Hi, everyone. So for this week's module, we'll be hearing from Brittany Hite, who's the Director of news tools and project management at the LA Times. Brittany, how are you doing today?

Good. How are you? Thanks for having me. I'm great, of course.

So you have a really cool title. Could you talk a bit about your journey in what your day to day looks like?

Sure. So my background is, you know, kind of more of like a traditional journalist, I started as a copy editor, and then sort of moved into the various digital editing spheres, which, you know, just kept building upon each other, and eventually kind of landed more on the product side. So I lead a three person team at the LA Times. And we truly are, you know, what you might hear described as, like a bridge role or a bridge team. And we kind of act as the bridge between our newsroom, which has something like 700 people, and our product design and engineering team, which is like 40 to 50 people. And, you know, we just kind of make sure that everybody talks to each other, we do a lot of translating, you know, when the tech side says something very technical that, you know, normal people won't understand, we kind of translate that into like, newsroom speak. We gather feedback from the newsroom. You know, if they have bugs, or feature requests, or anything like that, we kind of take those and take them to the product side. And you know, say, here's what we're hearing, here's what people are asking for, and help them to kind of, you know, prioritize like which things we should be working on? And, you know, if there are new features, like how can we roll it out? How you know, how to make sure we train people provide documentation, that kind of thing?

Yeah, no, that's so great to hear. I'm kind of thinking on that note, a lot of students have asked in this course, you know, they're really struggling to kind of understand the difference between a project manager and a product manager, so you kind of touched on it. But I would love to learn a little bit more about how you make that distinction, or if there even is one?

Sure, I think it kind of, you know, it kind of depends on the organization and the role.

I do a little bit of both in my role product management and project management. But the way I guess I would think about it is that a project manager is managing something that's, you know, very sort of, like time specific. So it's one very specific project that maybe it's going to be a month, maybe it's a really long project, it's going to be a year, but it's, you know, very sort of, like limited and focused. Whereas, you know, I think a product manager is overseeing a specific product, which is gonna have generally a much longer, you know, timeline or lifespan, like if you're male, you know, if you're the product manager of the LA Times website, like, that's not a six month job, that is sort of just goes on indefinitely, as long as the website exists, which hopefully will be for a long time. And I think that, you know, kind of is like the biggest distinction.

Yeah, no, that makes a lot of sense. So kind of going back to your title, obviously, a little bit of it is I'm working with visual tools. And with that job, I'm sure that there's a ton of stakeholders that you're kind of working with. Could you talk a little bit about how you get those various stakeholders to really get on board with your projects?

That is a great question. We have lots of stakeholders from, you know, everyone up from the editor in chief on down to the interns, in everybody, you know, in the middle, because everybody's using the CMS right, so, we have a few different ways, you know, we tried to like gather feedback through several different avenues, we have a form that people can fill out at any time, if they want to suggest you know, a certain feature or report a bug, we have a Slack channel where people can report things or ask for help, or, you know, request those kinds of things. And then honestly, a lot of it just comes in, like the day to day, you know, like we try to talk to people have regular meetings with you know, various teams, like, every six months, I tried to meet with the copy desk and just ask them, like, how are things going, you know, are there any problems? You know, what's like, the biggest hindrance to your workflows, like those kinds of conversations are where you actually, I think, can kind of get the most like bang for your buck in terms of useful feedback. We also started a survey that we do every six months, where we just ask people like, how's it going? What can we do that would like make your job easier? And that's been really useful as well. Yeah. Yeah, that kind of actually gets into my next question. Right now, this module is focusing a lot on feedback loops. Going once, you know, you have your MVP and once you're iterating on it, so you kind of gave that example. But do you kind of have any other example of projects or even products that you've managed, where you're kind of consistently receiving feedback and what that process looks like? Sure. I mean, you know, with us with the CMS, it's basically a never ending feedback loop because it's never gonna be you know, finished right? Because, you know, we build a new feature on and then Tick tock, you know, people start using Tick Tock now.  We got to build tic toc. And then we build tic toc. And and it turns out that, you know, it doesn't quite work on the app. So then we got it, you know, it's always like, it's very much a cycle of these things, you know, continuing on and on and on. And, you know, I think another thing with product management is that it's okay, like, you don't have to have like an end goal. Because, you know, if you're trying to think on like a two or five year timeline, like we don't know what's going to change in the technology world in that time, and, you know, you can't get like too far ahead of yourself, because you got to be nimble and be able to react quick, especially in the news industry isn't sure you know, thing, you know, video, it's Facebook, it's Google, it's Apple news. It's all these platforms. And so you know, just being able to be flexible is really important. Yeah.

And before you go, kind of with, you know, a lot of this feedback, there's been a ton of questions about what platforms to use for project management, things like air table, things like notion, could you share kind of some of your favorite workflow tools and how you use them?

Oh, I would love to. my favorite question. I'm a huge, like, software productivity software nerd. So I personally like air table a lot, particularly because you can generate a form and just, you know, have people fill it out. And then like, they don't have to actually go into the table itself. And

it's, you know, a little bit more flexible, I think, then, like Excel are a little more user friendly. And it's got sort of the color coding, and I'm not very good at Excel, so it's a little bit easier for me. So either fan of air table, I also use a couple ones that I find really helpful. One is called bear, it's like a note taking app where you can use like, it's like a hashtag, sort of, you know, you can do like hashtag tools and like, that collects all the notes with like that hashtag into like, one area, and it makes it really easy to find stuff and organize stuff. I also use a to do list app called things, which is great. Because it allows you to like have a you know, order your to do list and assign like specific dates to like each to do list item. And you can organize it in like different, you know, categories, or whatever. And it also syncs with your calendar. But ultimately, you know, I think that the project management tool that is most useful is the one that people are going to use, like I like all these fancy tools. But a lot of times I'll say, you know, we end up just using like Google Sheets, or Google Docs, because it's like, everybody knows how to use it. And that, you know, it's not going to be a hindrance. And that I think that can be you know, sometimes the big stumbling block in getting some of this project management type stuff off the ground is if people you're asking people to use a tool that they're unfamiliar with, if they have to create a new account, you know, you're that's just adding sort of friction. And so, you know, at the end of the day, whatever is going to people are going to use and fill out and like update is that's really the most important thing.

Yeah, no, that's such great. Whatever people use is definitely the best kind of route to go. Um, thank you so much, Britney for chatting with our class and giving these valuable tips and the time