

THE COMPANION TO
THE COMPLETE WEB DEVELOPER COURSE



How to make **\$10,000**
while learning to code

By Rob Percival

Chapter One: My Story

A Little Bit About Me

This might be a good point to tell you a little bit more about me. If you're not interested, feel free jump straight to the next chapter.

I coded a little as a youngster, messing around with BBC Micros trying (and failing) to recreate Zelda. When Windows came along and I hit my teens coding took a back seat to more pressing concerns, and was largely forgotten. I did a Mathematics degree at Cambridge University and went into teaching. After I got over my initial fear of my students I loved the job, but after a few years I started getting itchy feet, and started playing around with computers again.

Web development was the obvious path, as it required no special software, and the fruits of your labours could be shared instantly with the world. My brain buzzed with 'great' business ideas and I threw myself into building websites. I knew nothing about testing my ideas before building them, or customer development (if you don't know what I'm talking about pay attention in the next chapter!) but loved the technical

challenge of building a website to do what I wanted.

I built a home exchange website called HomesExchange.org (other than appearing on a list of humorous domain names as HomeSexChange.org that one didn't go anywhere). I partnered with a friend of mine to make green-england.co.uk, an eco-friendly listings site. That one is still there, and was a minor success, but we both moved on to other things and it hasn't been updated for a few years now.

Whilst developing Green England, I looked for an eco-friendly web host. The options were few and far between. Those that were available were expensive and offered nowhere near the features that the big providers did. I decided I could do better, and ecowebhosting.co.uk was born.

I built the website myself with the help of a designer friend, and did a bit of basic SEO (Search Engine Optimisation - we'll look at that in the next chapter). Customers started signing up straight away, and growth has been steady (although never spectacular) from day one. The site now provides around half my total income, and requires about an hour's work a day.

When I'm not working on the site, I'm usually building other websites - some for myself, and some for others. I also enjoy the odd game of tennis and spending time with my wife and son (soon to be sons).

There are two things I'd like you to take away from my story. First, if you're looking to build a money-generating website, your first idea is unlikely to be successful. Be prepared to keep trying out new ideas, improving your skills until you hit oil. Second, when coming up with ideas, try to 'scratch your own itch'. If you find yourself looking for something that doesn't exist, it's likely others are looking for that thing too.

Chapter Two: Building Income- Generating Websites

Earnings Summary

Before This Chapter	After This Chapter
TOTAL EARNED: \$1400 TOTAL TIME SPENT: 10 weeks	TOTAL EARNED: \$5,000 TOTAL TIME SPENT: 4 months

I'm hoping that by now you're making at least \$1,000 (that's two websites) a month from freelancer websites. My guess is if you've built a few sites for friends and colleagues you may have earned a fair bit more than that. Do share your success (or lack thereof) in the forums.

In terms of your skills, you should have finished the course and have had a fair amount of practice building basic (and not-so-basic) websites. You should be comfortable with Wordpress and Bootstrap and have built one or two PHP/MySQL based websites. This is more than enough to start building sites of your own.

This Chapter Is Not For Everyone

I'll say it again, this chapter is not for everyone. For me, the potential of web development to provide a recurring income is fantastic. It's the ultimate freedom, and with two or three successes you could potentially never work again.

Having said that, it's not easy. It requires a lot of work up front, a willingness to spend time on marketing and customer support, and more than a little luck.

If you're interested in trying to build your own income generating websites, read on. The great thing is it requires very little financial investment, so the only thing you have to lose is your time. And you'll learn a huge amount along the way.

Still with me? Then let's talk ideas.

Generating Ideas

Essentially we're looking to build an online business, with all that entails. Every business starts with an idea, but how can you be sure it's a good one?

Generally, we want to keep to a particular niche. You're unlikely to build a competitor to Amazon or Google. But you might be able to build an 'Amazon for Education' if you have experience of selling products to schools, or a 'Google for Twitchers' if you know what questions birdwatchers ask that Google currently doesn't answer well.

The web has seen the concept of the Long Tail (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_tail) develop, as the ease of reaching potential customers means that viable business can be made out of very specific products or services (eco-friendly web hosting for example). The 'long tail' refers to the fact that while a large proportion of people's interests may be served by the mainstream, there are still millions of individuals with niche hobbies and specific business requirements, who are unlikely to have their needs met by large companies. These are precisely the type of people you should be targeting.

As I mentioned, you want to scratch your own itch. If you come across a problem that you can't solve, then it's likely others have had the same problem, and

might pay for a solution. To paraphrase the saying, an idea without a problem is like a fish without a bicycle.

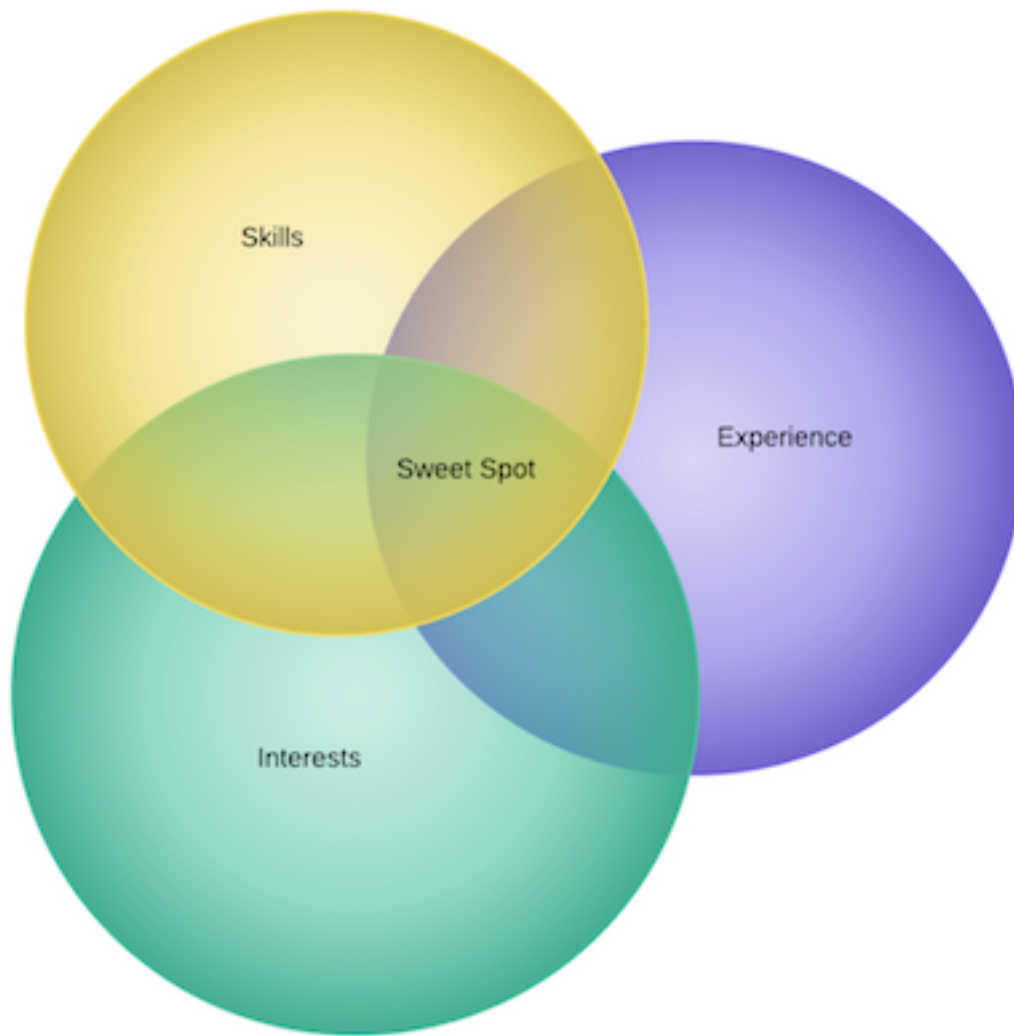
Challenge: Identify Your Itches

Spend 10 minutes thinking back over your work in the last two weeks. What was frustrating? What could have been done more easily if you'd had the right tool? Make a list of these frustrations and share it with others in your line of work. Do they share your frustrations? Keep your list handy - you'll need it soon!

Find Your Sweet Spot

You're much more likely to come up with a good website idea if you have an interest in that particular field.

In fact, your best chances of success are if an idea falls in the overlap of your skills, interests and experience.



Challenge: Finding Your Sweet Spot

Draw two vertical lines on a piece of paper, dividing it into three equal columns. Title them Skills, Experience and Interests. As quickly as you can, fill the columns with

your own skills, experience and interests. Ask your friends and family to add anything they feel you've missed (it's easy to underestimate how any skills and interests you have). Once done, try to think of areas where the three might overlap - these will be fertile areas for you to consider building an online business.

Sources Of ideas

Still not got anything? Here's a few places you can look online for ideas:

<https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=7616910>

Hacker News Idea Sunday

<http://www.scottsbartlow.com/100-awesome-business-ideas-for-2014/>

100 Awesome Business Ideas for 2014

<https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=7452630>

Free Startup Ideas

<http://talkbusinessmagazine.co.uk/14-best-business-ideas-for-2014/>

14 Best Business Ideas for 2014

<http://startups.co.uk/what-business-to-start-in-2014/>

What Business To Start In 2014

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/actiontrumpseverything/2014/01/05/looking-for-a-new-business-idea-in-2014-steal-one-of-these/>

More Business Ideas For 2014

As you can see, there is no shortage of ideas. The true value of a business is usually in the execution, not the idea.

Testing Your Ideas

When I started out, I spent zero time testing out my ideas. I spent about an hour thinking about it, and if I couldn't think of a good reason not to build it, I sat down and started coding. In the early days, there's nothing wrong with this - you'll learn so much from building your own apps, and you'll have something else to add to your portfolio.

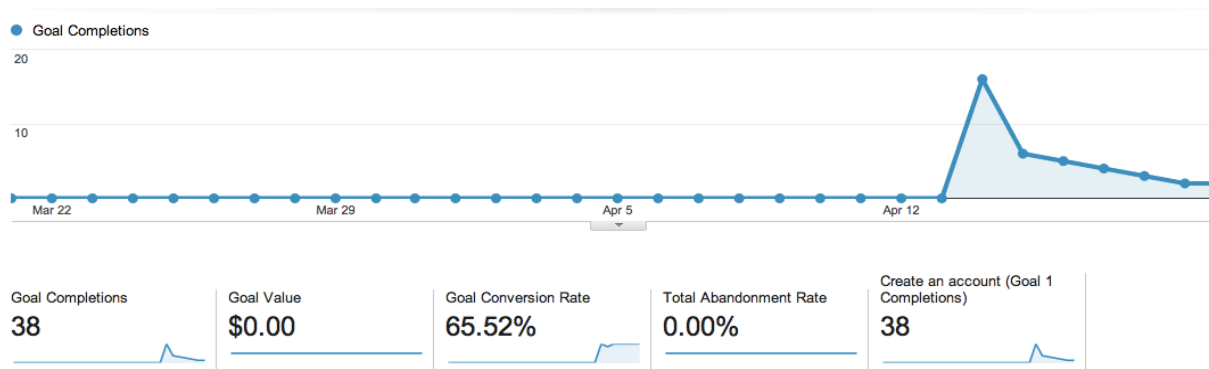
However, if you want to save time and effort, it's well worth testing them out first. Fortunately, there's a quick and easy way to do this.

First, put together a quick website explaining your idea. You can use a service like unbounce.com for this, or just build it yourself with Bootstrap or a Wordpress theme. There should be a clear description of what problem your app will solve, and

how it will do it. There is no need to talk about price at this stage.

Then, add a [Mailchimp.com](https://mailchimp.com) form to the site, and set up google analytics to test conversion rates (that is, what percentage of visitors sign up to your list). I describe how to do this in the last chapter of The Complete Web Developer Course. Drive traffic to this website using your Twitter feed and Google Ads or Facebook Ads. Spending £100 on Facebook ads will be well worth it if it saves you 10 days' of development time! You can also post your idea on sites like reddit, Hacker News or ratemystartup.com.

I did this when I built completewebdevelopercourse.com, and got the results below:



The numbers weren't huge, but 65% of people who visited the website signed up to hear more about the course. That was enough to convince me that there were

enough people who would want this course to make it worth my while building it.

Challenge: Test An Idea

Why not give it a try? Pick the best idea you've come up with, build a quick showcase website for it. Use the links at the end of this chapter to see some examples of great landing pages, and also find sources of free stock photos you can use to jazz up your page. Keep it simple, and post your results on the forum. At the very least, you'll learn a huge amount and have another site for your design portfolio!

What now?

So how did it go? If your conversion rate was lower than you'd like, maybe the idea needs tweaking, or perhaps you should try something else.

If you got a decent response, then congratulations - it's time to get to work! Start putting your site together, focussing on the core features that the product needs. This is known as the Minimal Viable Product: what is the minimum you can make that people will pay for?

Once you've got something that you think people will pay you for, ask a small

selection of your mailing list to try it out and give you feedback. Make changes based on their feedback (known as ‘iterating’), and keep going until you have a handful of paying customers. Then email your list telling them the product is ready, and continue the feedback—> iteration cycle.

There is obviously a lot more to building a great product than that, but this isn’t the place for a detailed examination of building and marketing products. If you’re planning to build your own products, I’d recommend Rob Walling’s *Start Small Stay Small* - it’s full of hard-earned advice on launching your own business. You can purchase it at <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Start-Small-Stay-Developers-Launching-ebook/dp/B003YH9MMI>. Rob also co-hosts the excellent *Startups For The Rest Of Us* podcast.

Progress Update

We’re 5 months in, and by my calculations we’re on \$5000:

Activities	Total Income (\$)
Month 1 10 small freelance jobs at \$20 each	200

Months 2/3 10 small freelance jobs at \$30 each 4 website jobs at \$100 each 2 full website jobs at \$300 each	1200
Months 3/4 5 small freelance jobs at \$40 each 4 full website jobs at \$500 each 2 users on your web-based startup at \$20 each per month	2280
TOTAL	\$5,000

Further Reading

<http://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2013/feb/19/how-to-find-your-business-idea>

How to find your business idea

<http://www.smarta.com/advice/starting-up/business-ideas/>

Business idea guides

<http://jmarbach.com/solve-problems-dont-build-ideas>

Solve problems - don't build ideas

<https://github.com/mmccaff/PlacesToPostYourStartup>

An exhaustive list of places to post your website idea

<http://designrope.com/design/find-stock-photos-dont-suck/>

A great source of free stock photos

<http://unbounce.com/landing-page-examples/built-using-unbounce/beautiful-landing-page-design-examples/>

<http://www.formstack.com/the-anatomy-of-a-perfect-landing-page>

<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/landing-page-examples-list>

<http://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2014/03/05/landing-page-examples#>.

Examples of great landing pages

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Start-Small-Stay-Small-Developers-Launching-ebook/dp/B003YH9MMI>

Start Small, Stay Small by Rob Walling

<http://webappsucces.com/>

A Practical Guide To Web App Success by Dan Zambonini