

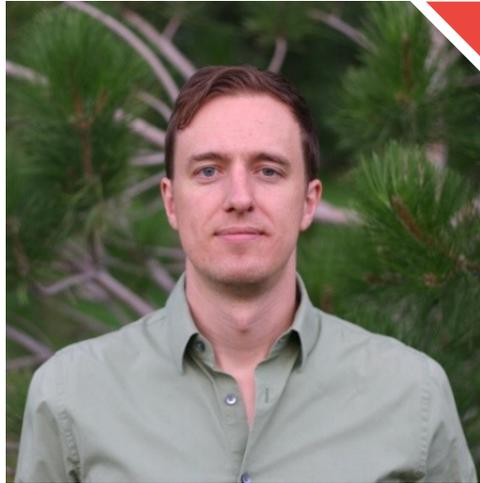
# Creators

Story of Ian Melchior



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For me, the most important part of any job is that it affords a chance to learn and grow.

## <About Ian>

Ian graduated from the University of Wyoming with a Bachelor's degree in International Affairs and Relations. He's also a veteran Zoho Creator developer with over 9 years of experience using the platform.

From being a VP of IT at EcoMark, to freelancing, to starting his own software development firm, Auxiliary Brain, Ian's career has taken many interesting turns over the years.

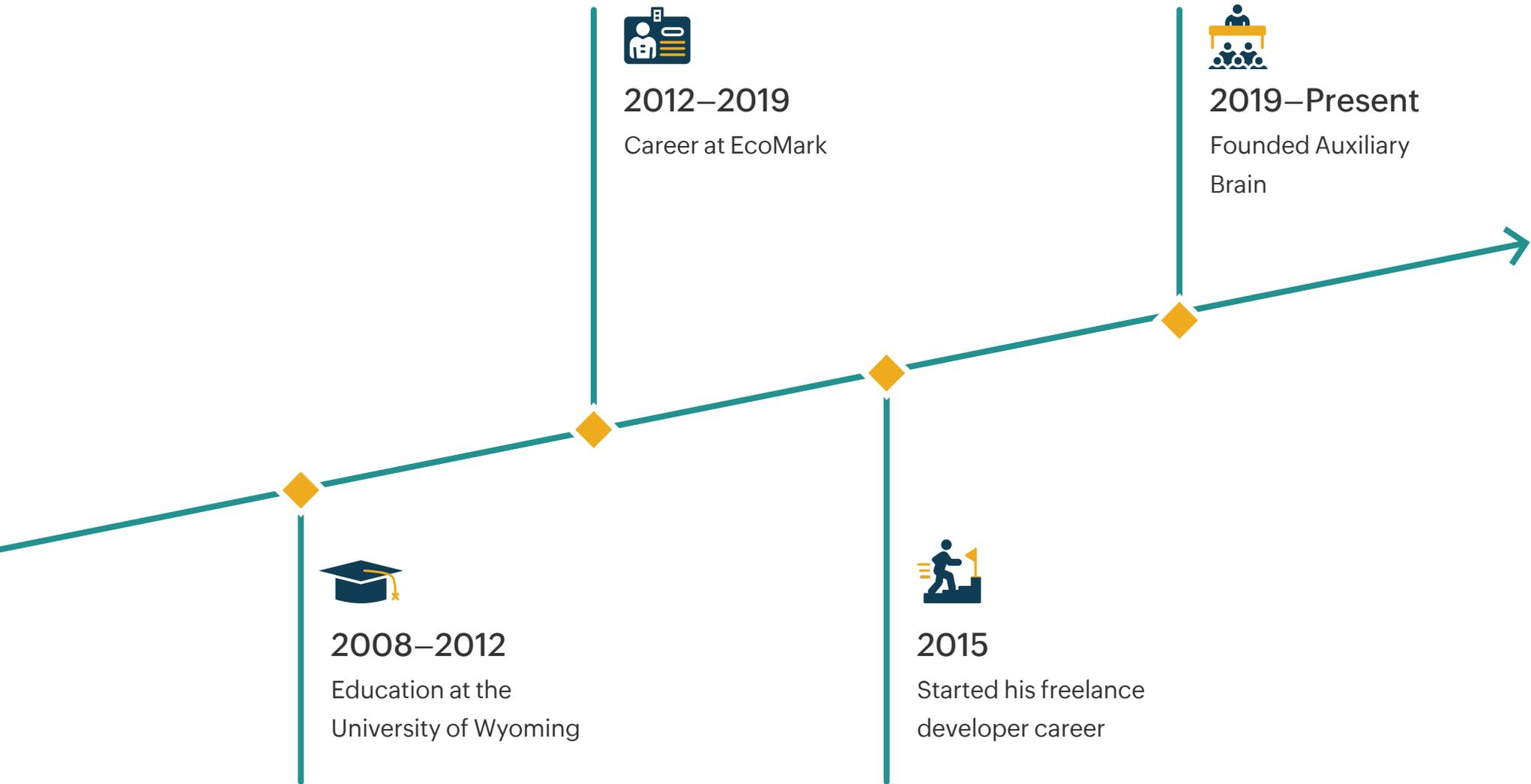
# <Key Skills>

Here are some of the skills that Ian has mastered over the years—ones that he feels all Zoho developers should master in order to implement projects successfully:

- ◆ Design thinking
- ◆ Zoho One platform
- ◆ User experience design
- ◆ Integrations
- ◆ Consistency



# <Timeline>



# <Ian's Coding Journey>

Ian came across coding fairly early in his life, and even though he didn't become a full-time developer until much later, these early interactions with computers (and coding) set him up for an interesting career:



## 2001

Back in 8th grade, during his keyboard typing class, Ian and his classmate—who both already knew how to type—used to quickly finish their assigned course work in the first 10 minutes of each session. They'd spent the remaining 35 minutes of the class tinkering with HTML—creating "masterpieces" in the process

## 2002



In 9th grade, a friend and I were playing around with a calculator, and programmed it to produce tons of specific frequencies to trick pay phones into thinking that a coin had been deposited. I learned two things later on in my life: 1. Hacking pay phones is a crime called 'toll fraud', and 2. Paying attention in class is more important than programming games on a calculator.

# 2008–2012

About 5 years later, Ian would enter the University of Wyoming where he studied International Relations & Affairs.

There he learned basic spreadsheet formulas, not knowing that it was yet another step into the world of programming.

Though as he was nearing the end of his second year of college, it was becoming increasingly clear that:

- ◆ He needed to figure out what he wanted to do, and
- ◆ He had no idea what he wanted to do

Because he had a knack for learning different languages, and was fascinated by history and foreign cultures, he decided to enroll in a Mandarin Chinese class.



I thought that if I learned Chinese, surely I'd find an interesting opportunity somewhere, so I started down that road to see where it would take me.

And he did manage to find just the opportunity he was looking for.

In the second year of his Chinese language classes, Ian's teacher suggested that he apply for a scholarship to study in Beijing for a year, which he did, moving there in 2008.

While in Beijing, he came across a Chinese-Canadian engineer who was looking for partners in a new import/export business focusing on a few different industries, one of which was solar energy.

This piqued his interest enough that when he came back to the US, he began attending different industry trade shows—his objective at the time was to make some contacts and look for opportunities.

At one of the trade shows, he met the owners of EcoMark Solar, who became his future employers.

Working together with the engineer he met in Beijing, their business consisted of importing solar panels and selling them in the US. But due to the political and economic situation at the time, their business never really got off the ground.

While that endeavor was faltering, EcoMark's business was beginning to take off, and they needed some additional help. Ian was onboarded in a part-time position, which graduated to full time soon after.

## 2012–2014



My first job after college: EcoMark contracted a PHP programmer to develop a web application. I then had to maintain it despite knowing nothing about PHP. I learned the most important skills for a coder: How to Google things, how to learn through trial and error, and how to be persistent when frustrated, lost, and confused.

He was a part of the early team at EcoMark, who had only 3 employees at the time.

It was then when he came across Zoho Creator.

“

I discovered Zoho Creator and convinced myself that I'm a natural-born programming genius who's found a shortcut to coding that doesn't require a degree in Computer Science.

“

Looking back now, it's about the simplest thing that you can build in Creator, but I was proud of it at the time, and I knew that there was much more Creator could do, even if I didn't know how to use a fraction of its capabilities yet.

His first Zoho Creator project was building a few web forms through which employees, partners, and customers entered new lead data. The app was basic, just a form with a few lines of code on the backend and an integration with Zoho CRM.

## 2015–2019

“ I discovered that I’d seriously overestimated my programming ability when I had to revise my code from the previous year and found that it was a mangled knot written by an incompetent amateur.

With that in mind, Ian enrolled for Creator training later that year to improve his skills using the platform. It was then when he was first contacted by a client to help build their app on Creator.

“ In 2015, I took the Zoho Creator Certified Developer course, simply to learn how to better use the software. I don’t even think I was aware at the time that there was a list of certified developers on Zoho’s website. Some time later, I got a call out of the blue from a company that needed a bit of work done.

Since he was still working full-time at EcoMark, he took on these projects over the weekend and during his free time.

Over the next few years, he started getting an increasing number of projects, and Ian slowly started becoming an expert in developing applications using the platform.

Between 2016 and 2019, he built new apps and resolved his past mistakes. He learned new techniques and slowly started getting a sense for when his code was good and when it was sloppy. This improved the quality of his apps, and he started teaching others how to use Creator.

“ I began to understand that coding is a journey, not a destination—that I’ll be learning for the rest of my life.

Towards the end of 2018, Ian realized that he'd played his part in EcoMark's journey and started transitioning out over the next 6 months.

That's when he started his own development firm—Auxiliary Brain—in 2019.

“ The first few months of running my own business, I felt fortunate that the challenges I faced were not the challenges I hear about from most business owners. Since I'd completed a few projects in my spare time previously, I had contacts to reach out to for new projects or referrals. Even at the beginning, I already had enough business to sustain myself, I had a bit of savings, and I had used the 6 months from when I made my decision to when I finally left to transition from one point to the other.

The biggest challenge for Ian at the time was (and still is) figuring out how to best use his time without an externally imposed structure.

“

When working alone from home, the line between work and not-work can get very blurry. You're in the same physical space most of the time. No one is telling you what time to start working and what time to stop.

On top of that, because there's so much to do when first setting up a business and no one is telling you what to do and in what order, being conscientious and thoughtful about where your time goes can be as difficult as it is important.

## 2020 and beyond

With that in mind, Ian enrolled for Creator training later that year to improve his skills using the platform. It was then when he was first contacted by a client to help build their app on Creator.

“

A few of my clients postponed work they were planning on, but at the same time, other clients operated in industries that actually benefited from the massive changes in how people lived and worked during the pandemic, so the net change for me was minimal.

The biggest challenge for Ian was the blurring lines between work and personal time.

“ Working from home on my own can get a little lonely in normal times, but during COVID, I was even more isolated than before. Have you ever heard of someone being stranded on a desert island alone for a few years and being a bit crazy when they’re eventually rescued? Or have you ever been told that solitary confinement is a form of torture?

But things got better for Ian, eventually. And now he’s used to his new routine at his new apartment in Medellín, Colombia.

“ My Spanish has improved a lot over the last month, and I’ve made new friends here. My father is visiting at the end of the month to live and work with me for a few weeks, and I feel optimistic about where the rest of the year will take me.

Of course, I brought with me the same weaknesses, flaws, and vices that I had back at home in Denver, and I still miss my friends and family back home that I haven’t seen enough of in the last year. But on the whole, I truly believe that I might really be the luckiest person on earth, and I hope that I can give something back through my work that justifies the incredible opportunities I’ve been given.

# <Some Key Projects>

## Retail management platform

This is an application to manage retail store sales from dozens of different outdoor sports equipment shops under the Vail Resorts brand, which manages the entire process: ordering, invoicing, shipping, and delivery.



## Custom CRM

This solution is a CRM/Creator implementation for a farmland real estate management company. One special custom feature I built was a tool that automatically tracks the market price for corn futures and, using that information along with other CRM data, calculates the value of farmland and land lease agreements.

## Travel management platform

This application manages group train travel on a major railway system in Northern California. For this project, I learned all about GTFS data, the ingenious technology that, among other things, allows Google maps to tell you how to get from point A to point B using public transportation in cities around the world.

# <Here's what gives Ian the confidence to develop apps using Zoho Creator>



I'm confident in the apps I develop using Creator because of the constant product improvement from Zoho, reliable and knowledgeable support, and uptime on par with the best companies in the world.



# <Ian's advice to new Zoho developers>

## Zoho Creator

First, sometimes it's best to spend lots of time upfront outlining exactly how you want everything to work when you're done, before you start building—and other times, especially for a beginner, it's better to just start building and experimenting first, then refine later. I think you develop a sense for this over time as you learn more and build more. Secondly, call me if you need help! I've made my share of mistakes and learned lots of lessons through trial and error, and if I could have worked with an expert early on, it would have saved me countless hours and sped up my learning curve significantly.



## Community

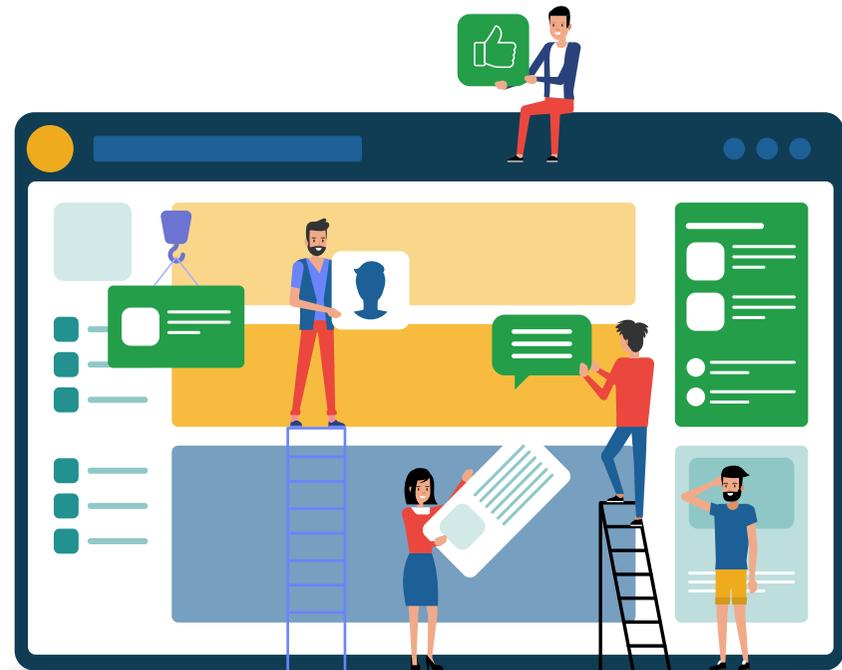
The most valuable takeaways from the community forums for me were seeing how other companies solve their problems with Zoho. Often I've learned a new way of doing things or a new use for Creator that I might never have thought of on my own. The events in which I've been able to spend one-on-one time with the actual Zoho developers and support team have been incredibly valuable, not only in helping me solve problems I was facing, but also in allowing me to provide direct feedback on what my customers and I would like to see in future versions.

## On getting feedback

The best way to get feedback on any app is to put it to use. Your coworkers or customers will find any weak points or edge cases and report them back to you. No one person can think of everything, and the proof is ultimately in the pudding. Once the app is being used in real life, not just in a test environment, putting your work up against real-world challenges will provide the best feedback that you'll ever get.

# <About Us>

Running a business is no mean feat, and we believe we can help. Rapidly build custom applications that are a perfect fit for your business, or choose from our extensive range of prebuilt apps and modify them. The best part? You don't have to be a programmer. Just sign up, pick a plan, and start building!





[www.zoho.com/creator](http://www.zoho.com/creator)

We'd love to talk! Reach out to us at:

[hello@zohocreator.com](mailto:hello@zohocreator.com)

