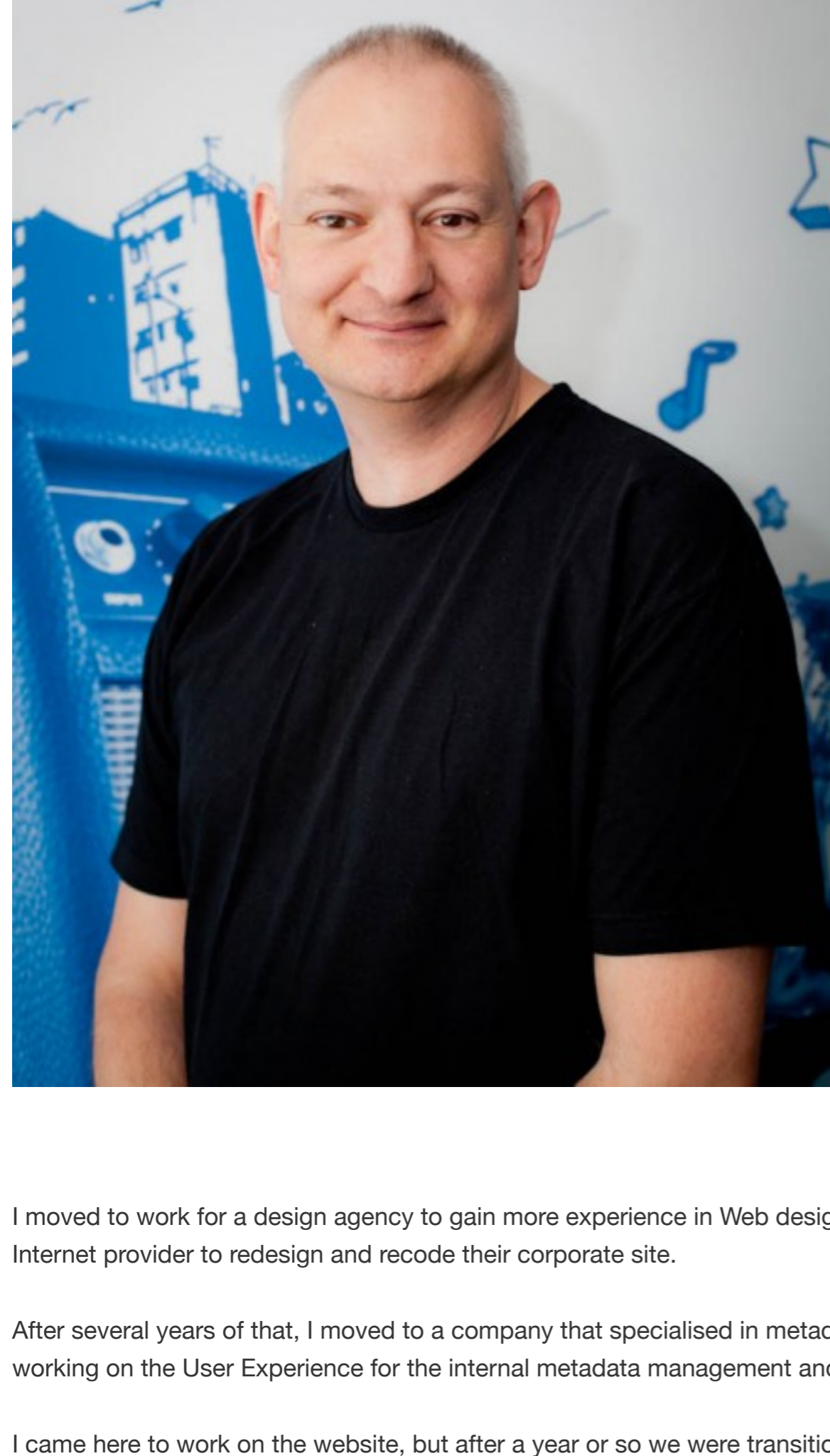


WINDOWS 8 DESIGN INSIGHTS FROM SHAZAM'S SENIOR UI DESIGNER

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Ubelly spoke to Richard Earmey, Shazam's Senior UI Designer and Product Manager for Windows Phone. Richard spoke to us about developing the music recognition app for Windows 8.

Ubelly: What's your background and how did it lead to your current role at Shazam?

Richard: I have been a designer for many years, working firstly in book publishing, designing academic and fiction covers. A few months after the web was invented, the publishers I worked for said to one of the technically minded editors and me that there was something called webspace, go build a website! The editor and I spent a few hours working it all out and published a 'website'. It was pretty basic and probably appalling, but it was so exciting to write some simple code and see it within a few seconds. In publishing you'd often wait a week or two to see the proofs of your designs, so I was hooked.



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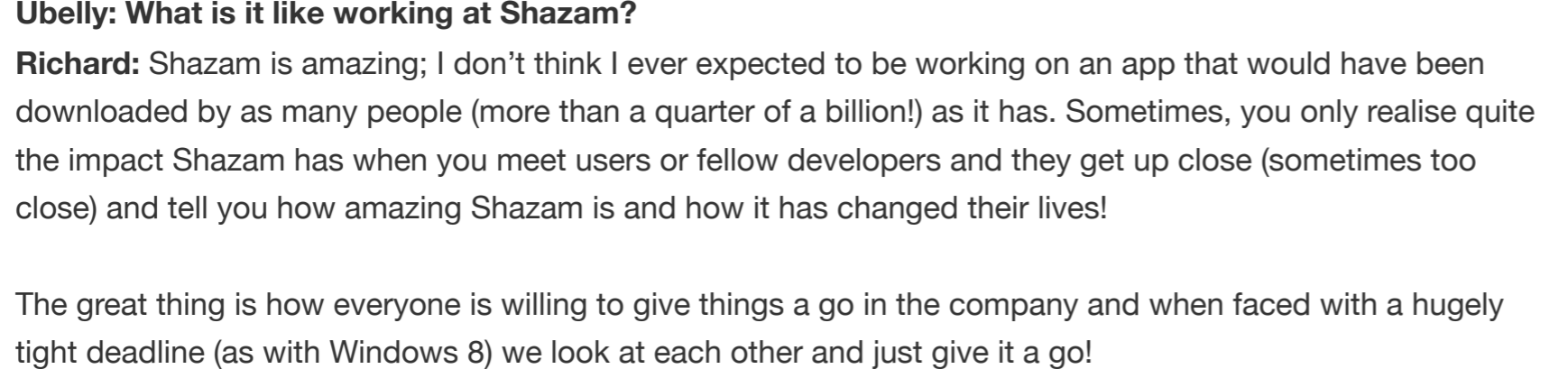
I moved to work for a design agency to gain more experience in Web design and coding. Then moved to an Internet provider to redesign and recode their corporate site.

After several years of that, I moved to a company that specialised in metadata management for on demand TV, working on the User Experience for the internal metadata management and finally came to Shazam.

I came here to work on the website, but after a year or so we were transitioning from a short code SMS service to, so called, Smart Phone apps. They were very dumb phones by today's standards, but they needed a design and some usability, so I was asked to come up with some concepts. An agency had produced some designs but our team were unhappy with them, so my ideas became the 'winner'.

And then came the iPhone, which as most will admit, changed everything. It certainly changed Shazam! I designed our original iPhone app and subsequent versions as well as those for Android, Symbian, and BlackBerry. When we launched our first Windows Phone app, we used an external agency to apply the Shazam look and feel rather than design and build in-house.

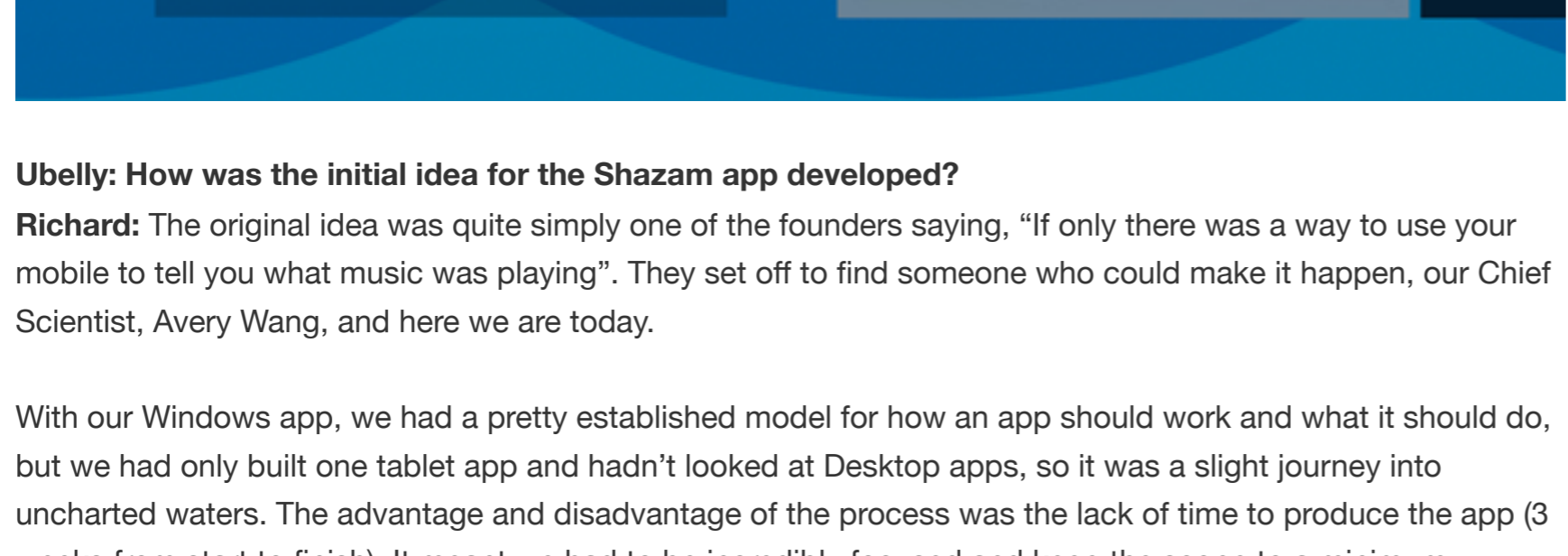
Recently I took over the Product Management and Design of the Shazam on Windows platform, and our small team, a developer, Wyono Aten, a QA tester and a Project Manager have started to ship some new releases, culminating in the release of Shazam on the Windows 8 platform.



Ubelly: What is it like working at Shazam?

Richard: Shazam is amazing; I don't think I ever expected to be working on an app that would have been downloaded by as many people (more than a quarter of a billion!) as it has. Sometimes, you only realise quite the impact Shazam has when you meet users or fellow developers and they get up close (sometimes too close) and tell you how amazing Shazam is and how it has changed their lives!

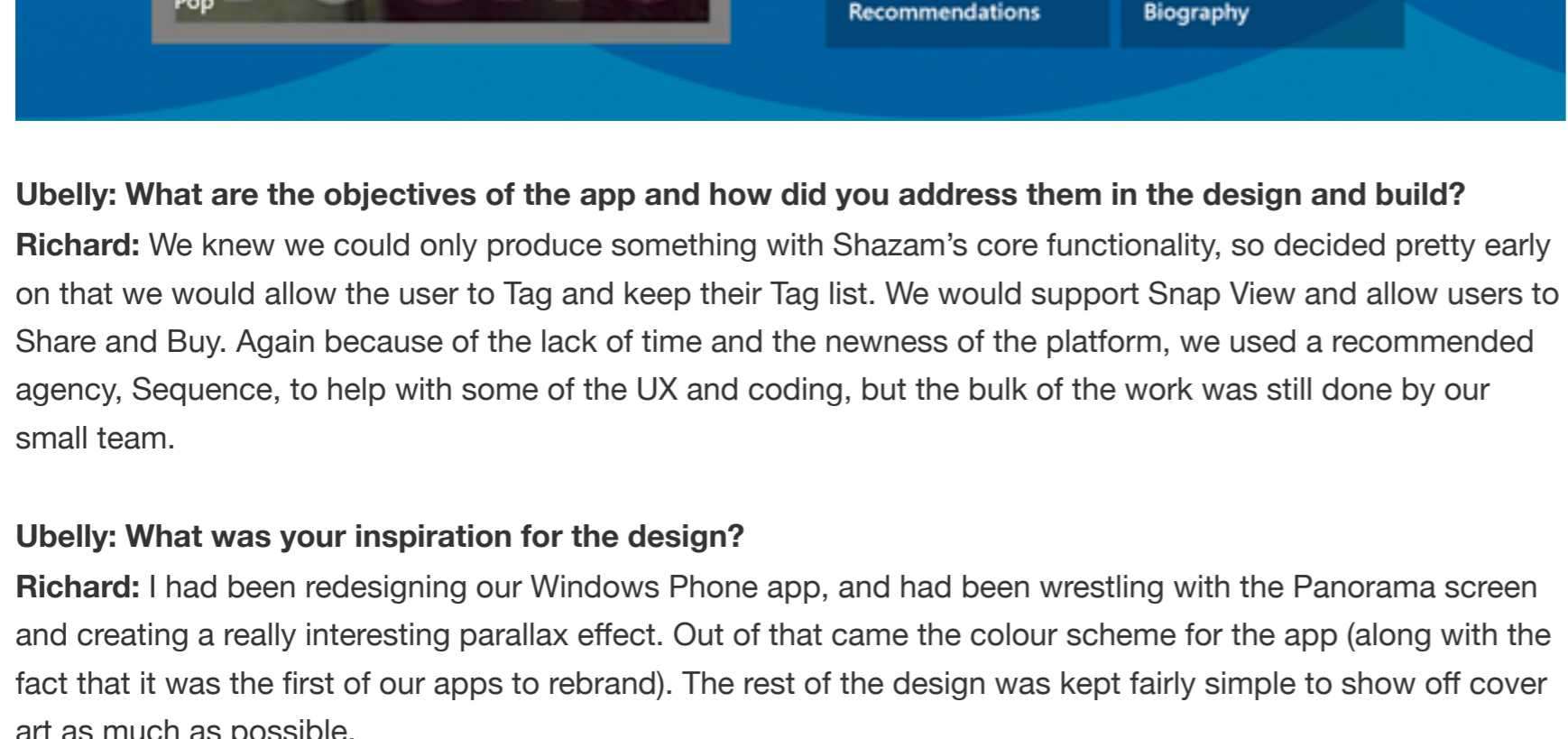
The great thing is how everyone is willing to give things a go in the company and when faced with a hugely tight deadline (as with Windows 8) we look at each other and just give it a go!



Ubelly: How was the initial idea for the Shazam app developed?

Richard: The original idea was quite simply one of the founders saying, "If only there was a way to use your mobile to tell you what music was playing". They set off to find someone who could make it happen, our Chief Scientist, Avery Wang, and here we are today.

With our Windows app, we had a pretty established model for how an app should work and what it should do, but we had only built one tablet app and hadn't looked at Desktop apps, so it was a slight journey into uncharted waters. The advantage and disadvantage of the process was the lack of time to produce the app (3 weeks from start to finish). It meant we had to be incredibly focused and keep the scope to a minimum.

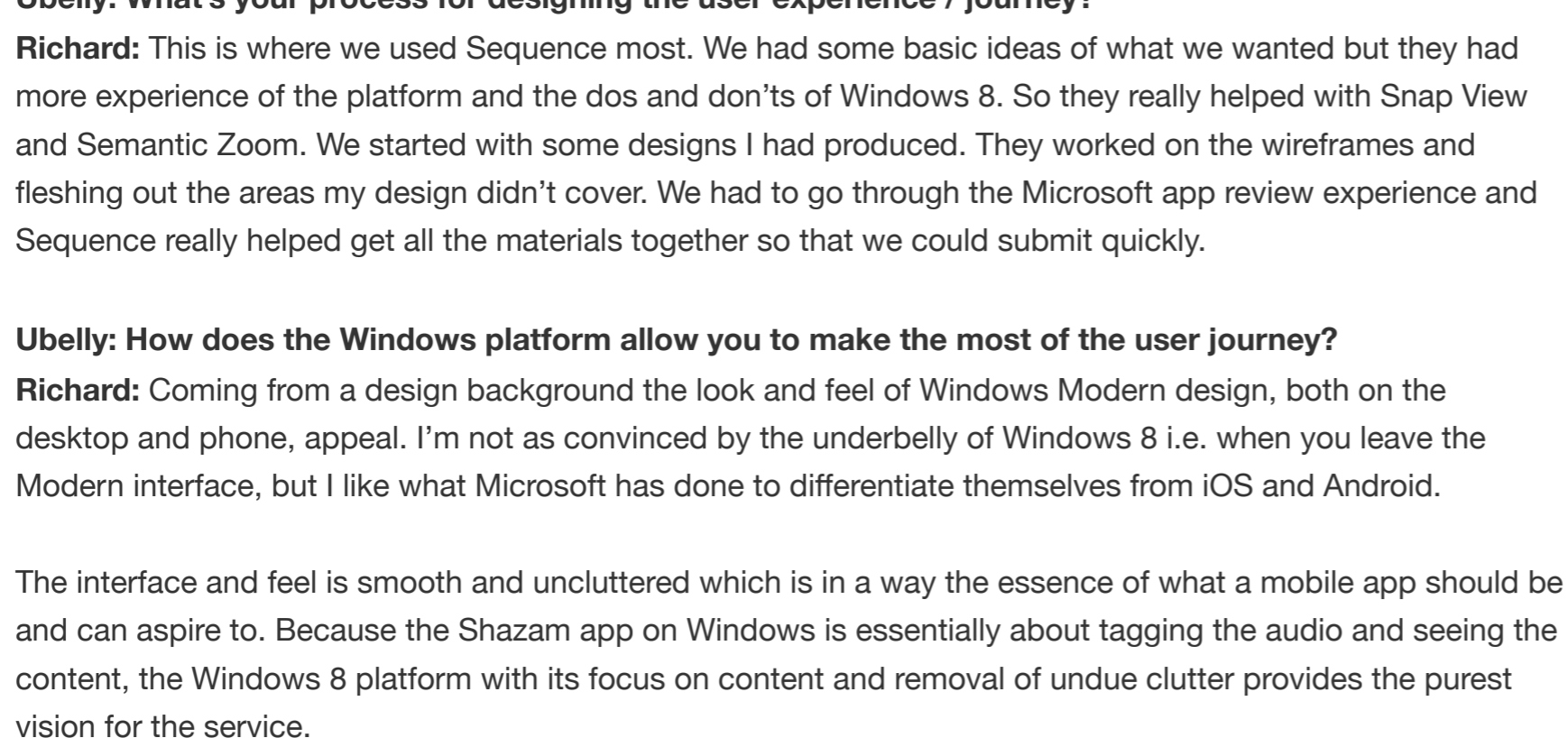


Ubelly: What are the objectives of the app and how did you address them in the design and build?

Richard: We knew we could only produce something with Shazam's core functionality, so decided pretty early on that we would allow the user to Tag and keep their Tag list. We would support Snap View and allow users to Share and Buy. Again because of the lack of time and the newness of the platform, we used a recommended agency, Sequence, to help with some of the UX and coding, but the bulk of the work was still done by our small team.

Ubelly: What was your inspiration for the design?

Richard: I had been redesigning our Windows Phone app, and had been wrestling with the Panorama screen and creating a really interesting parallax effect. Out of that came the colour scheme for the app (along with the fact that it was the first of our apps to rebrand). The rest of the design was kept fairly simple to show off cover art as much as possible.



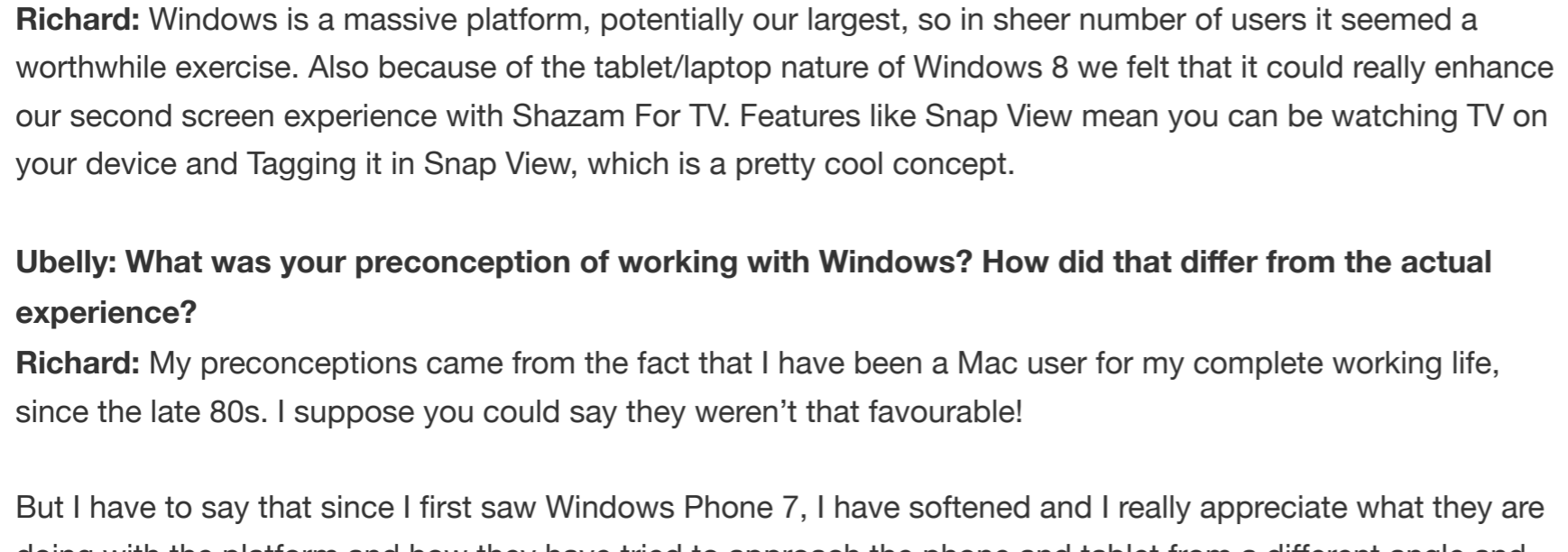
Ubelly: What's your process for designing the user experience / journey?

Richard: This is where we used Sequence most. We had some basic ideas of what we wanted but they had more experience of the platform and the dos and don'ts of Windows 8. So they really helped with Snap View and Semantic Zoom. We started with some designs I had produced. They worked on the wireframes and fleshing out the areas my design didn't cover. We had to go through the Microsoft app review experience and Sequence really helped get all the materials together so that we could submit quickly.

Ubelly: How does the Windows platform allow you to make the most of the user journey?

Richard: Coming from a design background the look and feel of Windows Modern design, so decided pretty early on that we would allow the user to Tag and keep their Tag list. We would support Snap View and allow users to Share and Buy. Again because of the lack of time and the newness of the platform, we used a recommended agency, Sequence, to help with some of the UX and coding, but the bulk of the work was still done by our small team.

The interface and feel is smooth and uncluttered which is in a way the essence of what a mobile app should be and can aspire to. Because the Shazam app on Windows is essentially about tagging the audio and seeing the content, the Windows 8 platform with its focus on content and removal of undue clutter provides the purest vision for the service.



Ubelly: What's the business model (i.e. free/paid for/subscription/ads in apps) and why did you choose that option?

Richard: We started with just a free app on Windows 8, and will be introducing some advertising shortly. At the moment we are really going through the process of identifying the cool features we can bring to Windows and then deciding the model, either free, sponsored or paid for.

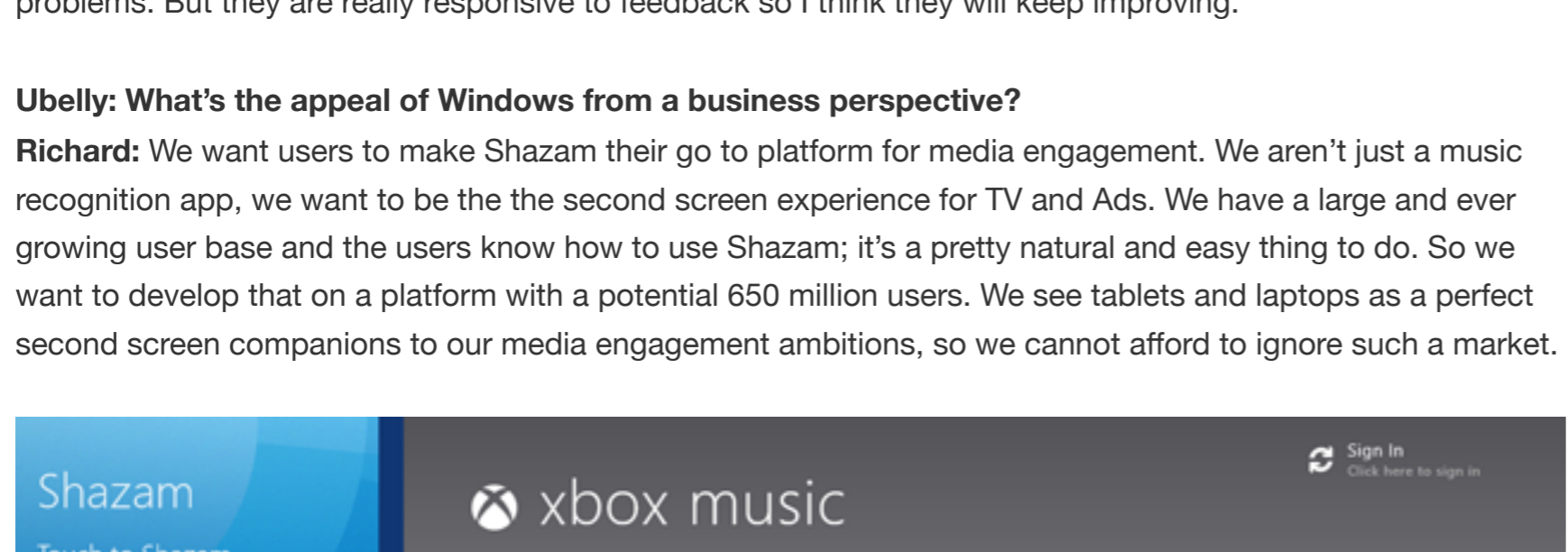
Ubelly: What made you want to build/design a Windows 8 app and bring Shazam to the platform? What appealed to you?

Richard: It's a massive platform, potentially our largest, so in sheer number of users it seemed a worthwhile exercise. Also because of the tablet/laptop nature of Windows 8 we felt that it could really enhance our second screen experience with Shazam For TV. Features like Snap View mean you can be watching TV on your device and Tagging it in Snap View, which is a pretty cool concept.

Ubelly: What was your preconception of working with Windows? How did that differ from the actual experience?

Richard: My preconceptions came from the fact that I have been a Mac user for my complete working life, since the late 80s. I suppose you could say they weren't that favourable!

But I have to say that since I first saw Windows Phone 7, I have softened and I really appreciate what they are doing with the platform and how they have tried to approach the phone and tablet from a different angle and not just tried to ape Apple as has happened with Android. I am about to get a Windows Phone 8 device as a backup to my iPhone and use Windows 8 under emulation on my Mac.



Ubelly: What would you say to other developers who might be sitting on the fence as far as Windows 8 development is concerned?

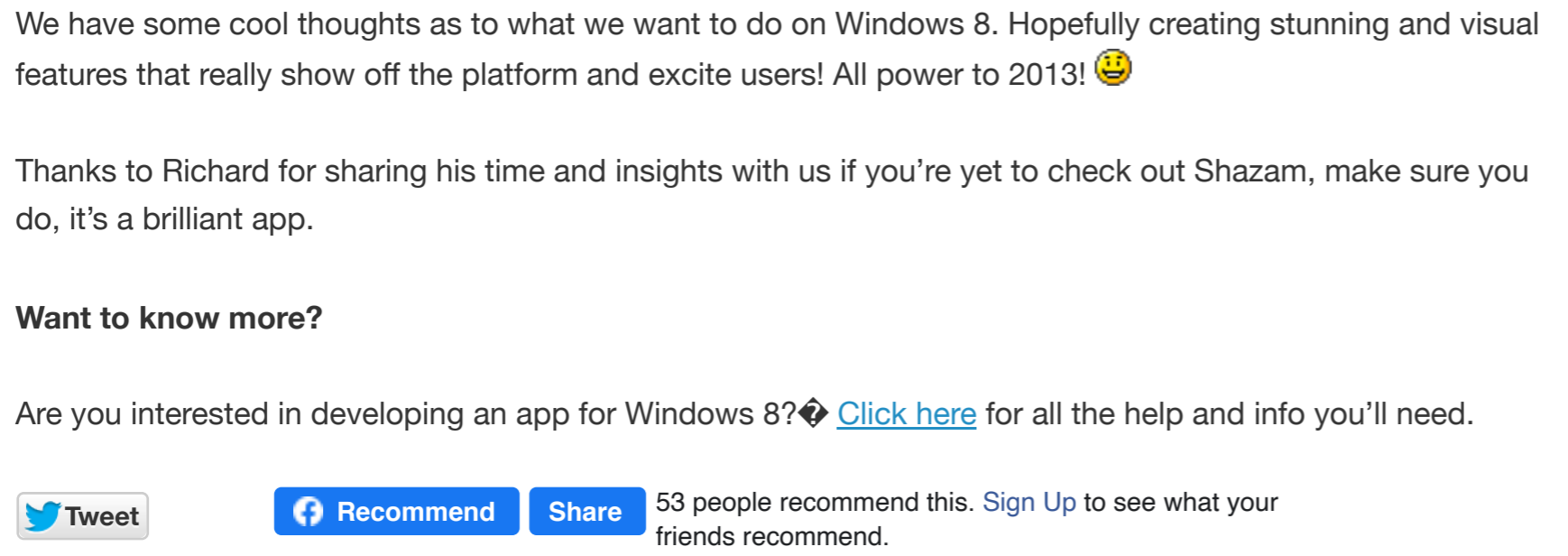
Richard: The great thing about the Windows 8 platform is just how much support you do get from Microsoft. The design guidelines, while pretty strict, do mean it is easy to get up and running quickly and makes it hard to not get the platform. The development environment is rich and flexible. So to developers I'd say, here you have a platform that will give you lots of support and a huge user base, with a great opportunity to make cool apps and money, so why wouldn't you look at it?

Ubelly: What's different about Windows from other platforms you've worked on (both good and bad)?

Richard: Good: the depth of support and resources. From a UI perspective the focus on the content makes it an exciting platform to express one's vision.
Bad: I think Microsoft have taken on board a lot of the good points of what Apple has done with iOS and the processes to get there. But maybe the areas where they haven't quite got there are causing a few teething problems. But they are really responsive to feedback so I think they will keep improving.

Ubelly: What's the appeal of Windows from a business perspective?

Richard: We want users to make Shazam their go to platform for media engagement. We aren't just a music recognition app, we want to be the second screen experience for TV and Ads. We have a large and ever growing user base and the users know how to use Shazam; it's a pretty natural and easy thing to do. So we want to develop that on a platform with a potential 650 million users. We see tablets and laptops as a perfect second screen companions to our media engagement ambitions, so we cannot afford to ignore such a market.



Ubelly: What were the challenges for you building this app?

Richard: Time firstly, we had 3 weeks from start to finish, and we went live at 23:45 on Windows 8 launch day! Learning the platform (as much as possible) in the space of a weekend. Honing down the feature set so we could make a viable product; not bringing an impossible set of features in release #1. This gives us a lot of scope for rapid iteration of the app (we will be at version 1.3 by the end of the year).

Ubelly: What support did you get from Microsoft?

Richard: We had great support from Microsoft. They helped us throughout the process, from attending one of Andrew Spooner's UX seminars at Microsoft's London HQ, to support from the Developer evangelism team in recommending Sequence to us, and their support through the account setting up and submission process.

Ubelly: What's next for Shazam?

Richard: By the end of January we hope to be on version 1.4 of our Windows 8 app, but we will be working on a Windows Phone 8 app for the first quarter. But because of the close linking of the two platforms improvements we bring to the phone will move to Windows 8 and vice versa.

We have some cool thoughts as to what we want to do on Windows 8. Hopefully creating stunning and visual features that really show off the platform and excite users! All power to 2013! 😊

Thanks to Richard for sharing his time and insights with us if you're yet to check out Shazam, make sure you do, it's a brilliant app.

Want to know more?

Are you interested in developing an app for Windows 8? Click here for all the help and info you'll need.

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