

# Connecting Digitally

An Interview with Mary Kay Huse, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder, Mandolin

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Mary Kay Huse is the CEO and co-founder of Mandolin, the leading livestreaming platform for concerts. She is a seasoned technology executive and passionate live music fan with experience working at some of the largest software companies in the world, including ExactTarget and Salesforce.*



Mary Kay Huse

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Mandolin (mandolin.com) helps artists and venues create connections with fans and prosper through the music they produce.*

## What was your vision for creating Mandolin and how do you define its mission?

Every great idea comes from a pain point, and we saw that both artists and fans were struggling. The pandemic exposed a need for artists to be able to connect with fans outside of live, in-person events. Fans weren't ready to give up on live music, so Mandolin was born. We saw the need to connect digitally, and we knew that this need would not be going away anytime soon. It is our mission to help artists and venues create connections with fans and prosper through the music they produce. We want to show artists and fans that there are big benefits to engaging and connecting with live music and each other in new ways.

## How do you describe Mandolin's culture?

Our culture is creative, optimistic, empathetic and certainly brave. As a company, we're strategic, collaborative, and not afraid to push the limits. We say to our artists, venues, and partners that we're in this together, because that's good for us all. They have the music and the passion, and we have the digital know-how to make the music industry even more resilient for this new normal.

## How is Mandolin's business addressing the challenges and uncertainty caused by the pandemic?

There is no doubt that the pandemic hit the live music industry hard, leaving artists, fans and venues in desperate need of new ways to connect and make music. The new version of "live" continues to evolve and reveal itself. We're in an all-digital world, and there's no going back. Mandolin has a way forward – a way to bring people back together and live music back to the stage, whether they are all in the same room or spread out across the globe. We help artists and venues prosper through the music they produce. We intentionally push

the boundaries of livestream, giving artists the right tools to create content, share it widely, and then better understand how fans engage. Mandolin gives artists the ability to build a digital strategy, all while giving fans unprecedented access to the artists they love.

## Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for Mandolin?

Livestream is a crowded space in the market, but our team's rare combination of big tech and music industry knowledge is allowing us to break

through the noise. That said, our greatest opportunities for growth are rooted in product innovation. We have three primary areas of investment right now: fan experience, in the form of watch parties, artist/fan interactions, custom merchandise and data and content management, which includes ways to drive deeper engagement and to better understand unique audiences; and marketing and promotion tools, which help artists to grow their exposure and ultimately their fan base.

**“It is our mission to help artists and venues create connections with fans and prosper through the music they produce.”**

## Will you discuss the team you have assembled at Mandolin and the expertise of the workforce?

My two co-founders, Steve Caldwell and Robert Meitus, inspire me daily with their passion and energy for what we are building together. They bring extensive experience from both the tech and live music industries that really gives us an edge over the competition. The strategic combination of

music and tech DNA has been core to our overall hiring strategy. We have lifelong music industry experts with amazing experience and relationships to some of the most tech savvy talent with marketplace and high-scale platform expertise and a go-to-market team with the ability to help our customers build sustainable business strategies leveraging digital.

We're excited to be recruiting big enterprise and music industry talent from across the nation. I'm looking for diversity in skills and personality types, but want to foster a team that highly values direct and honest communication and integrity, and takes initiative.

## What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you define your management style?

Effective leadership comes in many different forms but, for me, it is encouraging transparency and fostering an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their points of view and ideas. The best ideas are always a synthesis of many points of view. We also have a value of “adventure in the unknown” which means we take risks and iterate quickly. When creating a market as a team, it's important to have a culture that is willing to take a lot of calculated risks, but to have the security to be willing to pivot entirely or to double down, or anything in between.

## Did you always know that you had the entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own business?

I've always wanted to be a CEO, and I've always wanted to be in tech. Scott Dorsey, who's now managing partner at High Alpha, hired me at ExactTarget years ago, and I told him just that. Now here I am by the virtue of blind ambition, I guess. With every new opportunity at ExactTarget and Salesforce, I learned more about what I needed to become a CEO. When the idea for Mandolin was presented to me, everything lined up, and the opportunity was a no-brainer.

## Are you able to take moments to reflect and celebrate the wins that Mandolin has achieved since its founding?

Every step forward is a huge accomplishment for us. It's really important for the entire team, especially as a startup, to take note of the progress we've made in such a short time and acknowledge those wins. At the same time, though, we use those wins to fuel the fire to keep innovating and keep bringing something new to the table. The industry is growing so quickly and we want to keep the momentum moving forward. ●