right?”

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– Deron Triff

# Building on a successful product launch

**The co-founders of WaitWhat set out to create content that people love, delivered through a thoughtfully designed and inventive app. Mission accomplished.**

“Our goals were to launch a product that had great reviews in the [app] stores, and there’s not a single bad review,” Triff says. “And we have thousands of people who have adopted the app in the first several weeks since launch.”

In addition to expanding the *Masters of Scale* app, WaitWhat wants to make its content-sharing platform available to other media companies. They’re working with the Toptal team to build a white-label version of the platform to be leveraged for other podcasts, starting with the Peabody Award-winning *On Being*.

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– Deron Triff

“There’s just so much gratitude from our team to yours,” Triff says. “We loved working with you—and the quality of this team and the kindness, the humor, and the hardworking nature. It was such a great experience.”



Reid Hoffman  
LinkedIn Co-founder and host of Masters of Scale podcast

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