

# 1,000 True Fans

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*This essay was written in 2008, when this now popular idea was embryonic and ragged. At the suggestion of author Tim Ferriss, I updated and rewrote the essay to appear in his new book, [Tools of Titans](#). In my eagerness I posted this updated version here recently, but have taken it down and will repost it to coincide with the December 6 publication of Tim's book. In the meantime the old version continues to dwell here. Look for the updated version in Tools of Titans or here in this space after Dec 6, 2016. — KK*

[Translations: [Chinese](#), [French](#), [German](#), [Hebrew](#), [Italian](#), [Japanese](#), [Portuguese](#), [Romanian](#), [Spanish](#)]

The long tail is famously good news for two classes of people; a few lucky aggregators, such as Amazon and Netflix, and 6 billion consumers. Of those two, I think consumers earn the greater reward from the wealth hidden in infinite niches.

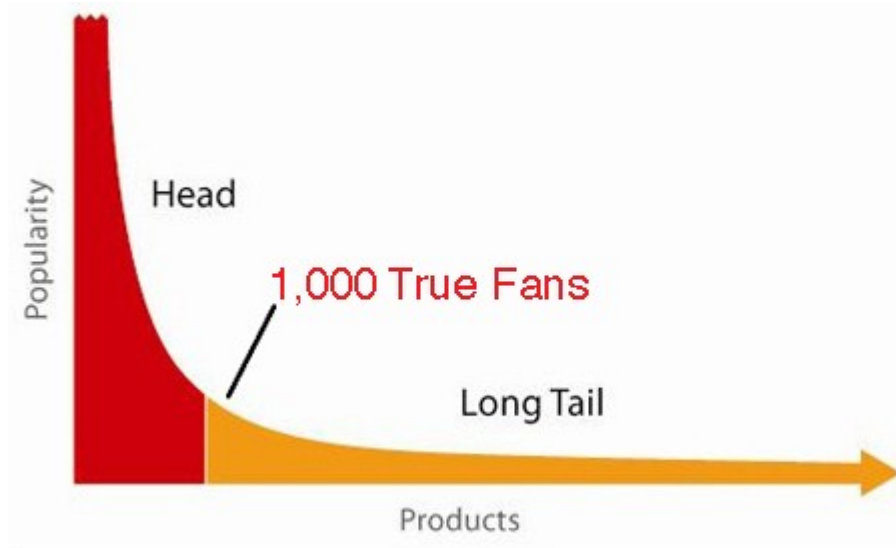
But the long tail is a decidedly mixed blessing for creators. Individual artists, producers, inventors and makers are overlooked in the equation. The long tail does not raise the sales of creators much, but it does add massive competition and endless downward pressure on prices. Unless artists become a large aggregator of other artist's works, the long tail offers no path out of the quiet doldrums of minuscule sales.

Other than aim for a blockbuster hit, what can an artist do to escape the long tail?

One solution is to find 1,000 True Fans. While some artists have discovered this path without calling it that, I think it is worth trying to formalize. The gist of 1,000 True Fans can be stated simply:

A creator, such as an artist, musician, photographer, craftsperson, performer, animator, designer, videomaker, or author – in other words, anyone producing works of art – needs to acquire only 1,000 True Fans to make a living.

A True Fan is defined as someone who will purchase anything and everything you produce. They will drive 200 miles to see you sing. They will buy the super deluxe re-issued hi-res box set of your stuff even though they have the low-res version. They have a Google Alert set for your name. They bookmark the eBay page where your out-of-print editions show up. They come to your openings. They have you sign their copies. They buy the t-shirt, and the mug, and the hat. They can't wait till you issue your next work. They are true fans.



To raise your sales out of the flatline of the long tail you need to connect with your True Fans directly. Another way to state this is, you need to convert a thousand Lesser Fans into a thousand True Fans.

Assume conservatively that your True Fans will each spend one day's wages per year in support of what you do. That "one-day-wage" is an average, because of course your truest fans will spend a lot more than that. Let's peg that *per diem* each True Fan spends at \$100 per year. If you have 1,000 fans that sums up to \$100,000 per year, which minus some modest expenses, is a living for most folks.

One thousand is a feasible number. You could count to 1,000. If you added one fan a day, it would take only three years. True Fanship is doable. Pleasing a True Fan is pleasurable, and invigorating. It rewards the artist to remain true, to focus on the unique aspects of their work, the qualities that True Fans appreciate.

The key challenge is that you have to maintain direct contact with your 1,000 True Fans. They are giving you their support directly. Maybe they come to your house concerts, or they are buying your DVDs from your website, or they order your prints from Pictopia. As much as possible you retain the full amount of their support. You also benefit from the direct feedback and love.

The technologies of connection and small-time manufacturing make this circle possible. Blogs and RSS feeds trickle out news, and upcoming appearances or new works. Web sites host galleries of your past work, archives of biographical information, and catalogs of paraphernalia. Diskmakers, Blurb, rapid prototyping shops, Myspace, Facebook, and the entire digital domain all conspire to make duplication and dissemination in small quantities fast, cheap and easy. You don't need a million fans to justify producing something new. A mere one thousand is sufficient.

This small circle of diehard fans, which can provide you with a living, is surrounded by concentric circles of Lesser Fans. These folks will not purchase everything you do, and may not seek out direct contact, but they will buy much of what you produce. The processes you develop to feed your True Fans will also nurture Lesser Fans. As you acquire new True Fans, you can also add many more Lesser Fans. If you keep going, you may indeed end up with

millions of fans and reach a hit. I don't know of any creator who is not interested in having a million fans.

But the point of this strategy is to say that you don't need a hit to survive. You don't need to aim for the short head of best-sellerdom to escape the long tail. There is a place in the middle, that is not very far away from the tail, where you can at least make a living. That mid-way haven is called 1,000 True Fans. It is an alternate destination for an artist to aim for.

Young artists starting out in this digitally mediated world have another path other than stardom, a path made possible by the very technology that creates the long tail. Instead of trying to reach the narrow and unlikely peaks of platinum hits, bestseller blockbusters, and celebrity status, they can aim for direct connection with 1,000 True Fans. It's a much saner destination to hope for. You make a living instead of a fortune. You are surrounded not by fad and fashionable infatuation, but by True Fans. And you are much more likely to actually arrive there.

A few caveats. This formula – one thousand direct True Fans — is crafted for one person, the solo artist. What happens in a duet, or quartet, or movie crew? Obviously, you'll need more fans. But the additional fans you'll need are in direct geometric proportion to the increase of your creative group. In other words, if you increase your group size by 33%, you need add only 33% more fans. This linear growth is in contrast to the exponential growth by which many things in the digital domain inflate. I would not be surprised to find that the value of your True Fans network follows the standard network effects rule, and increases as the square of the number of Fans. As your True Fans connect with each other, they will more readily increase their average spending on your works. So while increasing the numbers of artists involved in creation increases the number of True Fans needed, the increase does not explode, but rises gently and in proportion.

A more important caution: Not every artist is cut out, or willing, to be a nurturer of fans. Many musicians just want to play music, or photographers just want to shoot, or painters paint, and they temperamentally don't want to deal with fans, **especially** True Fans. For these creatives, they need a mediator, a manager, a handler, an agent, a galleryist — someone to manage their fans. Nonetheless, they can still aim for the same middle destination of 1,000 True Fans. They are just working in a duet.

Third distinction. Direct fans are best. The number of True Fans needed to make a living **indirectly** inflates fast, but not infinitely. Take blogging as an example. Because fan support for a blogger routes through advertising clicks (except in the occasional [tip-jar](#)), more fans are needed for a blogger to make a living. But while this moves the destination towards the left on the long tail curve, it is still far short of blockbuster territory. Same is true in book publishing. When you have corporations involved in taking the majority of the revenue for your work, then it takes many times more True Fans to support you. To the degree an author cultivates direct contact with his/her fans, the smaller the number needed.

Lastly, the actual number may vary depending on the media. Maybe it is 500 True Fans for a painter and 5,000 True Fans for a videomaker. The numbers must surely vary around the world. But in fact the actual number is not critical, because it cannot be determined except by attempting it. Once you are in that mode, the actual number will become evident. That will be the True Fan number that works for you. My formula may be off by an order of magnitude, but even so, its far less than a million.

I've been scouring the literature for any references to the True Fan number. [Suck.com](#) co-founder Carl Steadman had theory about microcelebrities. By his count, a microcelebrity was someone famous to 1,500 people. So those fifteen hundred would rave about you. As quoted by [Danny O'Brien](#), "One person in every town in Britain likes your dumb online comic. That's enough to keep you in beers (or T-shirt sales) all year."

Others call this microcelebrity support micro-patronage, or distributed patronage.

In 1999 John Kelsey and Bruce Schneier published a model for this in First Monday, an online journal. They called it the [Street Performer Protocol](#).

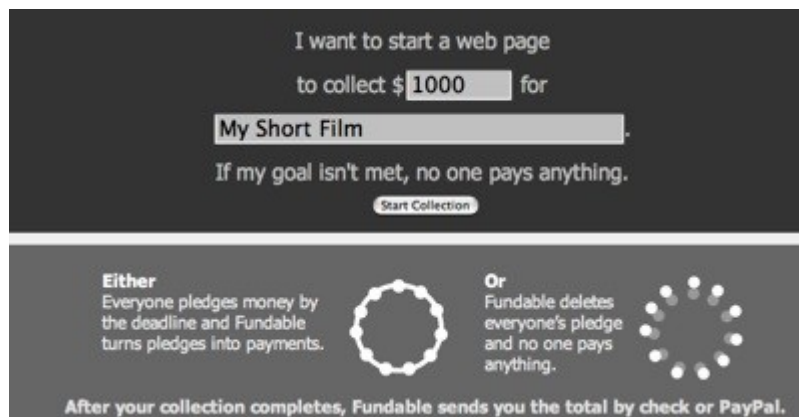
Using the logic of a street performer, the author goes directly to the readers before the book is published; perhaps even before the book is written. The author bypasses the publisher and makes a public statement on the order of: "When I get \$100,000 in donations, I will release the next novel in this series."

Readers can go to the author's Web site, see how much money has already been donated, and donate money to the cause of getting his novel out. Note that the author doesn't care who pays to get the next chapter out; nor does he care how many people read the book that didn't pay for it. He just cares that his \$100,000 pot gets filled. When it does, he publishes the next book. In this case "publish" simply means "make available," not "bind and distribute through bookstores." The book is made available, free of charge, to everyone: those who paid for it and those who did not.

In 2004 author [Lawrence Watt-Evans](#) used this model to publish his newest novel. He asked his True Fans to collectively pay \$100 per month. When he got \$100 he posted the next chapter of the novel. The entire book was published online for his True Fans, and then later in paper for all his fans. He is now writing a second novel this way. He gets by on an estimated 200 True Fans because he also publishes in the traditional manner — with advances from a publisher supported by thousands of Lesser Fans. Other authors who use fans to directly support their work are [Diane Duane](#), [Sharon Lee and Steve Miller](#), and [Don Sakers](#). Game designer [Greg Stolze](#) employed a similar True Fan model to launch [two pre-financed games](#). Fifty of his True Fans contributed seed money for his development costs.

The genius of the True Fan model is that the fans are able to move an artist away from the edges of the long tail to a degree larger than their numbers indicate. They can do this in three ways: by purchasing more per person, by spending directly so the creator keeps more per sale, and by enabling new models of support.

New models of support include micro-patronage. Another model is pre-financing the startup costs. Digital technology enables this fan support to take many shapes. [Fundable](#) is a web-based enterprise which allows anyone to raise a fixed amount of money for a project, while reassuring the backers the project will happen. Fundable withholds the money until the full amount is collected. They return the money if the minimum is not reached.



Here's an example from Fundable's site;

Amelia, a twenty-year-old classical soprano singer, pre-sold her first CD before entering a recording studio. "If I get \$400 in pre-orders, I will be able to afford the rest [of the studio costs]," she told potential contributors. Fundable's all-or-nothing model ensured that none of her customers would lose money if she fell short of her goal. Amelia sold over \$940 in albums.

A thousand dollars won't keep even a starving artist alive long, but with serious attention, a dedicated artist can do better with their True Fans. [Jill Sobule](#), a musician who has nurtured a sizable following over many years of touring and recording, is doing well relying on her True Fans. Recently she decided to go to her fans to finance the \$75,000 professional recording fees she needed for her next album. She has raised close to \$50,000 so far. By directly supporting her via their patronage, the fans gain intimacy with their artist. According to the [Associated Press](#):

Contributors can choose a level of pledges ranging from the \$10 "unpolished rock," which earns them a free digital download of her disc when it's made, to the \$10,000 "weapons-grade plutonium level," where she promises "you get to come and sing on my CD. Don't worry if you can't sing – we can fix that on our end." For a \$5,000 contribution, Sobule said she'll perform a concert in the donor's house. The lower levels are more popular, where donors can earn things like an advanced copy of the CD, a mention in the liner notes and a T-shirt identifying them as a "junior executive producer" of the CD.

The usual alternative to making a living based on True Fans is poverty. A study as recently as 1995 showed that the accepted price of being an artist was large. Sociologist [Ruth Towse](#) surveyed artists in Britain and determined that on average they earned below poverty subsistence levels.

I am suggesting there is a home for creatives in between poverty and stardom. Somewhere lower than stratospheric bestsellerdom, but higher than the obscurity of the long tail. I don't know the actual true number, but I think a dedicated artist could cultivate 1,000 True Fans, and by their direct support using new technology, make an honest living. I'd love to hear from anyone who might have settled on such a path.

**Updates:**

One artist who partially relies on True Fans responds with a disclosure of his finances:  
[The Reality of Depending on True Fans](#)

I report the results of my survey of artists supported by True Fans: [The Case Against 1000 True Fans](#)

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[Good Sense Liberal](#) • 4 years ago

Another benefit to the 1000 fan paradigm. You can be some places where you are recognized and adored, and at the same time go many more places, movies, restaurants, the beach without being mobbed or having morons hounding you for pictures

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**Richard Stanford** [Good Sense Liberal](#) • a year ago

It also doesn't take much work to go it. "500 fans" is an average lifestyle. "1000 fans" is pretty good. "2500 fans" is, relatively speaking, pretty amazing. Its much harder to make those economic shifts working using studio math.

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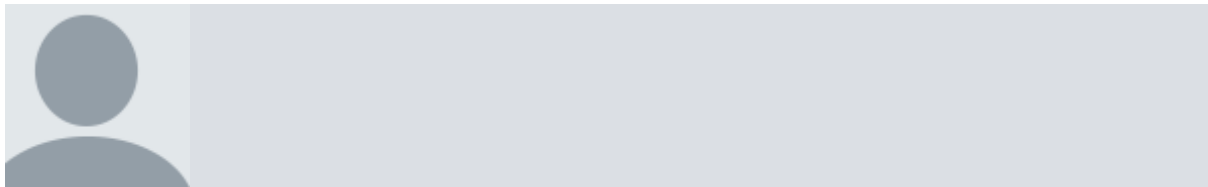
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**swift** • 3 years ago

A few years ago I learned an interesting business lesson. When I lived out west I knew a few artists who sold their work on a sort of an unofficial, unsponsored circuit of art and crafts fairs. The same core group of artists went from town to town.

A painter who made sort of western landscapes in oil was selling them for around \$200-\$300. He complained to my friend a metal-sculptor, that he couldn't make living because he could never sell more than 4 or 5 paintings per month. Then one day he started charging \$2000-\$3000 just to see what would happen.

Amazingly, he still sold 4 or 5 paintings per month. After the metal-sculptor and I watched him sell one, we went to ask him about his new business plan. We asked what was different about his new method. The paintings were exactly the same as before. But he said, "Different people buy them. The people that come looking for a \$200 painting walk on by. But the people looking for a \$2500 painting stop and look." This idea has stuck with me ever since.

I'm not sure how to apply it to my band unless I start charging \$100 for a download.

[www.thebloodshots.com](http://www.thebloodshots.com)

We think the 1,000 fan theory makes sense. We probably have 20 or 30 true fans and so, still need day jobs. But the number is growing and our goal is to keep writing and

releasing new original music. Spotify seems to be a valid model. Thanks for the thoughtful article and follow-ups.

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**[Ken Wallace](#)** [\\_swifty](#) • [3 years ago](#)

Excellent anecdote. Excellent.

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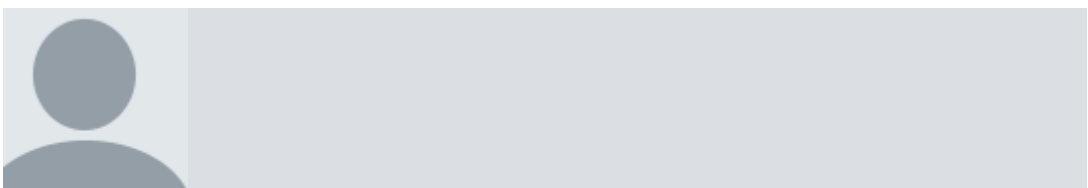


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**[Andrew Hausdorf](#)** [\\_swifty](#) • [2 years ago](#)

Look at what rapper Nipsey Hussle did with his \$100 mixtape.

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**Ember** [swift](#) • 7 months ago

I did something similar with my massage therapy practice, [www.FrederickMassageTherapy.co...](http://www.FrederickMassageTherapy.co...) After I discovered I was on the cheap-end of the scale, I went from being one of the lowest-priced in my town (\$80/hour) to the top-tier most expensive (\$110/hour). I still have the same number of weekly appointments I did before the change, and actually that number is growing. (I grandfathered my existing clients with the old prices for five months, so they had time to adjust and self-select if they were going to stick with me. Many did.) Twenty-five years ago I worked in an art gallery (I'm also an artist) and watched one of my favorite artists there raise her prices — just as described in the above comment — and she kept selling just as well. That was a big lesson which led me to try my price change.

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**priyadarshan** [swift](#) • 13 days ago

hey, i have a youtube channel and i posted my three cover songs there and i now have 27 subscribers i think i am stuck

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**Tommy Beringer** • 3 years ago

So what are some ways that you can build up those 1000 true fans?

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**Gene Tommy Beringer** • 2 years ago

- 1] network through friends and clubs.
- 2] hire a manager to do the promoting / recruiting for you.
- 3] pay for likes.
- 4] just kidding about number 3.

The post talks about using various online social media sites to find and locate people who would be interested in your works. Hang out at places where your style of work is being enjoyed or discussed. Promote your work in any and every way that you can. At work, in school, at church, in a synagogue, at temple, on subway, on the bus, at bars, the internet. If you're anti-social there's always option number two.

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[Terence](#) [Gene](#) • [a month ago](#)

hahaha! kidding about point 3!! :D

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[Gene](#) [Terence](#) • [a month ago](#)

Seriously tho, I'm not kidding paying for a few thousand likes will help your reach grow, and make it look like you have a good fan base when you're first starting off. Fake it till you make it. Even professional top ten labels and artists pay for at least 15-40% of their likes, especially for new artists, or bands.

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[Bas Freewheeler](#) [Gene](#) • [a month ago](#)

facebook recognizes paid likes and purges them. Money for nothing....

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[Gene](#) [Bas Freewheeler](#) • [a month ago](#)

About 10 percent get deleted. Buy 2K likes, keep 1.8k

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**Bas Freewheeler** [Gene](#) • [a month ago](#)

can you tell me more how FB selects the likes it deletes?  
Does that happen randomly, or do they source every like?

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**Gene** [Bas Freewheeler](#) • [a month ago](#)

I don't work for Facebook so I wouldn't know that kind of insider information. But I'm pretty sure they do it in waves. And they have a target algorithm that searches out profiles that were either recently made or only like artists or bands without actually posting something. As long as the provider of your likes is smart about his business, you won't lose out on any likes because of Facebook. If it does happen you can contact the provider and ask them for more likes because of the mass ban, they will help you out with more likes. Another great way is to do both, paid likes and advertising on Facebook. Then Facebook won't know which ones are natural referrals because of their program, or fake profiles. Doing both simultaneously will drastically increase your chances of success.

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Yup thats true :-)

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i hate fakers

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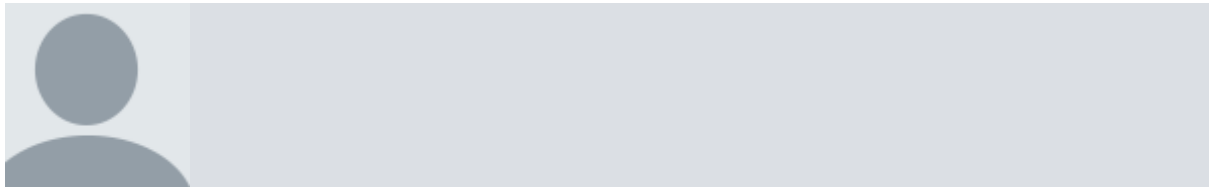


[Multicity Consulting](#) [Gene](#) • [a year ago](#)

Great Points!

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**Janetblair0000** • [4 years ago](#)

The key point to this article is that people wait around for the Harry Potter success to happen to them without building the critical mass first. The strength of building critical mass is that you make money off of it (albeit modestly) and if it ever does reach a tipping point...bingo!

- [15](#)
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**Richard Stanford** [Janetblair0000](#) • [a year ago](#)

Even better, if it doesn't reach a tipping point, you're still just fine. In exchange for that 1 in 10K not "making it big", the other 9,999 are happily self-supporting. That's not bad.

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**Alex Wood** • [5 years ago](#)

Wow - fantastic article. Very easy to understand model for bootstrappers and artists alike.

I'd go so far as to say that if you can achieve the first 10 and first 100 true fans - you're nearly there. It becomes a lot easier as your support network grows.

The time to cultivate these fans is where the real effort lies... Whilst honing/exhibiting your talent, the relentless (unnoticed) hrs spent on social networking, at meet-ups and performances can be exhausting... but worth it in the long run...

I'm sending this to a colleague to inspire

Thanks!

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**NewBizDad** • 4 years ago

I'm a small business owner in startup phases. This is an intriguing concept. When we launched our storefront I quickly realized that my personal "true fans", those that were in my life or staying on top of my facebook profile, translated into the most consistent traffic and marketing we could have. After spending a few hundred dollars on advertising, with very little to show for it, I was questioning which approach was best.

This post makes it clear. Time to build relationships. Without a proper base, there is no way to get your message across. You need aggregators, brand awareness among true followers to spread your message and support your ideal. This goes across all business types. And in this day and age of "uninspired" barraging mass advertising, what better way to keep your message personal. Thank you so much for this, this is the most influential article I have read since my business started!

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**Linda Sivertsen** • 5 years ago

Brilliant post. I've lived this model for years, as have several of my clients. Glad to finally have it explained in such a memorable way. I will share this with everyone I know! Thank you:)



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**Alex Mathews** • 3 years ago

This article was recommended by Tucker Max and Tim Ferris, so I gave a read. I like that it makes a massive dream (mega-celebrity) into a more manageable path to follow. I would love to hear community tales of how various people cultivated any single True Fan. It isn't easy, and I think it might be best to do what you love and hope someone comes along and loves it with you.

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**Alec McNayr** • 9 years ago

Kevin,

I don't know where to begin. Amazing insight.

As an artist, the dream is to “hit it big” or sell out. As you mentioned, “poverty” is the alternative to creating relationships with 1000 True Fans. Either financial poverty or worse: the poverty of a talent unfulfilled.

It is so clear to me now that “creating” (online or not) should be about relationship generating. I've long said that all comedy is niche — it's all an inside joke. You're either

on the inside (and get it) or are on the outside (are put off, don't like it, don't connect, etc.).

Moving towards developing financial relationships with 1000 is certainly not a difficult task, but a observable goal; thanks for the clarity.

I'm looking forward to reading this again, and to sharing it with everyone I know.

apm

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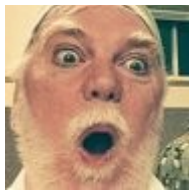
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**[Max Marbles](#)** • [2 years ago](#)

Kevin, your talk at the 2014 XOXO (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?...>tweaked my interest, especially how you brought together the 1,000 true fans and a modern entrepreneurial business model that met consumer demands based on highly specialized parameters. Have you written an article on this concept? I'd really like to read more.

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**Frank M** • 6 years ago

I find this article very inspiring and thought provoking. Thankyou for the insight.

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**VinceLin** • 4 years ago

We have about 1500 fans on PUA lingo via FB, and a lot more via the mailing list and comments. Overall we reached over 1500 comments in 3 years and now make a decent living

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**Brock Poling** • 7 years ago

WOW! This is a fantastic perspective.

As both an independant luthier (guitar builder) and a long time digital marketer I find this post to be an outstanding perspective with far reaching implications.

You have definitely won another loyal fan.

Brock.

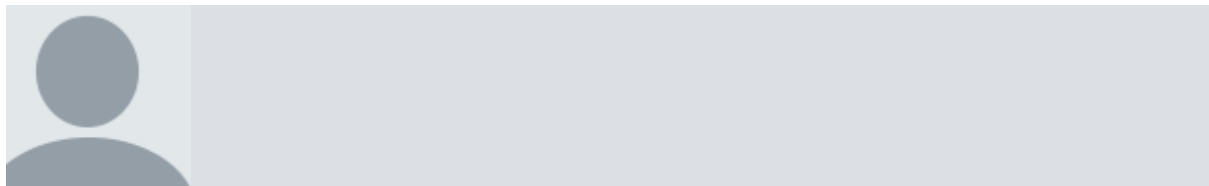
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**Francesca** • [4 years ago](#)

The Italian Link doesn't work. Would you like me to translate it?

Francesca.

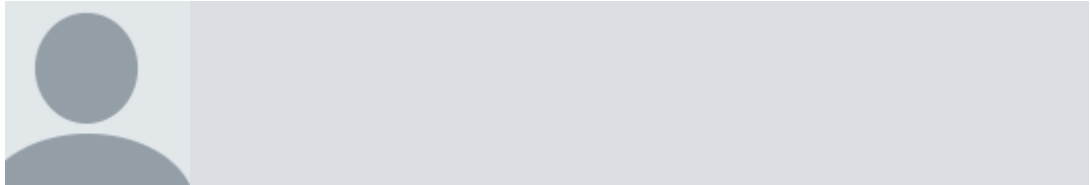


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**Helio** [Francesca](#) • 2 years ago

Damn you look good, - sry, but someone had to say it ^^

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**Anna** • 3 years ago

And the true fans will be, using the Seth Godin's expression "your mini marketing agencies." Great article!

[3](#)

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**Cristi** • 3 years ago

KK, you dont say anything about value. To have at least 1000 true fans, you have to care for them and for their needs. I think this is far more important than the actual number of fans you can have.

If you show 100 people you really care about them, they will really dont care spending \$1000 on you/year.

Anyways, it's a great article and the numbers that you mention are very achievable.

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**Bruce Hoag** • 3 years ago

Not sure where you got your numbers, but according to the World Internet Users Statistics (<http://www.internetworldstats....> there are 2.5 bn people connected to the Internet. So having 6 bn consumers is a bit of an exaggeration.

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<http://disq.us/p/r>

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**Observer** • Bruce Hoag • 2 years ago

Is it an exaggeration? Presumably there are a few offline consumers as well - about 6 billion+ world population. His general discussion would seem to apply beyond just internet users. Well, OK maybe quite a few people do not consume much beyond survival needs, and if that. But it seems a fair enough approximation.

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**Elizabeth Stone** • 4 years ago

This is an amazing overview of how to make it as a creative. It's probably in the top 5 articles I've ever read of all time on this subject. Thank you.

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http://disq.us/p/e





**Praverb** [Elizabeth Stone](#) • [4 years ago](#)

I agree Elizabeth. The article actually makes you think. I have read this at least five times and I learn something new every time. The key is taking the time to interact with your fans so they can become true fans. Lovely article!

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<http://disq.us/p/epsilon>

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**Kevin\_Kelly** [Mod](#) [Elizabeth Stone](#) • [4 years ago](#)

Thanks for the kind words, Elizabeth.

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<http://disq.us/p/epsilon>

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**Fari** [Elizabeth Stone](#) • [a year ago](#)

Hi Elizabeth, I really enjoy this article. After reading your comment, I wonder if you can share what are the other top 4 articles on this subject. Thanks a lot!

- [1](#)
- [Reply](#)
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<http://disq.us/p/z>



**Frederic Alden** [Fari](#) • [a year ago](#)

Hi,  
Fari, Did Elizabeth Stonr get back to you about the other 4 articles?

- [Reply](#)
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<http://disq.us/p/1>



**Quangdotca** • [3 years ago](#)

If  
1 days wage is \$100 on average...the average person is making  
\$25,000/year (250 working days/year). Why is it the artist gets to make  
\$100,000/year? I'd be pissed to know im supporting the artist who is  
making 4x more then i do...likely paying fewer taxes and writing off  
expenses.

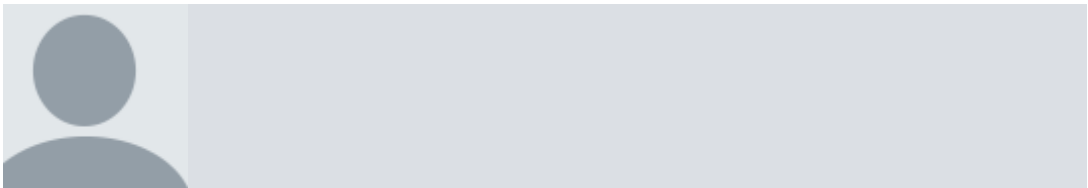
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**GetReal** [Quangdotca](#) • [2 years ago](#)

If you don't value the artist's work to be worth \$100, don't pay.

If you do think the art is worth \$100 to you, pay, and let the artist be successful.

Why do you want them to be an under achieve like yourself?

- [9](#)
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<http://disq.us/p/s>



**Bart Hopkins** • [2 years ago](#)

I truly appreciate the sentiment behind this, but I'm thinking that for someone to buy \$100 of your creations each year, it might be difficult. Example ... an author would need to write 25 x \$4.00 books each year for a person to be able to spend \$100 on them EVERY year.

An author writing 3 new books per year, and profiting \$3 per book, would gain \$9,000 per year from their 1000 fans. That's not enough to make a living.

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<http://disq.us/p/c>



**[Ken Wallace](#)** [Bart Hopkins](#) • [2 years ago](#)

You're correct, this is a foundational concept, but it's not a magic bullet.

With a little creativity, an author can find ways to add more value than just offering books for sale.

Here's just one example: a savvy author could offer an online writing workshop to their audience.

Just think, a two-hour workshop, followed by a Q&A session, could easily sell for \$99/seat (often more). Record that workshop and bundle that recording with one (or more) of the books, and you've got yet another higher-value product to sell.

Look at the site for Nathan Barry's book "Authority" for a quick peek at how this might look. While his books are non-fiction, with a little creativity this can work for fiction writers as well.

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**Bart Hopkins** [Ken Wallace](#) • [a year ago](#)

I agree that this concept is nice, and it does have points of value. The article is a worthwhile read.

I think, however, that it's going to be the very rare author who can launch a successful online writing workshop. Not because they won't try or aren't smart enough, but because there are a flood of authors out there now. Thousands, maybe tens of thousands. Can there be 10,000 successful online writing workshops in existence? Probably not. There just aren't enough buyers.

The argument is then that each person find their own creative outlet. And no matter what the invention, some will be successful, others will not, and the market will flood easily as too many try it.

Perhaps simply being a good writer, and a prolific writer, are good enough for most. I have some mild success and that's all I do, but of course, I have a day job that (unfortunately) takes priority, ha ha.

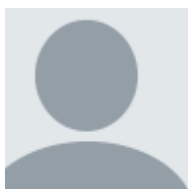
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**Vivian** [Bart Hopkins](#) • [4 months ago](#)

This is exactly what I was thinking. An author would need one true fan to spend \$10 per month, which translates into two \$5 books.

Thankfully, there's another way of looking at it. If an author's 1,000 true fans purchase a title at \$5 over the week of its release, making the author 143 sales

per day, retailers (especially the online ones) would probably notice that book and help promote it. And more visibility = sales to "untrue" fans.

Also, 143 sales, at a 70% royalty, would make the author about \$500 a day. Not great, but not bad either.

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  - [Bart Hopkins](#) [Vivian](#) • [4 months ago](#)
  - True that, Vivian.
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[julieannabishop](#) [Bart Hopkins](#) • [2 years ago](#)

Depending on the type of author, you can also build products from your work-speaking events, retreats, online offerings, coaching programs, inspiring card decks, etc to sell to your 1,000 readers...if you are creative enough to write, you are creative to build other offerings and add value to your fan's lives.

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**Bart Hopkins** [\\_julieannabishop](#) • [a year ago](#)

Hello. I agree these ideas will work for some, but the market isn't big enough for everyone to have successful retreats, etc. I think many authors will do well enough simply writing.

Not that people shouldn't keep trying or doing whatever makes them happy, and I doubt anyone would argue against bringing value to your fan's lives.

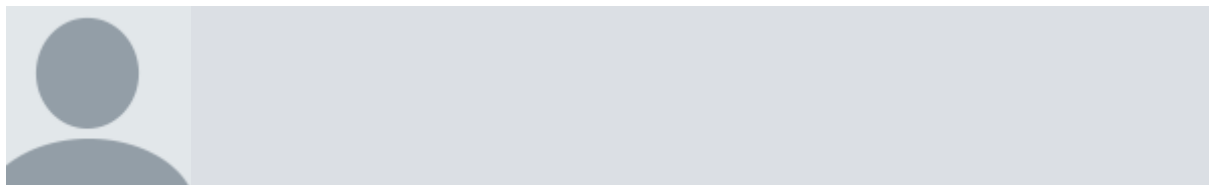
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**Jonathan Smith** • [3 years ago](#)

Great insight! Amazing this was written in 2008. Just wanted to check it out after reading about it from the Tim Ferriss book, The 4-Hour Chef. He's a guru in accelerated learning, and he practically said, this article is all you need to read to learn about marketing. Well, you may not be a master marketer from one reading, but several reading and studying of this article would help you understand the essence of marketing

without spending years and thousands of dollars for a marketing degree. The bottom line, learning the principle of 1000 true fans will let you earn a lifestyle. The degree might get you a job, might. This is not just for artists and authors, but great for entrepreneurs too; we are creating business after all...

<http://www.pdaffiliates.com>

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- **Spence Cater** • 4 years ago

Great article. I found this site via Tim Ferriss's keynote from 2009 in Paris which can be viewed here <http://www.fourhourworkweek.co...>

I have heard about this theory before from a various people, including Tim and after reading the full version here I was reminded that Thurston Moore from Sonic Youth said something very similar years ago in an interview. He was asked about the bands longevity and how it was achieved/maintained, his response was to 'never have a hit!' Just satisfy your core fans and don't sell out, then you can keep on chugging along. It seems the internet has just provided the vehicle to make this process a lot quicker, less expensive and enabled more creative power and control.

Thanks for sharing this

I am inspired today to please my one fan I have at the moment!

[www.spencecaterphotography.com](http://www.spencecaterphotography.com)

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**Wallace Malama** • 6 years ago

it is a lovely idea indeed. if it was discovered earlier, people who have failed to finish a project because of lack of money, would have been richer. As a joker, comedian and



writer, i would love to a big audience , like 1,000 true fans, to entertain. i am 100 percent for the idea

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**Joshua Black | The Underdog Mi** • [7 years ago](#)

This is such a powerful article. This should be required reading for every small business owner that is trying to make their way in this big, nasty world of commerce.

It's all about adding one person at a time to the conversation and then eventually you build your brand. There is no instant magic success. You have to build your small community BEFORE you can try and conquer a larger one.

-Joshua Black

The Underdog Millionaire

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**John** • 7 years ago

Fascinating article

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<http://disq.us/p/2>



**richard** • 3 years ago

This is an awesome article! As an online entrepreneur [www.richardandnamaste.com](http://www.richardandnamaste.com) we realize that just like theres no substitute for quality content, there also are no barriers to being a success if you're willing to do the necessary things, which most people spend a lot of time and energy trying to avoid doing!

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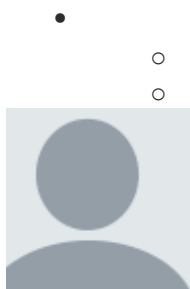


**TheFatRat** • 8 days ago

Great essay! I've been using exactly this model in the past two years as a music producer. It went so well that even Billboard wrote about it. Looking forward to read Tools Of Titans.

<http://www.billboard.com/artic...>

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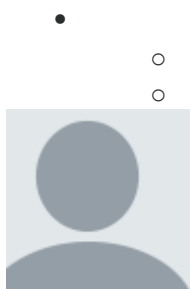


**[Sam Shepherd](#)** • [10 days ago](#)

Are the ways of gaining "1,000 true fans" skewed? I mean, some people are just in the right place at the right time and they could get 2,000+ followers on social media. And even then those specific followers could be just following for absolutely no reason, other than they think the person they're following is cute or famous from their 5 minutes. Are these people even considered "true" fans?

What really bothers me about this particular situation is that it's so unfair to artists out there who are actually trying to get people's attention and make a name for themselves, or create their own fanbase.

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**sivanesan M** • 19 days ago

Thank you for your nice post. It is really Excellent . I'm working in Brave Technologies Private Limited. [ERP Software company in chennai](#) For more details Call: +044 4283 5587.

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**Surath Giri** • 23 days ago

I really liked the article. Very useful for the creative people in this connected age. Therefore, I have translated the article into Nepali language, the official language of Nepal and with around 30 million speakers across the world.

<http://www.surathgiri.com/2016...>

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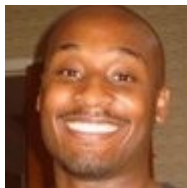
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**The Japan Guy** • 3 months ago

This article is timeless! It's so interesting to see how tech has changed since this was published. Despite the improvements in tech, and the accompanying "web noise" that

has come with more and more social media platforms, and the like...this concept is as true now, in 2016, as it ever was. Finding 1000 true fans has been something I've really been struggling with (just being honest). But I think it lies more in me not fully realizing that "thing" that I can do, that people would even become raving fans of. Struggles aside, I genuinely believe in your message and I appreciate you sharing it.

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**[ForumKal. Com](#)** • 3 months ago

[seslikal](#) thank you

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**[Searnold Shár- Nühld](#)** • 3 months ago

Patreon is a great "new" platform to help raise consistent money with True Fans. You can see an example (it's mine, you can use me as an example) here:

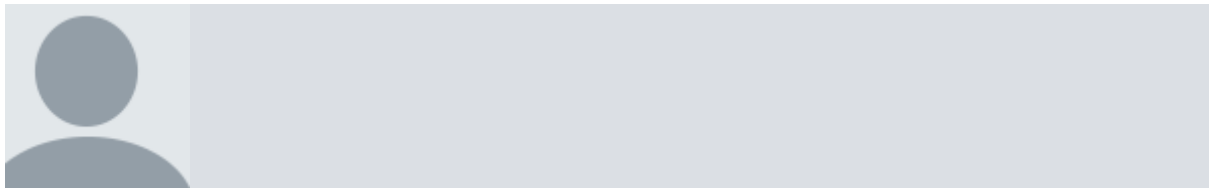
<http://www.Patreon.com/Comple...>

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**Rob** • [3 months ago](#)

Really great insights. I just want to add to this that it seems unlikely to me that anyone getting to 1000 true fans would stay there. Whatever process got you there, would surely continue. So it might be helpful to think of this as continuum, that it to say, 1000 true fans is your initial goal but the journey continues from there.

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**[ForumKal. Com](#)** • [3 months ago](#)

[seslikal](#) thanks

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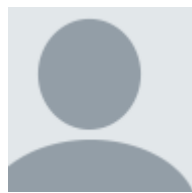


**ForumKal. Com** • 3 months ago  
[seslidunya](#) Superr tşk...

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**Josh MacDonald** • 4 months ago

Great article. I like the concept, but there was no real mention of costs, but I suppose costs are low in the art and music world. Maybe renting a venue and travelling around the country is the only cost.

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**[Video Kolix](#)** • 4 months ago

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**[Jordan Suber](#)** • 5 months ago

This was an amazing read, very enlightening. Definitely have to get A-B before jumping to A-Z . There most certainty needs to be more articles like this one! We need more people that talk about the journey to huge size success (if that is what your goal is) the thing done behind closed doors when know one sees if what people are celebrated for. Thank you for constructing such inspiring wiring, I am definitely sharing this!

Sincerely

Jordan suber

We are all in this together but it all starts with you. You are creating history.

[Weindigo.com](#)

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**cilesesli** • 7 months ago

One of the few How-To articles I've bookmarked in a long time. I sometimes worry about quantity and forget that 100 loyal > 1000 simply breathing.. [sesli sohbet] <http://www.cilesesli.com>

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**sesliwhat** • 7 months ago

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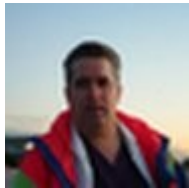


**ForumKal. Com** • 8 months ago

[sesli chat](#) Wow thank you

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**[Nurse Jon](#)** • 8 months ago

Awesome article. I used to make a living as an artist. I was not in the business of creating art, rather, I was in the business of collecting art collectors....namely collectors of my art. Several of my collectors bought several pieces of my works. They would turn their friends on to me who would buy one or two. I left and then made a come back and did well again, adding the Clayton Christensen market disruption theory to the process, namely competing with non-consumption. People had a choice of my art or nothing, given the sizes of works I did. I did not need 1000 fans. My prices were \$150 - \$6000 and a once in a lifetime \$52K. I had less than 100 fans.

Now, trying to break into book writing is proving to be much more work. Getting 1000 fans will not of its self pay the bills on a \$2.99 to 3:99 book that I make 70% of. However, if I find 1000 businesses to buy a case (36 books) of my book at 75% off retail (\$4 of which \$3 is mine) for their employees or for marketing their businesses, then I can still be in the \$100K club. The book, 'Dying to Be There' is on Hospice. There are 3000 hospice agencies in the US. It is still going to be a lot of work but....I'm going to give it a try.

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**Stuart** • 8 months ago

I love this article hits the nail on the head

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8 • [خرید خانه در ترکیه](#) months ago

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**Seslichat** • 8 months ago

Thank you for another informative site. Where else could I get that type of information written in such a perfect way? I have a project that I am just now working on, and I have been on the look

[Sesli Chat](#)

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**alico** • 10 months ago  
[2016 filmleri](#) thank you my admin is four you she

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**john burnett** • 10 months ago

"the additional fans you'll need are in direct geometric proportion to the increase of your creative group." —That statement was really alarming!

But then you said, "In other words, if you increase your group size by 33%, you need add only 33% more fans".

Ah! —Not to be nerdy, but that's an *\*arithmetic\** proportion, not a *\*geometric\** one, and a *\*lot\** less scary.

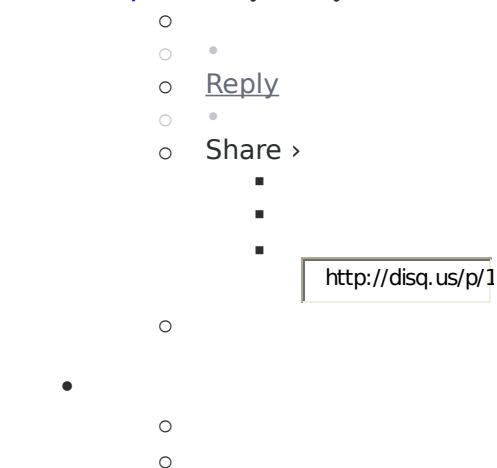
Geometric proportions are like Al Gore's famous global warming chart— starts slow but very quickly curves up toward infinity!

No, you don't need an infinite number of true fans. You just need a thousand, times however many of "you" there are. So: four of you, you need 4000.

And that's your point.



[ForumKal. Com](#) • [10 months ago](#)  
[sex shop](#) Thank you my admin :)





**ForumKal. Com** • a year ago

[seslises](#) Thank you emekler harika sizleri seviyorum

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**Burns the Fire** • a year ago

This new paradigm for artists and happy human beings is an inspiration. Thank you!

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**ehliyet sınav soruları çöz** • a year ago

Ücretsiz ve online olarak [ehliyet sınav soruları çöz](#) ,kolay ve basit sistemi ile kendinizi ehliyet sınav soruları ile online ehliyet sınavı testlerini çözerek sınavlara daha iyi hazırlanabilirsiniz.Online olarak ehliyet sorularına ulaşabilir ve çıkan soruları kontrol edebilirsiniz.

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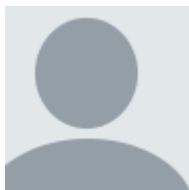
**[Craig Desmarais](#)** • [a year ago](#)

One of the best posts on audience building on the entire web.

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**[ForumKal. Com](#)** • [a year ago](#)

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[Tim Dini](#) • a year ago

I revisit this post often, and share it whenever I do. It's as pertinent today as it was when it was written, perhaps even more pertinent.

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[seslisoho.com](#) • a year ago

seviyeli [sesli sohbet](#) ortamı ,sesli chat ve kameralı sohbet

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[Josh Waggoner](#) • a year ago

So what do you think are some possible 'first steps' to cultivating your 1,000?

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[web developer](#) • a year ago

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[web developer](#) • a year ago

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[web developer](#) • a year ago

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[web developer](#) • a year ago

Arkadaşlık kurmak isteyenlerin en sevdiği sesli sohbet sitelerinden birisinde sizlerce özgürce sohbet etmek ve ücretsiz görev almak istermisiniz.

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**Sesli Chat** • a year ago  
<http://www.seslichatmi.com>

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**Anita Vroonland** • a year ago

Great article. Thanks. I shared it on my blog too.

Thanks,

- Anita Vroonland

The [www.TribalRainmakersClub.com](http://www.TribalRainmakersClub.com) showers & empowers full  
#FunFreedomFulfillment

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**seslisohbet** • a year ago

[www.sesli100.com](http://www.sesli100.com) seslisohbet

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**Sesli Chat** • a year ago

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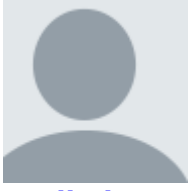
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**Sesli Chat** • a year ago

Uygulama İçSin Teşekkürler

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**seslisoho.com** • a year ago

Hergün yeni dostluklara merhaba diyebileceğiniz,elit ortamda [sesli sohbet](#)odalarımızda keyifli vakit geçirebilirsiniz

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• **seslisoho.com** • a year ago

seviyeli ve dürüst arkadaşlık ortamı içerisinde,kameralı ve görüntülü sıcak bir ortamda [SesliSohbet](#)

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**1Hasan Sahin** • a year ago

Sesli sohbet denince akla gelen ilk ve tek sitede sizlerde yerinizi alın.

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**SonSuz Askim** • a year ago

**Seslinefes** sohbet odalarımız açılmıştır, sohbet odalarımıza bağlanmak için sitemize giriş yapabilirsiniz.

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**Buket** • a year ago

**SesliSohbet** İster kameralı ister sesli isterseniz görüntülü sohbet edin!

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**Buket** • [a year ago](#)  
[SesliChat](#) Sosyal platfrom harika!

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**ForumKal. Com** • [a year ago](#)  
[Seslikal](#) Harika kardesim tşk

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**HappenInn** • a year ago

Could the tools for micro patronage as Dropcoin help in this new projects? We are on a research for this. All the help will be a big present for us. Thank you!

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**Sesimdeyim .Com** • a year ago

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<http://disq.us/p/z>

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**seslisohbet** [Sesimdeyim .Com](#) • a year ago

Merhaba Seslisohbet kullanıcısı :D <http://www.sesli100.com>



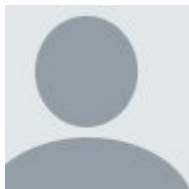
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- http://disq.us/p/1



[RonOrr.com](#) • a year ago

This concept along with Seth Godin's Tribes is really turning out to be true, as relationships are more diversified and a true fan has more value, plus everyone has a social circle on social media at the touch of a button, plus on new platforms like [periscope.tv](#) you can have your true fans invite other people and it gains traction and compounds as seen in real time. In fact, many who share often need to be a pretty good fan, and it's often needed as a minimum to even have it go exponential.

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[javad](#) • a year ago

تور ارمنستان <http://abineseir.com/>

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**Capitanul Hook** • a year ago

Thanks for this article. Is super!

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**seslichat** • a year ago

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**seslichat** • [a year ago](#)

Basarılı buldum makalenizi tebrikler

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**DeTravius Bethea** • [a year ago](#)

Good piece...going to check back for comments

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**Dreamkeepers** • [a year ago](#)

Excellent article- I think you're defining the future of feasible creative endeavor.

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[Sesimdeyim. Com](#) • a year ago  
[seslichat](#) Thank you my admin

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[Mete Polat](#) • 2 years ago  
[sesli sohbet](#) thank you admin

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**Ak Sayfam** • 2 years ago

**Sesliduy** Thank you

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**Johnny** • 2 years ago

I think i've accidently stumbled upon having 1,000 true fans...or at least a few hundred. People kept mention it, so it was about fine I read this article and I'm glad I did!

Combined with my books on amazon, my podcast Travel Like a Boss and my blog [www.johnnyfd.com](http://www.johnnyfd.com) - somehow people started following me, buying my stuff and \$100 a day has somehow came about from it.

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**Scott A Dennison** • 2 years ago

I've now read this article 3 times over a period of years and each time, I'm compelled to share it with other, like-minded entrepreneurs. Building an audience and a relationship with them is the key to success in a noisy marketplace of peddlers. Whether that audience is 1000, 10,000 or only a few hundred is not the issue - the relationship is the important part.

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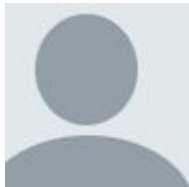
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**Firat Biradli** • 2 years ago

[Sesli Sohbet](#) Thank You admin

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**Guest** • 2 years ago

[url=<http://www.seslisevdali.com>]Sesli Sohbet[/url] Thank You Admin

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**Guest** • 2 years ago

[url=<http://www.seslisevdali.com>]Sesli Sohbet[/url] Thank You Admin

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**Hasan Sahin** • 2 years ago

**sesli sohbet** sesli ve görüntülü arkadaşlık hizmetleri [seslisohbet](#)

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**alexrichard** • 2 years ago

Thanks, I've picked up some great tips from this article! [Montreal Movers](#)

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**agentJay** • 2 years ago

I'd like to believe the theory. But do you really believe that 100k a year is enough to sustain an artist's living expenses, and this is key here, business expenses. I think it's reasonable to expect that a musician/artist has to spend to promote their work, travel, equipment/software, etc. I'm not really sure what these expenses would be. But I do think that this wasn't a consideration when KK came up with the theory.

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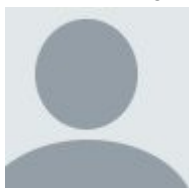
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**shadii** • 2 years ago

This post is great. Thank you for your helpful information. [خرید ملک در ترکیه](#)

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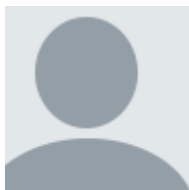
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[Sesimdeyim.Com](#) • 2 years ago

[Sesli Sohbet](#) Tşkler

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[Sherwin Sullivan Tjia](#) • 2 years ago

I hate to nitpick, and sorry if this has been discussed elsewhere, but in your opening paragraphs, you say, "Let's peg that per diem each True Fan spends at \$100 per year. If you have 1,000 fans that sums up to \$100,000 per year, which minus some modest expenses, is a living for most folks."

In my math, 1000 x 100 isn't a hundred thousand but ten thousand dollars.

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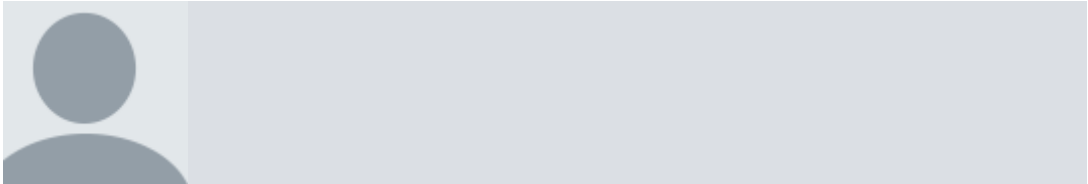
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**Elliot Bresson** [Sherwin Sullivan Tjia](#) • 2 years ago

Your math is wrong. A neat trick I learned in elementary school, combine the zeros together and put the 1 in front of them (There's 5 zeros).

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<http://disq.us/p/uc>

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**Sherwin Sullivan Tjia** [Elliot Bresson](#) • 2 years ago

Oh shit. You're right. Sorry. My bad math has always haunted me. Apologies.

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Firat Biradli • 2 years ago

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**[ApathyNihilism](#)** • [2 years ago](#)

Sounds nice...but: How do you find/create the 1000 "True Fans"? All that is given as modus operandi is that one must "connect with your True Fans directly". How can one possibly take the time to connect with 1000 individuals directly and have any time left for actually creating art?

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**[Excelanto](#)** • [2 years ago](#)

Thanks for your valuable posting. I have collect more than information from your website. It's really wonderful blog. please added more than tips. i'm working in [content management In Chennai](#). Here providing very low price CMS , responsive webdesign and ERP. you have any more than information kindly make me call this number 044-42127512 or send your mail [info@excelanto.com](mailto:info@excelanto.com).

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**[John Lilly](#)** • 2 years ago

We're learning it's much more efficient to run any music campaign (album launch, tour) like a presidential campaign. Connect directly with your supporters; ask them to volunteer and donate. The old days of trying to get a record label to give you a high-interest loan for production and marketing expenses are over.

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**[Etienne Savard](#)** • 2 years ago

Inspiring. I had to try myself : <http://agiledroid.com>

I have already some true fans (may be around 50) and it's invigorating. They motive me to meet their expectations

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**Herfinnur** • 2 years ago

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**David Germanico** • 2 years ago

The spanish translation linked to here has been down for a while, and since I reference to this post a lot, I made a fresh new one. Share if you please, please.

<http://www.davidgermanico.com/...>

¡Aquí la traducción al español!

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**Jiří Růžek** • 2 years ago

great article



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**Kapitalust** • 2 years ago

Fascinating way to approach goals for creators in an online medium. I will make sure to remember to have this type of realistic goal in mind on my own blogging journey.



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**Zeek Fit Freak** • 2 years ago

This is why real, honest, and raw content is very important. BE YOURSELF, your 1k fans will flock quicker than you think! Lift Life guys!



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**[Paul Ricken](#)** • [2 years ago](#)

I will apply this, right now. It will be a adventurous journey. But I will persist.

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**[Devani Anjali Alderson](#)** • [2 years ago](#)

One of the best posts.

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**Sesli Chat** • 2 years ago

Merci de partager belle, Thank you for sharing beautiful, Vielen Dank [Sesli Chat](#) [Sesli Sohbet](#) [ne-nerede](#) [speakychat](#) [Seslidunya.com](#) [Sesliduy.com](#) [ne neredede](#)

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**Guest** • 2 years ago

Excellent idea. I learned the same thing about 1,000 true fans from producing my webcomic:

[www.motmaitre.tumblr.com](http://www.motmaitre.tumblr.com)

It's a niche comic that appeals to a certain type of well-educated, sophisticated reader. Not easy to find, but those who like it absolutely love it. That small community of passionate readers is why I continue producing the comic- for them.

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**Gisela Beckermann** • 2 years ago

Just reading this article. Giving true value to your fans is of most importance. Better to be a big fish in a small pond than to be a big fish in a huge pond I guess. Makes sense. Great article. Thank you.

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**Levi Andersen** • 2 years ago

Then the task is to stay focused on keeping your True Fanbase healthy and active. I have been a True Fan for a few bands and it works. But then they stop producing and there's nothing left for me to buy.....

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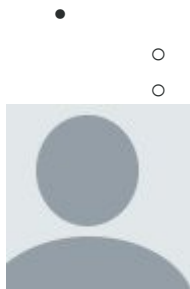
• **Ada Chiu** • 3 years ago

This is definitely an eye-opening article. I have a background in industrial design, and what I've learned in the past is the importance of emotionally connecting with the users. I find that it relates to this 1000 true fans topic because it's ultimately about interacting deeply with the end users or "fans" and making sure they are happy with the product/service that you're providing. In the end, these users/fans will turn into "true fans."

The great thing about "true fans" is that they will be willing to share your work with everyone else. This would help attract an even bigger audience!

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**Mike** • 3 years ago

Great article. Really makes you think about how easy it is to achieve this goal of 1000 true fans and that if you concentrate your efforts on not trying to please the masses and just work on building a dedicated following keeping those fans that are religious followers happy you can live comfortably.

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**Another Substance** • 3 years ago

Old post, but excellent. Still relevant I believe... it's really changed my entire way of thinking about things.

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http://disq.us/p/k



**@ikeepit3000** • 3 years ago

Truly a great article, I've read it at least 4 times already, great work

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http://disq.us/p/j



**Detlev** • 3 years ago

... to find your numbers ... <http://mytimevalue.com>

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http://disq.us/p/i



**Rahmat Mulyadi** • 3 years ago

really inspiring article, very worth to read

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**Ted Fauster** • 3 years ago

Nice article. As an emerging writer of science fantasy adventure, I'm just beginning to build a fan base. I am lucky to have connected with some very kind people who are genuinely interested in my writing. They ask for more and cheer me on. That number is small but growing each day. It's a good, steady pace. Of course, my hope is to reach as many new readers as possible, but this article shows that there actually is light at the end of the tunnel, and I just may be able to do more than pay for some Thai food with my book earnings. Fingers crossed.- Ted Fauster

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**gamerjoe** • 3 years ago

Look at the success of many kickstarters that go above and beyond the target number based on their fanbase. Zombicide went over their goal amount by a ton, however the downside is they werent expecting to go that high so now they aee struggling to get caught up to the fans.

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**ontheregimen** • 3 years ago

I love coming back to this article - super motivating.

Mike

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<http://disq.us/p/f>

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**Craig Dewe** • 4 years ago

I love having it broken down like this. Whenever I start a new project I work out the product price/profit margin and then work it back to a similar formula. Being able to see what you'll make with 10, 50, 100 and 1000 fans makes it seem a lot more achievable.

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**Kathy Kawalec** • 4 years ago

Thanks for this inspiring article. 1,000 True Fans sounds like a lot...but if we nurture one fan at a time...with a true, heart-centered desire to add something special to their life...we will get there. One true fan at a time.

Thank you!

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**sharonthoms** • 4 years ago



Great concept proving the importance of looking after your true fans. Depending on how true a fan, the fan is, could one day see a group of just fans as large as a million, enough in any ones terms I'm sure, and all thanks to the power of the 1000 true fans

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**[Branch Whitney](#)** • [4 years ago](#)

Thanks. Really opened up my eyes and I see new possibilities.

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**[AnnexCore](#)** • [4 years ago](#)

Years old, but still relevant to this day! Kevin Kelly great work on this article, we at AnnexCore share this with a lot of our customers!

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○ [Reply](#)

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**[Jim Ulle](#)** • 4 years ago

Great article. Thanks for sharing. I like the reference to fundable since I am looking at launching a crowd sourced project through kickstarter or a similar service.

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**[Ron Orr](#)** • 4 years ago

I keep coming back to this concept and believe in it more every day as the long-tail is here to stay.

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**Amy Hagerup** • 4 years ago

This is really good. Aiming toward 1000 true fans is a great idea. It actually is very freeing because it lets each person truly be themselves and not try to please or attract the masses - just the 100 which can then progress to the 1000. I love this.

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**Freedom Jackson** • 4 years ago

Very cool

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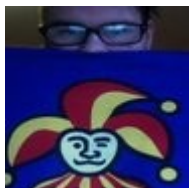
<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**Niklas J. Blixt** • 4 years ago

Really great post! Lots of great ideas how to fund different projects and such. And I really liked the economic side of it in the beginning, I've never thought of it that way. Great stuff!

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<http://disq.us/p/c>

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**[Zen Samantha](#)** • 4 years ago

Thank you for this very helpful & informative post! I'm on my way to my 1,000 True Fans.

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**[Hiro.Miyasaka](#)** • 4 years ago

Great & insightful pierce. Japanese author Haruki Murakami has learnt this kind of thinking from his experience and applied his life of writing, IIRR.

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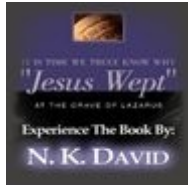
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**N.K. David** • [4 years ago](#)

We can not doubt the strength of true fans. I think every entertainer needs fans even preachers do. Some people claim that Michael Jackson sold more records following his death but in reality that shows the love and strength of fans. However, the first task is to win the heart of people because they are those that will become the fans.

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**Tony Jones** • [4 years ago](#)

The dynamics seem feasible and applicable, well anything's worth attempting where structure and macro-economics are visible.

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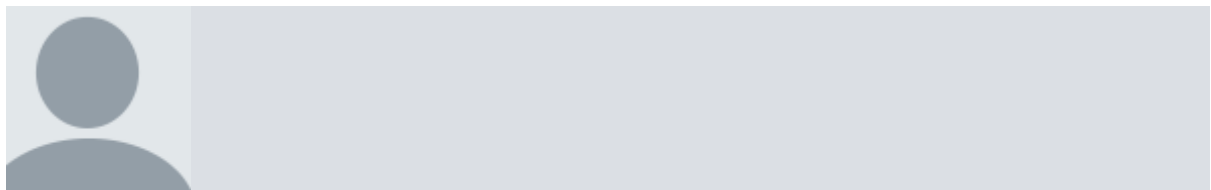


**Seslichat** [Tony Jones](#) • [a year ago](#)

[Seslidünya](#)

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<http://disq.us/p/1>



**Vessymink** • [4 years ago](#)

Thank you so much to you the writers of this article and to my good friend Jordi Ortega for sharing it with me!!

I will take your good advice and get going!!!

<http://www.myspace.com/vessymi...>

<http://www.youtube.com/vessymi...>

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<http://disq.us/p/9>



**Shagmon** • 4 years ago

Great article, but there's a flaw - he says your fan base must rise at a rate directly proportional to the size of the group - that is, adding a 3rd person means you only have to grow 33%. But what that ultimately does is lead to the total pie being divided by three as opposed to 1. So the profits are now split 3 ways. In order to maintain your salary, each member has to contribute their own 1000 fans to maintain the goal of \$100,000 per person. Make sense?

I still think this is a great article, I just thought I'd throw this out there.

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<http://disq.us/p/9>

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**Giovanni** • 4 years ago

The italian link is wrong

Here the right one

<http://www.internazionale.it/u...>

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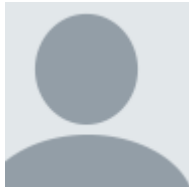
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**μετακομισεις** • 5 years ago

Nowadays 1000 fans i think are not enough. Unfortunately people relate number of fans with service quality. They have the need to belong in a big team. It's in their nature. 1000 true fans may be enough but you 'll need a mask of much more in your front end to have a successful business

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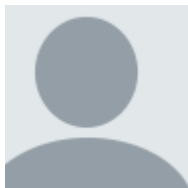
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**Eliza** [μετακομισεις](#) • 4 years ago

Get rid of the guessing - find out how many you actually need here

[www.thefanformula.com/the-form...](http://www.thefanformula.com/the-form...)

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**v&a nea-news** • 5 years ago

Nice point of view and good article! Having True fans is really valuable if you belong to the state of art, or have an expensive product or paid membership. If fans really appreciate your work or if they anticipate the launch of a project 1000 are maybe enough and a good base to continue for more. On the other hand, online businesses such as blogs, news portals, e-commerce and deal sites need more fans to roll

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<http://disq.us/p/ε>

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**ανεκδοτα** • 5 years ago

Very helpful.. The first 1000 fans are definitely the hardest to get.. However when you get them i don't know if they are enough. I think it depends on the category and the niche of the site

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**John Robie** • 5 years ago

Thanks for this article; gave me some new ideas for going about finding fans.

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<http://disq.us/p/8>

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**Onemorechris** • 5 years ago

fast forward 4 years: the kickstarter website now covers some of these models: allowing people to raise capital from their 'true fans' to release a product or service. Still an awesome article and very very relevant, even for those who want to take over the world, a good first mile stone is 1000

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<http://disq.us/p/8>

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**Craig Desmarais** • 5 years ago

I have heard great things about this post. Glad I finally got to read it.

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- <http://disq.us/p/ε>
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**atc482** • [5 years ago](#)

Good point. Still a pretty hard number to get (and I feel like I'm selling myself incredibly short with my current channel) but I won't give in. I don't like the idea of having to wait until I'm 25 but whatever.

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- [Reply](#)
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- <http://disq.us/p/7>
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**Greeshma nair** • [5 years ago](#)

Now you gave such great insight which boosted my hope .  
Great article, appreciate it.

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- [Reply](#)
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■ <http://disq.us/p/7>

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**[Josh Hinds](#)** • 5 years ago

Great food for thought. I've seen the ideas you talked about play out again, and again. I'm reminded of what a colleague told me years ago, "if someone is interested in something you've done, or what you do they might see you once -- if they like you, and are passionate about what you're doing they'll see you again, and again, and again." I've seen that play out with authors / speakers, entertainers, brands (big co's & small).

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**[DaveSchwReno](#)** • 5 years ago

As a small "information marketer" I adopted 1,000 true fans as my business model about a year ago. We are currently at about 150 "true fans" and moving steadily upward towards the goal. Of course, our qualification level is not \$20 or \$30 per year but substantially higher. At the rate we are going, I expect we will reach our goal of 1,000 within 3 years.

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**D4B4** • 5 years ago

This is a great article, but there is always the unknown human nature factor that shines through most of the time to help along the way.

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**Wako335** • 5 years ago

-sura 50, verse 6. The subject is man in general.

"Do they not look at the sky above them, how We have built it and adorned it, and there are no rifts in it

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**Alien Gun** • [5 years ago](#)

Thanks for taking the time to elaborate on this. I think it's a great idea. With 1000 True Fans you can actually make an honest living and you can enjoy the fact that you have 1000 fans! That`s more than a lot of new artists can say.

I'll let you know how this works for us.

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**Emmaline H- Rhemalda** • [5 years ago](#)

I agree with you insights here. As a publisher I work with many authors. I can tell the difference when an author has a large list versus 'true fans'. The author with the larger list rarely, if ever, out sells an author with 'true fans'.

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**Sell Dubai Properties** • 5 years ago

Good article your site have a really unique design, its pretty decent and attractive, nice tips as well.

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**Math True Fan** • 5 years ago

"But the additional fans you'll need are in direct geometric proportion to the increase of your creative group. In other words, if you increase your group size by 33%, you need add only 33% more fans."

I think you mean to say "linear" or better yet, "proportional" growth as the good news here mathematically for mutli-person artistic endeavors. "Geometric growth" is like falling, or air resistance, or sound intensity--they all increase as the square or cube of the distance or speed or number of fans. You might want to take out the word "geometric" here.

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<http://disq.us/p/6>



**Lori Finnigan** • 5 years ago

Interesting post. Although it's geared towards artists, I like the possibility of how it might apply to a non-chain store, i.e. a stand-alone gourmet market who has devoted followers & customers.

Thanks for sharing.

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**Phil Simon** • 5 years ago

Interesting post. I could be wrong, but how many of us can effectively keep in touch with 1,000 people? That's nearly seven times as high as Dunbar's number. When you move from fan to fan, isn't it hard to reconnect two years later with someone whose attention you now want because you have a new movie, book, painting, or album out?

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**Andrea Wilson Woods** • 5 years ago

Very inspiring and enlightening article. The truth is in today's world--artists must be promoters of their work. If you don't have the marketing skills and if you don't sell your stuff to fans, you will be a starving artist. I meet so many artists (e.g., writers, musicians) who are shy and expect to "be discovered" and think upon discovery someone else (e.g., agent) will do the selling for them. Wrong.

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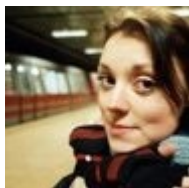
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**Daphne Gledhill** • 5 years ago

A thousand true fans is a lot to ask. However, I guess that if you produce great art, you won't have to worry about attracting positive attention. Your fan base will grow organically.

Daphne Gledhill

[Free Email Marketing](#)

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**Dan Duffy** • 5 years ago

Hi, thanks for the thoughtful article. For evidence of actual networks of support, see Howard Becker's classic Art Worlds. Howard supported the research playing jazz piano.

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**Cathy Walker** • 5 years ago

As an artist myself, I always wondered exactly how I would fit into the Long Tail. Turns out I'm already on the path to 1000 True Fans (well, just part of the way there), without having defined it that way.

Thanks so much for sharing this.

• **land222** • 5 years ago

This is so inspiring. We, as a small upcoming business, can take a lot from this. It gives you motivation to press on knowing if you tried hard you should reap the rewards.

Is it cheeky to ask for a visit to our website and if you like what you see you could always like our Facebook page? No spamming offense intended if it irks you.

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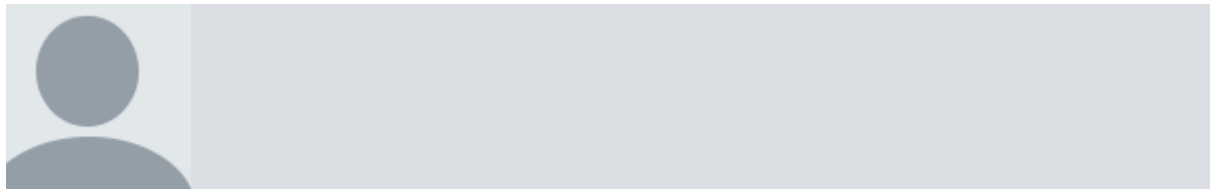
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**Harmonytanguay** • [5 years ago](#)

I can't tell you how inspiring and motivating this article is. As an artist, success seems like this nebulous and unattainable goal, but approaching it in this way makes it seem possible and also rewarding. I have a very small number of true fans so far, but I'm going to take the steps to get that number up!

Thank you so much.

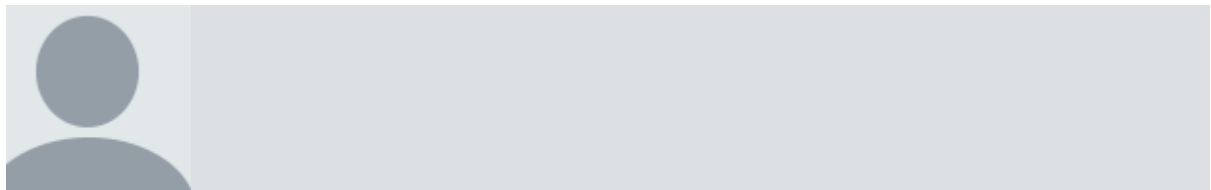


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<http://disq.us/p/5>



**Project 1%** • [5 years ago](#)

I love the concept of 1000 true fans... sharing with my members.

I definitely agree it's not the quantity but quality that counts.

-Vince, Project1Percent



[Reply](#)



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<http://disq.us/p/4>



**Vince** • 5 years ago

I love the concept of 1000 true fans... sharing with my members. I definitely agree it's not the quantity but quality that counts. -Vince, Project1Percent

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**Robb714** • 5 years ago

Well apparently you have 305 fans here and that's a start. I have six brothers and sisters, parents, nephews and I can't even get one.



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[Jocuri](#) • 5 years ago

I really really enjoyed this article, no wonder it is your most popular ! I feel very motivated, gonna start getting my 1k fans.

Thank you for the insight

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<http://disq.us/p/3>

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[spliffonline.com](#) • 5 years ago

Thank you so much for this article, it was very insightful! It's definitely gonna have a huge impact on my priorities and dealings with fans from this point on.

Spliff The General

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- [Reply](#)
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http://disq.us/p/3



**Ibrahim Cesar** • 6 years ago

Hi Kevin Kelly :)

I'm the translator of Portuguese version. I moved it from my personal site to a blog: <http://blogdeconteudo.com/1000...> Please update the link. Thanks!

[Reply](#)

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http://disq.us/p/3



**Ten Minutes, Tops!** • 6 years ago

fantastic article! no wonder it's your most popular - it is timeless and has great impact on all businesses. i think it's what guy kawasaki termed 'raving fans'. your concept is eloquent and very powerful. thanks for a very insightful article.

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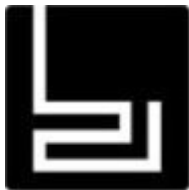


**James Richman** • 6 years ago

excellent insight and motivation. I'm thinking of other places to apply the idea as well...

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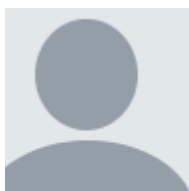


**Scott Barrington** • 6 years ago

Brilliant post.

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- [Reply](#)
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<http://disq.us/p/3>



**Kristian Kittelsaa** • 6 years ago

Fantastic! I am going to study this site, get 1000 True Fans, and live as a photographer!

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**[Wallace Malama](#)** • 6 years ago

it is great to belong to a circle where people can support one another. in this world, we are there for one another.

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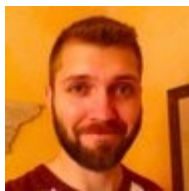
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**[Max Murrey](#)** • 6 years ago

Very interesting.

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**Jon Gorrie** • [6 years ago](#)

Great article! It really shows the value of the 1000 fans idea!

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**Buggaboo** • [6 years ago](#)

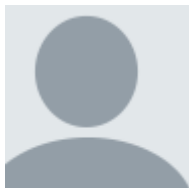
very good if u can get the 1k fans.

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  - [Reply](#)
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**Info andre Boddie** • [6 years ago](#)

Wonderful business model. I have always  
Been into niche concepts and I never was content always chasing the long tail. The 1000  
true fans is the real deal.

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**RickAGriffith** • [6 years ago](#)

Been hearing about this post for a while, now I see why. Well done!

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**Vincent Esprit** • [6 years ago](#)

Very interesting article! It is motivating!

vincent

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**Jake Hobbs** • 6 years ago

Found this article whilst researching crowdfunding. A great article, very inspiring

Jake

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**Anomaly Jonez** • 6 years ago

Wow..I really enjoyed reading this post and I plan to read it a couple of more times. I currently have about 3 true fans but man they really keep me going..lol.. I started a blog would love to mention this page in it if it is okay. Again this information really great for someone just trying to understand what to do. Another piece of the puzzle make me one step closer to understanding it all.

Thank you thank you thank.

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**The Do Over Guy** • 6 years ago

Great post! I have thought about this concept before, but didn't have a name for it. Not only do I now have a name, I also have a target... 1,000.

Thanks Kevin.

Best,  
Matt

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**Debra jarvis** • 6 years ago

Great Article,

I'm familiar with the 10,000 hours theory and it seems to me that if we build our fan base at the same time as our 10,000 hours, we could arrive at a comfortable living.

I have to give credit to Joanna Penn of [www.thecreativepenn.com](http://www.thecreativepenn.com) for putting this article in front of me. As entrepreneurs we are exhibiting Self-Leadership and the goal of 1000 true fans is believable and an important step in our development and evolution.

Thanks so much for sharing! Debra Jarvis :-)

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**RT Wolf** • 6 years ago

I suspect the 1,000 true fans don't buy the items you put out for sale for the sake of those items (or to collect them all, though some do), they buy something else, usually being a part of something, or identifying with something. The buzzwords in marketing these days of selling a story or experience is overhyped, but applies here for the 1,000 True Fans. The 1,000 True Fans are more likely to be interested in a story that's inspirational and relates to their values. Part of reason I bought an Android phone over an iPhone is that I love its values and its story. It's open source, it's got a bunch of hackers and tinkerers like me and it's Google!

The related post on/by Robert Rich brings this up. In telling his story there's a number of things I identified with that caused me to go search out his music, and would help turn me into a True Fan: his authenticity about wanting to produce the best expression of himself he could, the underdog story (we all love a good underdog story), him sharing his struggles and vulnerability and him referencing something about evolution as a model for something else. These things are not to be found on his website, though. In fact his website seems like it's been written by someone who does marketing for a living.

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**RT Wolf** • 6 years ago

One thing you didn't mention in this post is that marketing still has a role. This comment also applies to the other post you linked about Robert Rich. Marketing is still important in this. You want to get into a "niche" that's large enough to support you, and you want to get the word out to the right people. The internet makes it easier for people to self-identify as part of your target audience for being a true fan. Getting in touch with the 1 in 2,000,000 who's your true fan is easier than before, but by no means easy.

So, simply put, figure out what makes your true fans, true fans and try to pick out commonalities in them and try to market/promote yourself to others with those common features. Reminds me of a story I read in one of the Dan Kennedy's books (great marketer, recommend his books to learn more) that a dating service owner/manager noticed that a disproportionate number of his customers were ex-army truck drivers, so he started advertising in trucker magazines and at trucker pit stops. Another story: a business owner noticed most of his owners had a crew cut and were generally conservative, so he went around to the barbers and bought names and addresses of people who get crew cuts and advertised to them successfully.

Very interesting post. I was thinking about how to get out of the trap of having to hit it big and this is a pretty good answer.

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**Dougal** • 6 years ago

I think "meh" is a good summary of my opinion of this.

A few comments:

- A worthwhile example (better than Jill Sobule, in my opinion) for a fan supported

musician would have been Kristin Hersh and the CASH Music folks, who came up with the idea of fans “supporting the artist’s life”, but *everybody* having access to the music: her music is available for free download — under a CC license — as mp3, ogg and flac, plus they make available the ProTools “source” of the music, so fans can remix it (i.e. an equivalent of Free Software).

<ul>  
<li>

I guess your idea of living off the \$100 a year of true fans is why today’s “indie” (sic) label vinyl is so ridiculously expensive: vinyl is expensive to manufacture and they press small amounts and expect to get a very big profit on each record (Lungfish LPs sell less than a thousand copies, yet Dischord doesn’t charge preposterous amounts for them...).

</li>  
<li>

I actually think this mentality is why music is so crap these days. I see this in two ways:  
I) People want to be “artistes” and spend their time lousing around rather than doing something with their lives. Look at people like Ian MacKaye and Steve Albini — they have **day jobs** and work hard to earn a living, making music for fun. That makes their music more interesting, since they have life experiences which go beyond “being an artiste” and since they’re **having fun** making music.

II) Do you know how Frank Zappa’s records started sounding like shite around the late 70s? You know what happened to cause that? He built himself a home studio!

If you need to go and record in a “proper” studio, you will make sure you’re prepared for it (and not just futz around all day) and the time limit (plus getting out of your house and seeing other people, hearing their opinions etc.) will help you figure out what you’re trying to do and cut the crap.

When you sit around a home studio all day (as Zappa did), you just end up saying “let’s re-record that piece, it didn’t come out perfect”, “let’s add some effects here” etc. etc. and end up with something multi-layered, polished and generally beaten to death.

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</ul>

see more

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**James Clark** • 6 years ago

Kevin,

Thank you for your thoughts about 1000 fans. Great article! Those of us who understand the marketing concept have been saying it all the time.

What you need is a list of people who respond to you and spend money. First time reading your stuff, you can be sure that I will return.

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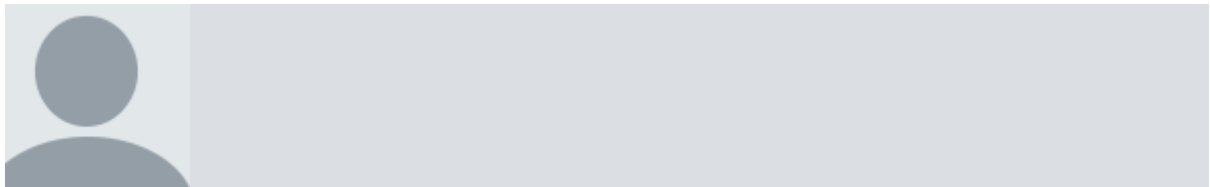
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**Amanda Rose** • 6 years ago

So interesting! My first exposure to your writing...I'll be back for more.

Btw - I came across this via Twitter post (sirmitchell). I realize it's not a news article, but I've posted on Digg. Because I dig it.

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**Shaun Kjar** • 7 years ago

Kevin-

You would no doubt love the TED presentation by Elizabeth Gilbert on creativity and genius found

here:[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/elizabethgilberton\\_genius.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/elizabethgilberton_genius.html)

Thank you for posting your insight and sharing your knowledge. Have a great day!

-Shaun

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**Kevin Kelly** [Shaun Kjar](#) • 7 years ago

@Shaun: Yep I had the pleasure of seeing her give the talk live and meeting her afterwards.

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**Matt Maginley** • 7 years ago

We may be overestimating how many people we are in touch with on a daily basis in terms of channels of information, entertainment and news. It's been stated that there is a maximum number of tv shows /channels that a person can keep up with even with TiVo.

I live in NYC and even as a media sales person and commuting everyday, I perhaps can be in touch with close to 1,000 but these are forced business contacts e.g. media companies, ad agencies - not part of my personal tibe.

I think the largest gathering most people muster in the course of their life is their wedding and possibly at their passing. I also think that we are allowing ourselves to become more visible publically and as we aspire to achieve 'social media' status e.g. FB friends, Twitter, etc. but the authenticity of this can be argued due to the nature of the medium eliciting the relationships.

This is an achievable number but I've found that one has to be mindful of giving or doing service for others rather than marketing.

Thanks for letting me share.

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**burzen** • 7 years ago

Very interesting article. Here's a dose of realism/pessimism from a small independent board game publisher:

Jackson Pope, founder/owner of Reiver Games has recently called it quits.

On his blog he cites this article when talking about one of his True Fans.

In the next paragraph he says “With 3,000 true fans I’d have sold out of all my games. But that’s one in every 2,200,000 people in the world population. Considering most of the world population will never hear of me or my company, and of the proportion that might have a slight chance of stumbling across me most have no interest in board games it’s a pretty tall order.”

Something to think about...

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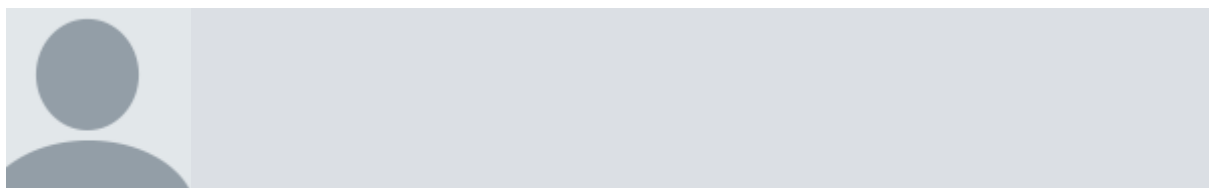
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**Raythe Reign** • [7 years ago](#)

This article put the strategy I’m pursuing for my writing and comic book business at [www.RaytheReign.com](http://www.RaytheReign.com). Basically, I decided to put up a site for my writing and hire the artists for the comic books, book covers and illustrations myself. For about \$10 a month (less if you sign up for more months in advance) the readers get updates of 6 novels (and counting), 4 comic books, and various short stories, etc. It’s like an old time serial where you get the next chapter the next week. I’ve completely avoided the sending your work into a billion publishers and being rejected and went right to the readers. It allows me to write and put out there exactly what I want to and the readers get to be the judges of whether or not the stuff is any good rather than some publisher in New York.

We’ve just been open a few months, but I can say that reaching 1000 true fans seems actually doable sooner rather than later. And when we do reach that level, I’m quitting my day job!

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**Rich Girl** • 7 years ago

Great article, but how to achieve these 1000 fans? Where to get them? What and where to start with?

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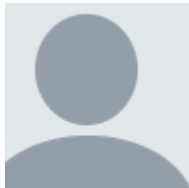
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**Chris Castiglione** • 7 years ago

For me 1,000 true fans theory is best understood as: building your tribe.

Here is a nice interview w/ Ellis Paul who claims to have 2500 true fans, and grosses approx \$270k a year.

<http://www.musicthinktank.com/blog/in-defense-of-1000-true-fans-part-vii-ellis-paul-300-fans-10.html>

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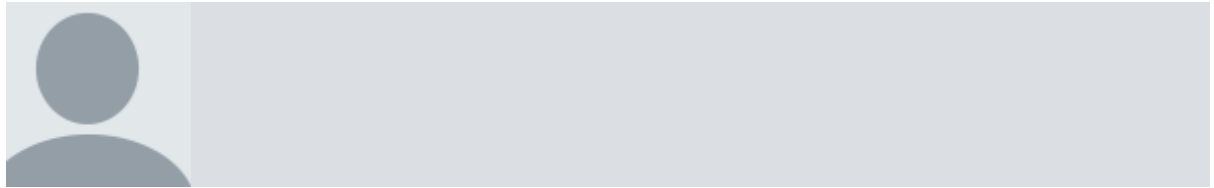
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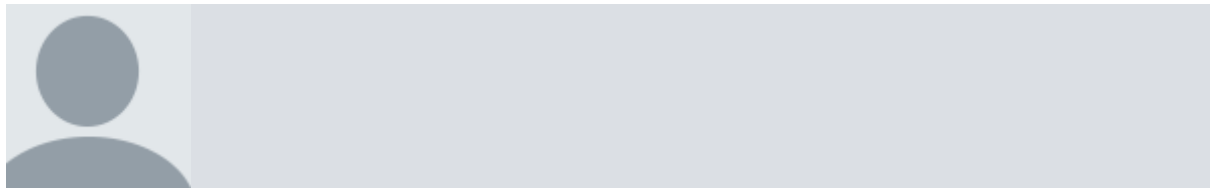
**Susan** • 7 years ago

Like the idea of 1000 fans...thanks.

However, looking up [fundable.com](http://fundable.com) shows they have permanently shut down.

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**Gloria Willis** • 7 years ago

I like this model in thinking about creating business. As a consultant, the smaller bite-sized products are often easier for a prospective client to consider than the year -long transformation package. New to Facebook and loving the idea of “fans”—makes me look at how creative I can be in finding 1000 direct fans with a CD product,workbook or other offerings at \$100 or less OR the \$1000 program that easily is valuable to 100 customers. Thanks.

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**Tim Easton** • 7 years ago

Well, you've just explained my life as a creative artist. I added doing the folk art paintings(several were for sale at Yard Dog at SXSW)and different ways to do merch, plus the short stories. Along with the music, I have the cottage industry that my label told me I should start as they let me go.

Thanks for more insights, because I'm not about to get a job job.

Mostly because nobody in their right mind would hire me, and secondly because I was born to do this.

Tim

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**Bill Brady** • 7 years ago

As a commercial photographer specializing in food I am luckier than a lot of artists. There is a serious demand for my niche.

I have been questioning lately whether I want to keep running on the same treadmill or use my photography for good.

I really want to move into a direction where I control the content instead of working for a client's vision.

It's nice to see there are alternatives.

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**Rick** • 7 years ago

I love this concept. I work in NYC in alternative medicine. I am building my clinic on this concept. While many of my colleagues are struggling to stay afloat, and just see as many patients as possible, I am aiming for 250 “true fans.” I think, just as you mentioned, that this will allow me to give them much more, and really enjoy my work, while ensuring that I can focus on my true fans and not focus on survival.

Great article Kevin, thanks!

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**Dave Kaufman - Techlife** • 7 years ago

Kevin...once again a great concept, not the first time you made my syndicated column. This time built on the concept for organization's in a piece titled, 1,000 Loyal Customers. <http://bit.ly/9NrJrg>

Thanks.

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**Joel Falck** • [7 years ago](#)

Thanks for a great post!

I am a member of a Swedish church choir. We have always been well supported by the church economically, but that support is not something we can count on forever, since the church is constantly losing members. That in turn means less money to spend on related activities, such as choirs.

A solution that I see for this problem is to create a possibility for our fans to become true supporters, meaning that they kind of subscribe to us. Such a subscription could give true fans benefits like free entrance to all concerts, reserved seats in the front of the church, access to a members area on the web site with audio and video clips, and special prices on booking the choir for parties, baptisms, weddings etc.

The subscription model is as I see it taking your 1000 fans model another step.

Any reflections?



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**Ray Ross** • [7 years ago](#)



Kevin, I was referred to your article by Tim Ferriss from his video blog, who made it clear this was all I needed to read. I am very glad I did, and will enjoy creating 1000 True Fans.

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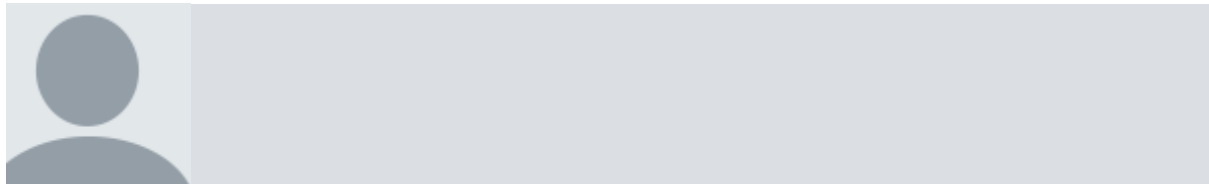
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**Erik de Bruijn** • [7 years ago](#)

It seems like an escape velocity. It takes a great deal of investment before you can cultivate these fans (or develop skills) so much to attract them. This means that you have to first build a financial buffer or work alongside building this reputation. Once you've reached a number of fans to make this way of living sustainable, it becomes easier to do what your passion is. If you focus on your passion you will easily do A LOT and your fans will increase much more easily.

Obviously, not all fans are created equal: I think your fan base also could be graphed as a power law distribution with 'involvement/dedication' as the Y-axis scale.

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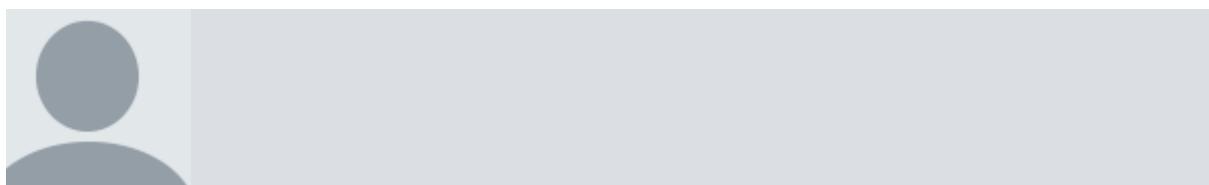
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**Leah Wescott** • 7 years ago

One of the few How-To articles I've bookmarked in a long time. I sometimes worry about quantity and forget that 100 loyal > 1000 simply breathing.

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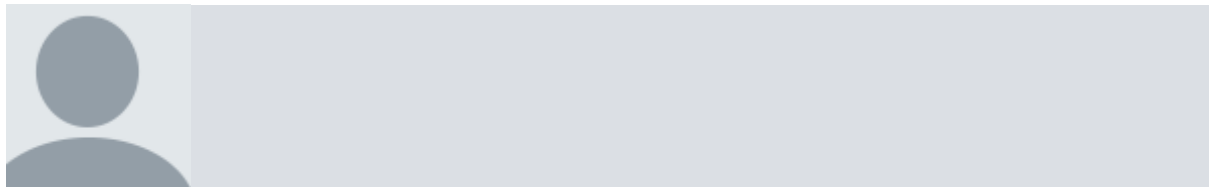
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**Verity** • 7 years ago

Wow! What a great article! I crowd-funded my debut album online and released it after over 2000 people in 25 countries bought it and 10.6% of the money went to women empowerment and artist upliftment in South Africa. I am now getting ready to record my next album and with my 2000 Future Owners and thousands more followers on Facebook etc I look forward to seeing if the process is a lot faster than last time (took 3 years from start to finish).

If other artists out there want to learn about how I did it and try it for themselves please visit my site ([www.iamverity.com](http://www.iamverity.com)) or visit my youtube channel to watch some of the tv documentaries that have been made about the project ([www.youtube.com/iamverity](http://www.youtube.com/iamverity)) I am so glad to see that this is a viable way forward for small businesses to grow and succeed without having to spend millions on marketing but rather just invest time in building relationships with the people who matter - our fans!!!

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**ridwanzero** • 7 years ago

Cash Making Opportunities - The Beginning The working life is already tough enough, but the worries of being out of work was even tougher. The unsecured working environment have prompted me to search the internet for an alternative source of extra income so that I could learn how to Make Money Work for me and be Financially Independent. I listed down a number of Free Internet Business Opportunity Ideas while researching ways how people earn money online while working-from-home.....

[www.onlineuniversalwork.com](http://www.onlineuniversalwork.com)

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**Chris** • 7 years ago

Awesome article — glad I found it; very inspiring.

As much as “making a living” off your craft sounds awesome, we all must remember why we do what we do in the first place.

I’m just getting into writing and performing, and I have a day job (at least, for now). I realize that my music is going to be very very odd to some people, but right now I’m just trying little by little. If I can get 5 people to come up to me after a gig and say (with absolute sincerity), “That was really awesome,” (or some other such compliment) I can feel good about myself. I don’t even care at this point if they don’t buy anything from me. I just want to hear that people like what I do. But perhaps one day, after connecting with each person and building relationships with fans, maybe I too can have 1KTF.

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**James Martin** • [7 years ago](#)

Great blog post - and great comments from other readers as well.... which brings me to my point.

The value of 1,000 individual fans is — in my estimation — dwarfed by a *community* of 1,000 fans. Online networks, in addition to allowing the ‘5000’ customers to find and engage with the artist, is that the customers can also find and engage each other about their passion for the artist.

Not only is the profile of the artist elevated with a community of fans (think Grateful Dead or Bruce Springsteen), but the ability to that group to keep each other engaged and to give the artists work another layer of meaning and context is also exciting. For me, as a video game marketer, games like Halo — where the community keeps dragging you back in — brings a game / IP to life in a way that 1,000 disconnected fans simply cannot match.

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**Christina Katz** • [7 years ago](#)

Well, I sure wish I had read this post in its entirety soon. I would definitely have included mention of it in my last book. I have been working as an independent teacher using this 1,000 true fans method for years. In earnest, since 2004, when I stopped teaching for

others and became independent. Today, I'm the author of two books, which has helped my visibility considerably. I wonder if/when I hit 1,000 true fans. I'm going to do some more research and get back to you.

- **Alyn** • [7 years ago](#)

I got to you through Seth, too. Can't stop thinking about this approach. I'm going to test drive the formula I'm coming working on with a few fans soon. Thank you.

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**Peter Holsgrove** • [7 years ago](#)

Really great read Kevin and conceptually it sounds cool. I'd suggest however that when the theory is reversed, and looked at from a customers perspective, the network of decisions that require processing make this difficult to realise. G. Steve Jordan above cites Daniel Ariely and contrary to GSJ's view, I'd suggest Ariely and his appreciation of behavioral economics would determine that the 'predictably irrational' element is the lack of true individuality in all of us. 'Rationally' getting 1000 true fans sounds great and a lot easier than acquiring 10k, 20k or 1m. However, consider a group of 1000 appropriate customers who each have an annual budget of \$250 to spend on musicians or groups of their choice (focusing only on 'music' to form this argument). Note that the budget is fictional only for the purposes of the argument, and in reality, no budget is set by the 1000 customers and instead they purchase primarily on impulse. I would guesstimate the participants buy based on where the greatest return comes from. The greatest return socially and the one that helps solidify their position in a group and that may help attract a potential partner. Whether we like it or not, our decisions are driven by more crude mechanisms than often recognised and the opportunity to identify with a group or fit within a certain convention play their part. Hence I can't see the 1000 true fans theory holding true over a growing number of observations. Customers would buy based on music they want to identify with, that maximizes their social potential within a group - conversations about the latest album, or opportunities to see the act live and opportunities to interact with others who share similar tastes. The power of popularity through MTV, Youtube and promotion online is also obviously huge. The energy

required to discover Jay Z's new video and who through supporting one can gain a large 'social return' is far more profitable than that of a lesser known artist who needs uncovering by spending time and energy and who's 'social return' will be far less. For these reasons I reckon those that achieve 1000 true fans probably go on to acquire 10k, 20k, 100k plus true fans who spend a good amount of their fictional budget aligning with artists or groups. Those that don't probably languish in relative obscurity, making money but perhaps not enough to really establish a living from.

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**Robert Zuniga** • [7 years ago](#)

This is a great reminder that it is possible to change behavior with the right type of promotion

Robert

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**DaraBell** • [7 years ago](#)

Great quality over for me everytime, the high yield hi ya type of client. Seth Godins calls it the tribe, think the long tail is something everyone should have.

DaraBell

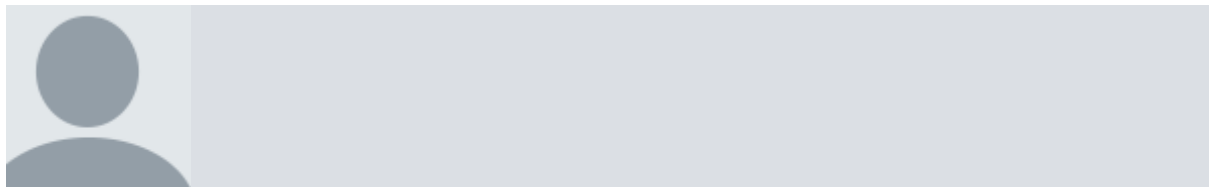
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**Jim Harshaw** • [7 years ago](#)

This is awesome. I also got to this via Godin.

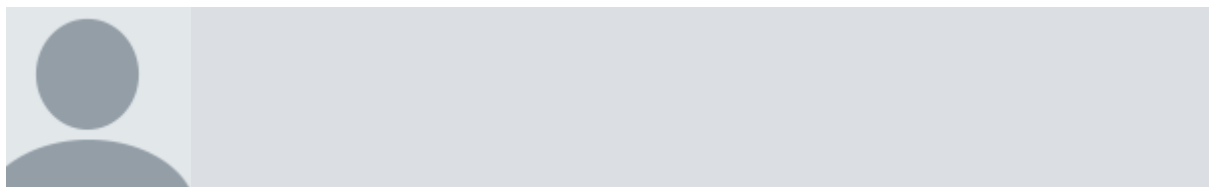
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**Kurt** • [7 years ago](#)

I am a small business owner. We do marketing for a niche industry. Typically I would print and mail 10,000 catalogs in a year. I would travel and do five trade shows across the country. I have always worked on the 80/20 principle, but this year I decided to concentrate on our top 500 customers. While we could expand to 1000 I wanted to communicate how important our most active 500 customers were. I communicated this in a letter sent with the catalog. I included a special incentive offer to them. I promised

more benefits such as e-mails - information based, not just sales notices -. I created events in their markets for free seminars. I find the key is to give more than you get. In essence I will share information on how they can be more successful whether they work with our company or not, even to the extent of teaching them how to do things they typically pay us to do. For the most part they still decide to have us do the heavy lifting, but I feel it is a stronger relationship. My goal is to focus our efforts on increasing our average dollar per account. I have long advised our clients to do the same thing. We call it 'core customers' and the impact of concentrating on something as simple as one more store visit and an increase of just five dollars per visit can increase the value of that customer by over 30%. I still don't know if our clients truly understand this well enough to commit completely to the concept as it is hard to break old habits. I don't usually comment but I found this article helpful, and encouraging. I do think it has practical applications no matter how big or small the company.

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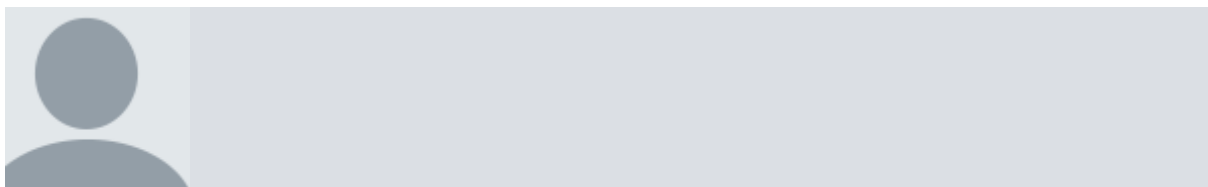
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**Paul** • 7 years ago

Like Fred, I got to this through Seth's post and I'm honestly blown away by your insight.

Thank you Kevin

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**Fred** • 7 years ago

Great post Kevin. BTW, I came to your post through Seth Godin's post. You made a very interesting point. My question is how easy is to find those 1000 people that will be waiting to buy your next thing, spend a wage per year on you, etc. The theory makes sense but don't you need to aim higher to end up with those quality 1000 fans?

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**Graham Hodge** • 7 years ago

As a serial “1,000 fans” member, an investor in micro-patronage projects, and an occasional creator, I'd like to sound a note of caution. It is rare for the individual creator/artist/auteur to possess all of the skills required to produce, redraft, polish and market a piece successfully. The A&Rs, the sub-editors, the PRs and the gurus who are derided as value-destroying links in an obsolete chain can have a crucial role to play in helping the auteur realise his/her vision and get it out there. Yes, the organisations that these people inhabit can be bloated and inefficient, but that doesn't mean that direct is always best.

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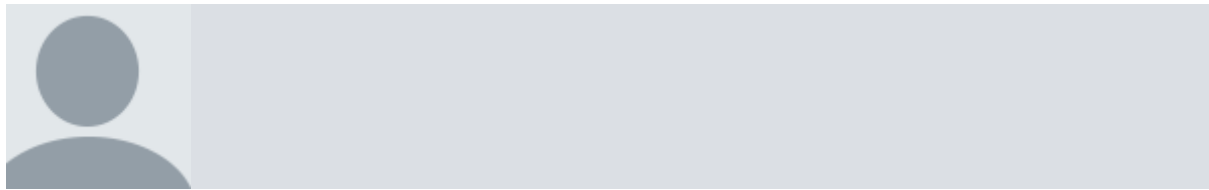
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**Curtis** • 7 years ago

Excellent work Kevin. I've bookmarked this page and will be sharing with friends :)

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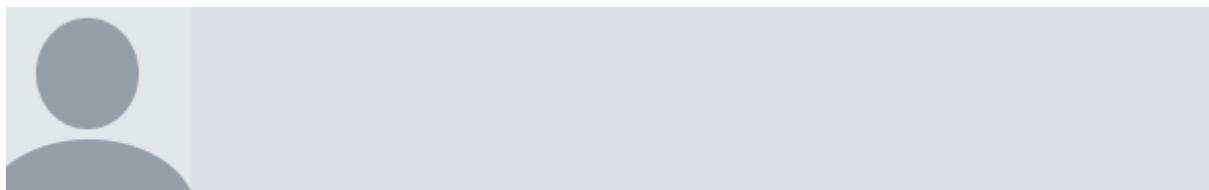
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**Federico** • 7 years ago

Hello Kevin,

these guys seem to have implemented a business model starting from your idea of True Fans.

They created <http://www.buskerlabel.com> to allow artists to find their True Fans and fund their unreleased albums.

From ideas to real world.

Fred

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**Melle johnson** • [7 years ago](#)

Take heart fellow artists and see the proof of 1000 true fans in action at your local coffee shop, pizza parlor or post office.

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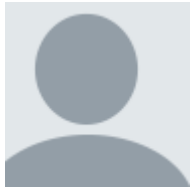


**Eric IQ** • [7 years ago](#)

I can see clearly now as a independent artist, very well explained.

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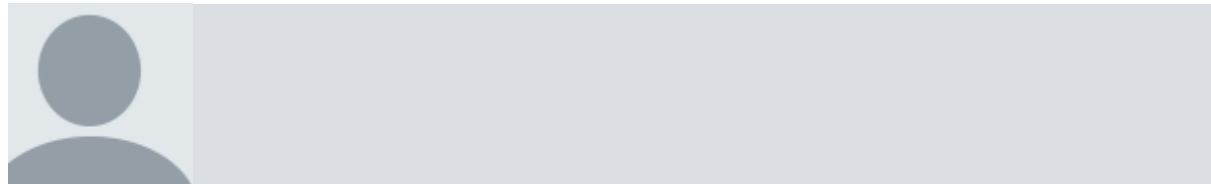


**Gordon Thomas** • [7 years ago](#)

A thousand is a lot to shoot for. Right now I would be happy with just 100. I can see how a thousand true fans would be the perfect number, but how to get that good? <http://hydrocodoneaddictionhelp.com>

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**David Jefferis** • [7 years ago](#)

Great article KK that brought into sharp focus some of the random musings I've been having.

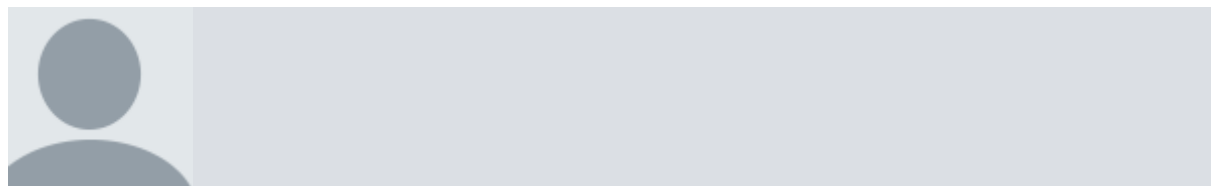
I'm going to give it a bash. Meantime you can have a look at some of my books here -

<http://www.buzzbooks-online.com>

But for 1KTF I'm also going to show my neglected illustration and fiction work as that's where I think there's an additional creator-fan nexus to be made, and fun to be had.

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**Jamie Wilmott** • [7 years ago](#)

Thank you KK, your article was detailed and well thought out. I especially appreciated the links, as they took me on another reading journey. Again, thank you!

Jamie Wilmott

Vancouver, Canada

btw, where's the "help finance KK's next project button?" :-)

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**gopher65** • [7 years ago](#)

I'm glad that I'm not the only one who thought of this. Personally I was thinking that I'd need about 4000 regular readers in order to make a living, but I didn't think about the "True Fan" model either.

Your article makes me think that I might actually need *more* than 4000 readers in total, but that if I groom them properly I can convert some of them into fanatics who will actually, you know, digitally flip me a dollar coin on occasion.

If 1000 people each gave me 2 dollars a month I'd be satisfied. That's only one 24 dollar donation per yeah per person, and I could live on that.

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**Frank Polenose** • 7 years ago

Great concept.. although 1000 is a really big ask.

Are you ok for me to link to this on my blogs?



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**Sam** • 7 years ago

thats a brilliant concept. being unique in some way has to be a major factor.

that post was really good read and i'll think about it a lot

Thanks

Sam x



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**Link Building** • [7 years ago](#)

Hmm 1000 fans. That's a nice dream. Maybe one day...

nice post. i enjoyed it

thanks,

Derek



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**David** • [7 years ago](#)

Well, I'm not sure quite how I got here... just sort of surfed my way from seeing where my site was on the Google listing. But, yeah, you're right... you need just a little bit more.

Other people have commented that most artists tend to not be great at marketing, others note that the existing websites are difficult to use. They just need a little bit more.

The artists need a simple website where the "fans" are actively engaged in marketing for the artist (this is not a stretch when you consider who fans are). You need a site that removes all the hassles in site management and fund-raising.

ALL creators of digital content, not just traditional artists, need pretty much the same thing, a way to earn a living. Journalists, bloggers, and programmers are on the same long-tail that musicians and authors are on. Really, if you create content that can be digitised, then your work can be freely copied and you're trying to figure out a new way to earn a living.

I have a way, I call it Keliso, but I don't have the resources to build it. Its design answers all the problems that people have been commenting on. It allows people to earn a living with the "1000 fan" concept, even without being in a niche with "fans." You just need people that care.

If you can answer the question "why do people become fans?" then you'll be well on your way to understanding how Keliso works. Once Keliso or something like it is up and running, artists will thrive in the 1000-fan zone. It might even be a new Renaissance.

David...

\*\* shameless plug to bump my Google listing:

<http://keliso.blogspot.com>

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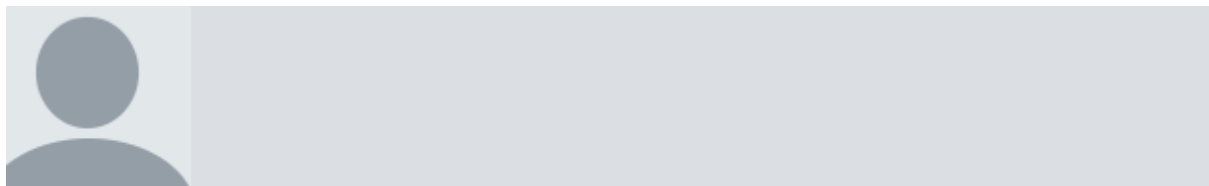
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**Busted Keys** • 7 years ago

<http://bustedkeys.com>

TRUE FANS?

'When you have corporations involved in taking the majority of the revenue for your work, then it takes many times more True Fans to support you.'

does this equate to 'selling out' and that these multinational 'corporate artists' don't have any true fans? not necessarily, but in this scenario i do think then it's majority lip service when artists thank you, express how special you are, or say they love you because the built-in reach per these massive deals outpaces the artist's ability to make authentic connections with their fans.

it doesn't mean one can't still appreciate the music but the relationship is at best compartmentalized. in any true relationship, if we are to buy into the idea that you are more than just your music then, the product/service that ties the connection between producer and consumer or, in this case, artist and fan would be blurred.



## TRUE COMPENSATION

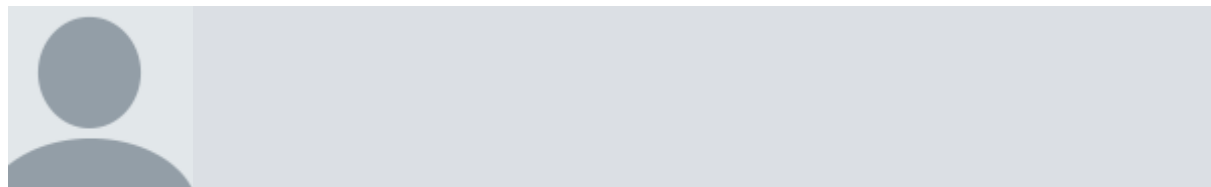
still this article is more of a breakdown of 'making it' in fiscal terms. and there are many links therein that i need to need to explore.

i am an artist and, if anything, i'd like to do BOTH—make true fans that help me build an earnest return which also helps me to 'make it' financially.

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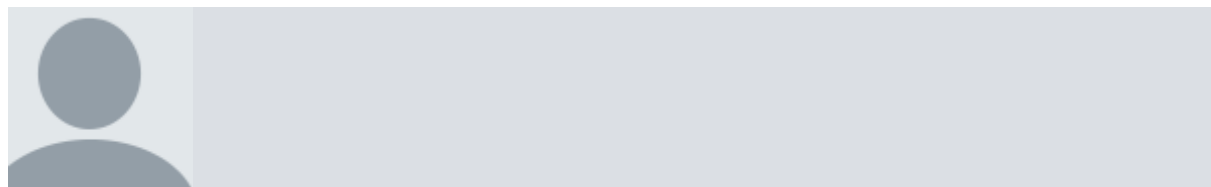
**josh** • [7 years ago](#)

311 fits this description best. pushing 60k+ units first week sales on a 7th album is impressive in this day and age.

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**kevin j ryan** • [7 years ago](#)

Thanks Kevin for this. I am a great believer in the 'home' somewhere for creatives between stardom & poverty especially in what I like to call the 'Next Generation Music Business' Having spent most of my life associated with the 'old' stardom approach of the

record business which really serves a select minority - not the artist! - I spend most of my time now making people aware of what I think is a better way - This is a great starting point - Thanks again

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**Huth** • [7 years ago](#)

So, uh, how many of you out there spend \$100 on *any* one thing a year?

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**Zoe Winters** • [7 years ago](#)

Awesome post!

I think another thing to remember is your 1,000 true fans are going to help grow your casual fans. I write, so, if I have 1,000 true fans who love my novels with unceasing fervor, they will tell every single person they know who reads to check out my books. And while not all of those people will buy, some will. And while not all those who buy will

become true fans, some will, and some who aren't true fans may still mention my book to others.

But most definitely the idea of cultivating a core group of fans for one's work is very smart.

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[Openworld](#) • 7 years ago

Your post points to an path for creatives to build a larger base of fans: offering help in building language skills (via Skype, etc) and/or other skills useful to talent in emerging economies.

Assisting as a “remote faculty” member with entrepreneurial schools in poor regions could be one way of reaching large numbers of prospective fans.

The terms of compensation — in lieu of near-term cash payment — could commit successful students who record digitally milestones of progress in the chosen skills to becoming “true fans” in the ways that KK describes.

Their ability to earn a living (and pay back the faculty member for his/her help) can be realized by putting their skills to use in fast-growing global telework markets, such those featured in [www.freelanceg.com](http://www.freelanceg.com). Alternatively, the jobseekers might engage in work-study or virtual internships for agreed periods, helping the faculty member find, develop, and support other true fans.

Best,

Mark Frazier

Openworld, Inc.

[www.entrepreneurialschools.com](http://www.entrepreneurialschools.com)

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**Johanna** • [7 years ago](#)

This is exactly what Joss Whedon does. He most definitely has TRUE FANS, and a lot more than a thousand. They are the people that buy all the DVDs, and then buy the Blu-Rays, they go to conventions, they watch his shows when they air, or on Hulu, or both, they buy off iTunes, etc. etc. etc. He raised a ton of money for charity by auctioning a dinner with him — people paid something like \$10,000 for a seat at dinner. However, you take 10 people randomly off the street and ask them if they know who Joss Whedon is, most likely all of them will answer “no.”

Anyway, very interesting article.

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**A** • [7 years ago](#)

Yes, yes quite.

All you need is mindless followers to consume everything you churn out.

Quite.

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**kleerstream** • [7 years ago](#)

I disagree that 1,000 true fans are enough to support you as an artist. 1,000 real fans are certainly better than any number less than 1K.

If you have a band, it won't come close to supporting everyone. If you want to tour, other than a couple hours from your home base, it mostly likely will not be enough either.

I would like to see this laid out as most companies do in their annual financial state. Show everyone what the bottom line profits will be after expenses & after taxes, etc. One person might be OK, but, a 4 or 5 piece band, no way.

We have coined real fans into TRUE BLUE FANS (TBF), firmly believe the number of TBF NEEDED to support a tour are more like 10K which equals one million in gross sales annually.

Get to 10K fans, should not be that difficult, provided each TBF will recruit 5 additional TBF per year.

We call this the Power of 5.

From our point of view, if you care to learn more about what we feel is today's bottom line, you are welcome to read our blog on artist development at:

<http://kleerstreementertainment.blogspot.com>.

With today's technology evolving so quickly, especially in the music world, the chances of a indie artist becoming successful, is, becoming reality.

Our latest blog goes into a lot of random detail about Music World 1.0 & Music World 2.0; free music; free sharing; and a suggestion way to license everyone, globally, for a nominal fee of \$1 / week, as advocated by Gerg Leonhard. Music Wolrd 2.0 will turn the

music business upside down in a fashion that anyone in the music business, will realize more income for their endeavors.

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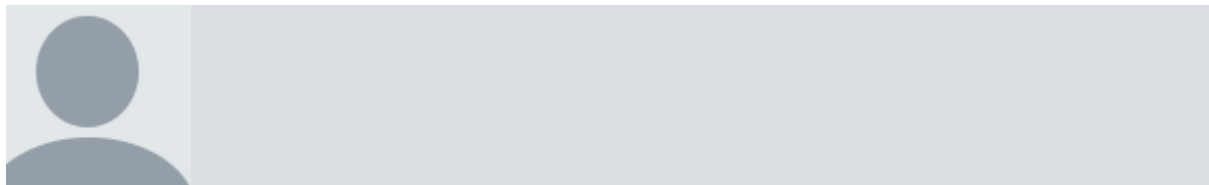
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**incolas** • [7 years ago](#)

this is exactly how radiohead became the most respected band in the world.

1 000 true fans is enough to make a living and still make music without comprimission (as opposed to Britney Spears' for example). that's one of the reasons why the internet is such a good thing: by allowing niches to get visibility all around the world at low cost, it's helping us move out of the claws of the mainstream.

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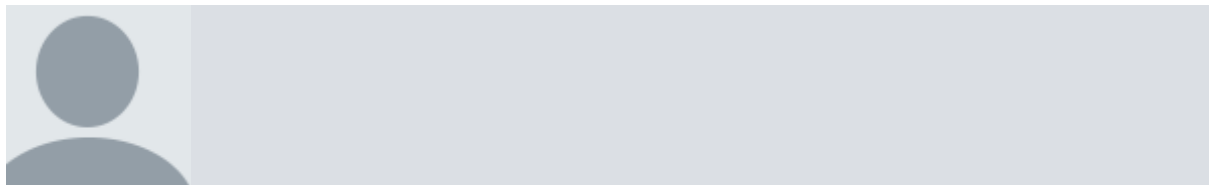
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**Jennie Nash** • [7 years ago](#)

Someone should create a widget that lets the writer/musician/artist enter the gross proceeds for what they create and spits out a variety of equations for how many true fans they would need to make it work. I'm a novelist with a mainstream publisher. I can only write one book a year, but I have four in print. I only make 15% per book. So how many people do I need to buy how many books to make a living? It would be an invaluable service. Thank you for the illuminating post.

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**[Tomás Ó Cárthaigh](#)** • 7 years ago

I've yet to get the true fan numbers up... I have one fan in USA who will buy my stuff, and 250 odd lesser fans via facebook, and another 20 or so via other writing websites...

Anyone wishing to check out my work can see <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=736687279&ref=name> for my Facebook page or <http://www.writingsinrhyme.com> for my website...

Go on... be a true fan!!!

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**Jeff Coleman** • 7 years ago

What a world. I've been reading and writing about the subjects of micropayments, sponsorships, patronage and the like since sometime around the demise of [MP3.com](http://MP3.com). I've been operating my recording studio, Steam Powered, on the principle of listener sponsorships since 2002, and have been working on building my sponsor base (my magic number is 3,000) ever since. And despite the parallel of interests and ideas, I just found this post!

Goes to show how hard it is to connect with people. That's one of the reasons that the 1,000 True Fan idea has been so seldom achieved, I think.

Anyway, hello! I haven't read every post here yet, but will certainly learn a lot from them. Let me add a link to my most recent idea, an application to help true fans track their sponsorships.

[http://www.somewhereoutwest.com/sponster\\_demo.html](http://www.somewhereoutwest.com/sponster_demo.html)

Just a series of graphics indicating what might occur in the ap, plus some explanation about it.

Leave comments- then visit

<http://www.somewhereoutwest.com>

the worlds first (and only) listener sponsored recording studio!

(in the interest of full disclosure, I'm up to about 20 sponsors now, at \$20 a year, for all the music I record here)

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**Paul The Pageman Pajo** • 8 years ago

thanks for articulating this idea - I've put it to good use for the [michaelgemina.com](http://michaelgemina.com) - Michael is a 20 year old Filipino drummer who needs 500,000 pesos (roughly 17K USD) to get to a 5-week programme in Berklee School of Music (and hopefully audition for the full programme). Using your 1,000 True Fans concept we tried to get 1,000 true fans to donate 10 USD towards his cause. We're now almost at 1,700 fans and if we reach 2,000 true fans, he will need only about 5 USD each to reach his dream! Thanks again for your post!

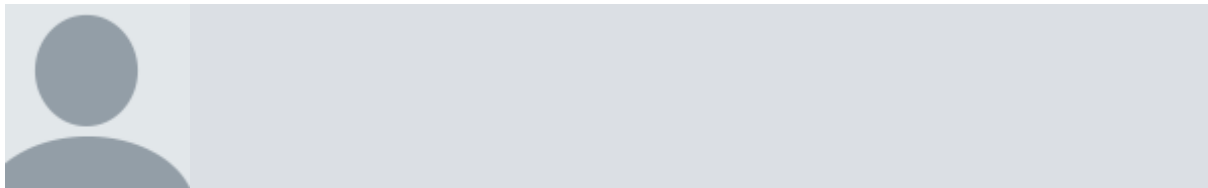
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**Lincoln Crisler** • 8 years ago

Talk to webcartoonist Randal Milholland of SomethingPositive.Net about this. I'm not sure if he's still doing it this way, but a few years ago he challenged his readers that if they'd donate enough money to equal his salary, he'd quit his job and work on the comic full time.

Not sure if that's how he still makes his money, but I know the comic still gets updated more or less daily.

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**Atul from DonkeyBox** • 8 years ago

I have now read pretty much every comment made on this post and boy it took me some time!

For many years I have been struggling to come to a concrete goal regarding my rock band DonkeyBox. This article helps focus things a bit better for a band. Infact I would say the best thing is to small chunk the target. For me that would be:

```
<ol>
<li>25 true fans by 3 months</li>
<li>100 true fans by a year</li>
<li>1000 true fans by two years</li>
</ol>
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This seems like a very real target to achieve and in the process I will find out realistically how my targeting is after 3 months.

I can then keep tweaking my marketing etc., until I am back in track for my exponential growth between Year 1 and 2. I'll let you know how I get along with this!

<http://www.donkeybox.co.uk>

DonkeyBox (Greenday and Metallica doing the funky chicken dance together)

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**Melissa** • 8 years ago

Great stuff. However, I guess it also depends on the assumption that a true fan would spend \$100 per year on you, which would then depend on how much your stuff costs. If

you were a musician, whose product sells for under \$25 per year, you would probably have to come up with many more products to sell in that year than a sculptor, who might be able to sell their one piece for several hundred to several thousands of dollars per year. If you were a painter and could sell your paintings for \$500 ea, and your true fans were ones who bought anything and everything you produced, then you would only need 200 true fans to make \$100k. 1,000 seems like a small number until you add the stipulation that they are willing to buy anything and everything...then it seems large. :)

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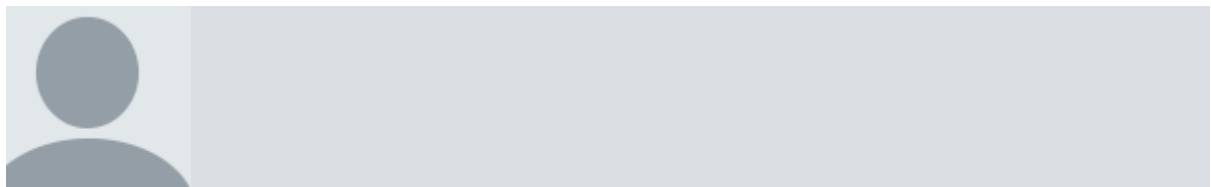
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**samax** • [8 years ago](#)

you have put numbers and research to the plan i've been working on since 2004. great stuff. welcome to my bookmarks!

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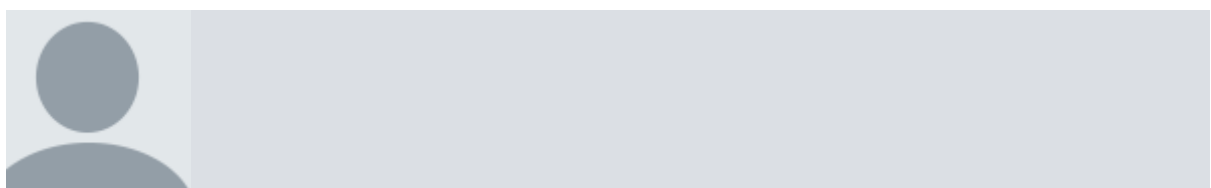
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**james lee stanley, datamusica** • [8 years ago](#)

kevin, this is a wonderful insight that i myself came to in a manner of speaking over twenty years ago. i have recorded 24 albums in that time and have toured and composed

and recorded and had a wonderful and comfortable life doing just as you suggest. last year i created a blog to help all us artist types realize what it is we can do to be true to ourselves and our gifts. so far we've had 525,000 hits, not robot hits, but actual hits. just helping people. check it out if you like:

[www.datamusicata.com](http://www.datamusicata.com)

and thanks for the article, as a matter of fact, i'd love to reprint it in datamusicata (with all the appropriate credit and url's, etc if you would give me permission.) in any event, thanks again,

james lee stanley

[james@jamesleestanley.com](mailto:james@jamesleestanley.com)

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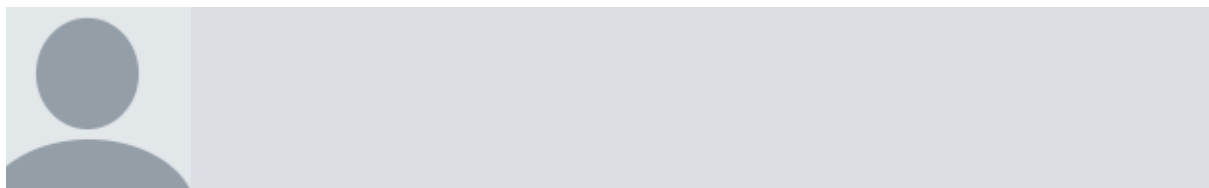
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**SpacehotelMusic.com** • [8 years ago](#)

Great article thanks. And I've always put 'making a living' over 'worldwide fame' in my musical pursuits. I do it because I love it, but I'd like to be able to AFFORD to do it more often than I can at the moment.

My only worry is getting 1000 true fans, which takes a hell of a long time when you are also spending every free hour on recording the music itself. I have some very loyal 'fans' at the moment but not large numbers. I know that 1000x that would be more than enough for me.

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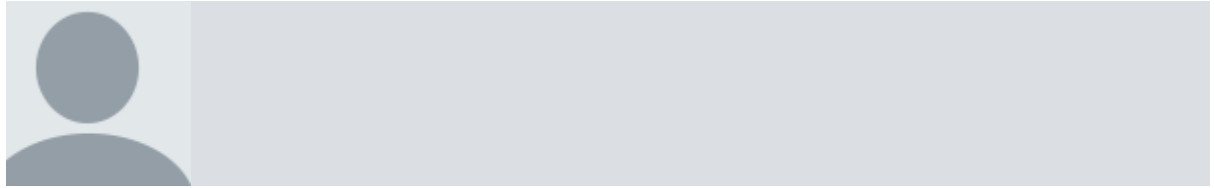
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**Jason** • 8 years ago

I think your principles sound good on paper, but the economics in your first example are off. It is VERY hard for a musician to get even his truest fans to spend a hundred dollars a year.

More like twenty or thirty, really, which is the price of a couple of cd's or dvd's. Maybe they'll come to a show if you can afford to get to where they are. Those ARE true fans. Casual fans buy one of your cd's and that's it - for their entire life. Obsessed fans may spend a hundred on merchandise a year, but even the most established indie bands with twenty or forty year careers have a limited number of those.

So there are certainly some good ideas here, it's something that a lot of musicians that want to remain independent think about (myself, I tend to think more along the lines of 'five good fans in every big city') it's just a little optimistic in terms of the number of fans you need. I should point out that getting three or five thousand good fans is extremely difficult without financial backing (loans) from somewhere - like a bank or a record company.

Another example, about Lawrence Watt Evans, he has been a working writer for something like thirty years, and has had all that time to build a good following of 'true fans'. In the meantime he had contracts and promotion from great, big, evil and greedy companies. Now, I don't know his finances and I don't want to presume, but after thirty years in the business, just the advance he makes from a book that shows up in a store like B&N or Amazon ought to far outstrip what he made selling each chapter for a hundred bucks. It does sound like a good way to publish stuff your publishers don't want, though. Publishing is still one of the areas in art where the contracts are actually OK. I couldn't see a writer at this point wanting that to be his writing income unless he has a nice side job.

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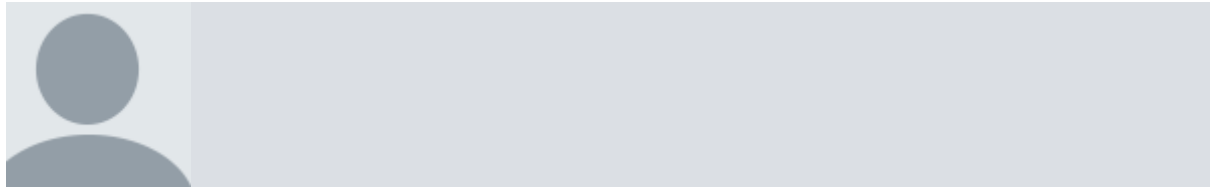
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**Noel Albano** • 8 years ago

Hi Kevin,

A friend of mine shared this post, and I am absolutely encouraged by the ideas presented.

It never crossed my mind that my coaching clients can be “True Fans”.

I can’t wait to apply these principles to my astrology-based executive/career/life coaching business.

More power to you, Kevin!

Noel

[www.coachnoel.com](http://www.coachnoel.com)

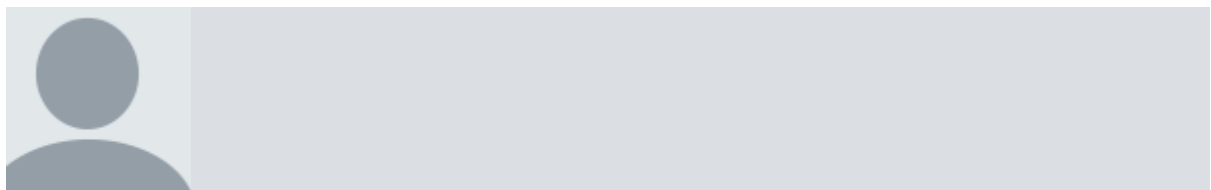


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**Mr. Sifuentes** • 8 years ago

An amazing resource. I came across this article through IndieGoGo . I will apply the 1,000 true fans on my independent film “The Myth of Man”. This will incorporate my DVD, Poster, Stills, Screenplay etc. Thank you, Kevin.

<http://www.indiegogo.com/themythofman>



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**Ian** • [8 years ago](#)

Fabulous post. I just finished reading Tribes by Seth Godin and this post rings very true to me based on what I've just finished reading.

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**Ahad Bokhari** • [8 years ago](#)

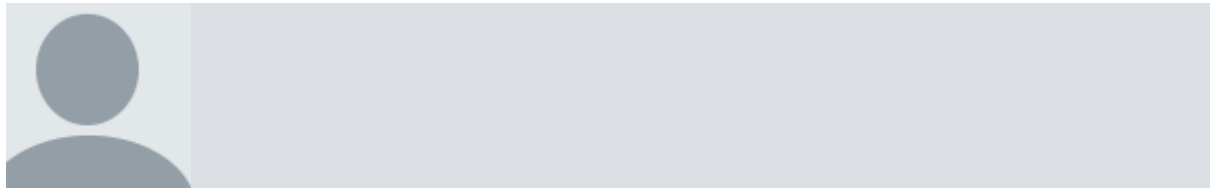
Excellent article and blog!! Indeed i will be spending much time here, and I just tweeted it!!

Thank you.

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**Dan Freeman** • 8 years ago

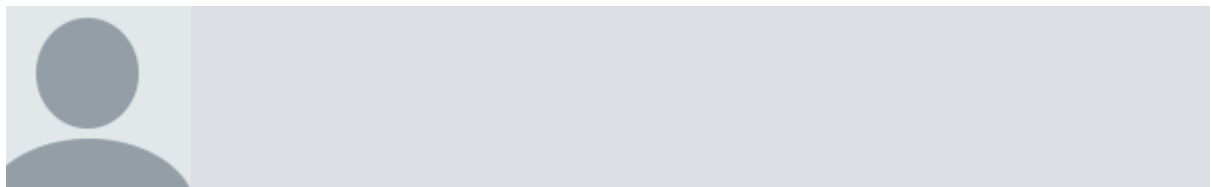
Kevin: My brother sent me this post and I loved it. We're in the process of trying this model with our upcoming record. We've built a new site and created a film describing the project. If it works out for us we're planning on writing a piece documented the process and hopefully giving pointers to other artists and bands who want to try it. Our site's at [www.comandantezero.com](http://www.comandantezero.com). I'll definitely point to this post in our blog.

Thanks,

Dan

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**Kevin Montgomery** • 8 years ago

Kevin,

This is a fantastic article, and you hit on something i've been saying for a long time. I survive in this business by this concept. My "fans" are my friends, and come to my shows, buy the cds, and occasional t-shirts, and generally support me.

I've been touring independently for 9 years now.....doing 200 shows a year.....just completed a 50 States in 50 Days tour, and could not survive without the help of my friends.

Thanks for the article. I've linked to it on my website.

Sincerely,

Kevin Montgomery

<http://www.kevinmontgomery.com>

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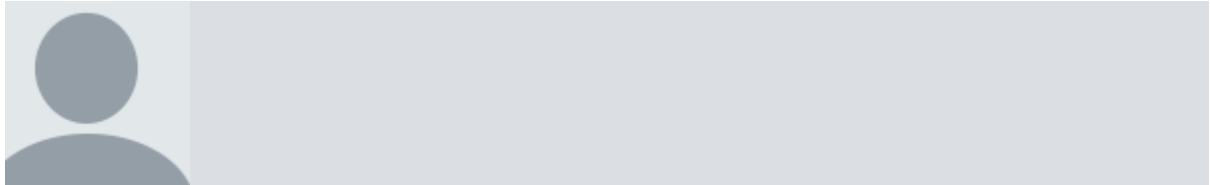


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**Yvonne Rice** • [8 years ago](#)

This is very enlightening Kevin - "Thank you".

It can be difficult to find the balance between being an artist and funding the lifestyle you need to "keep being an artist" and following your passion.

Thank you for sharing this. I appreciate it.

Smiles to you,

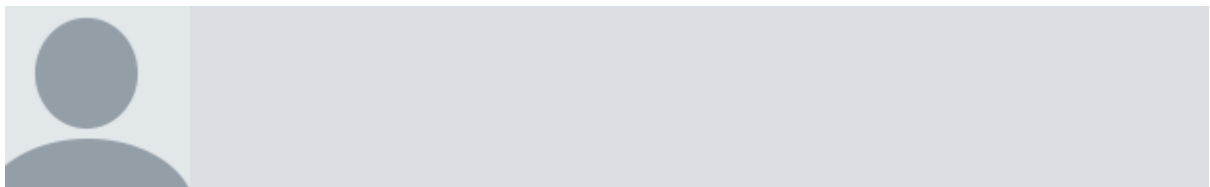
Yvonne

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**Duchess Oblunt** • [8 years ago](#)

This is a lot of information to digest and I'm not certain I agree with everything I have read. However, I will go over it again later this weekend. You have many comments - both good and not so good.

If nothing else, your approach to the marketing of this is quite unique and has generated a great deal of interest and traffic.

Good for you!

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• **Awed Job** • [8 years ago](#)

How many artists could make a living under this model before it reaches over saturation? Would each true fan have to be a fan exclusively of one artist? Could that fan be an artist with their own core of 1k fans?

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**Robert Evans** • [8 years ago](#)

Even though I've been told I should write a book some day (and if I hadn't become a teacher in 1968, to avoid being drafted, I might have gone on to English grad school), I always felt one needs to have something to say. I love music, but I'm not a musician making a CD. People read less these days than they used to, and the average American doesn't ever read one book per year. I don't see how one could ever gather 1,000 true fans, unless he or she had something very compelling to say, but I'd be glad to think of the book I've always wanted to write and take it from there.

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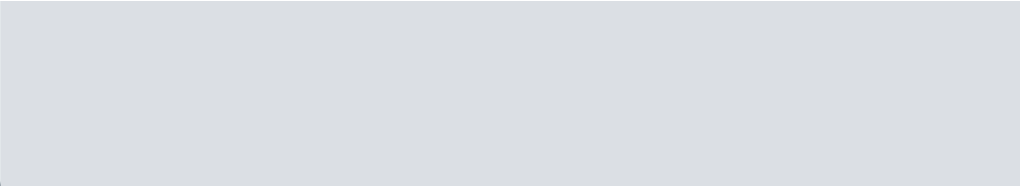
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**Robert Evans** • 8 years ago

I fear that this whole deal is for egotistical folks who think they have lot of talent, should be artists, and making money from it. I have things to attend to today, and when my computer is back to snuff (next week), I'll read this all more carefully. And this stupid Captcha thing is too hard to match.

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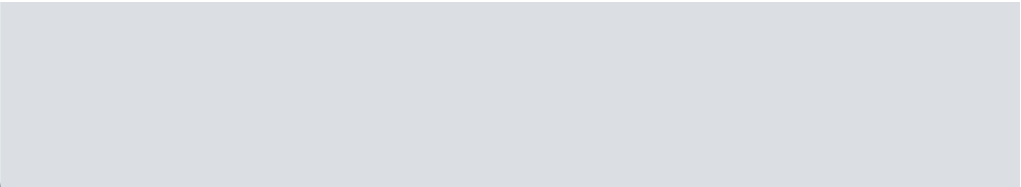
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**Nathan Ketsdever** • 8 years ago

I think in other areas of creative content, the 1,000 may be less necessary.

However, contrarily, if you're in the software area, Marc Andresen says scale is your friend:

<http://www.longtail.com/the/longtail/2008/11/the-miraculous.html>

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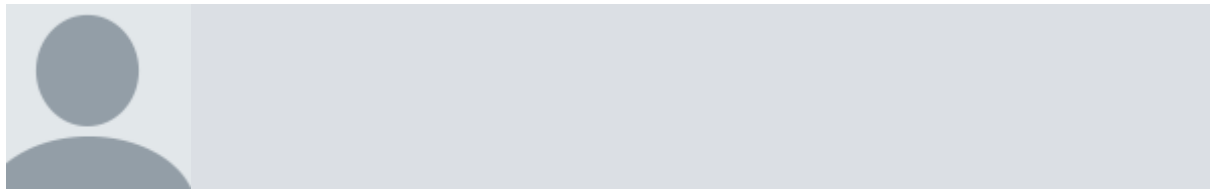
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**James** • 8 years ago

Wonderful post, I don't have 1,000 True Fans yet, but now that I have read this, I want 1,000 True Fans. This clearly makes sense to the creator/artist, but I am more curious how well this parlays into the niche service industry.

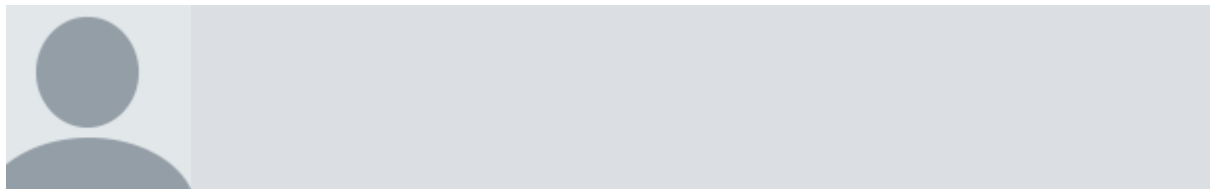
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james

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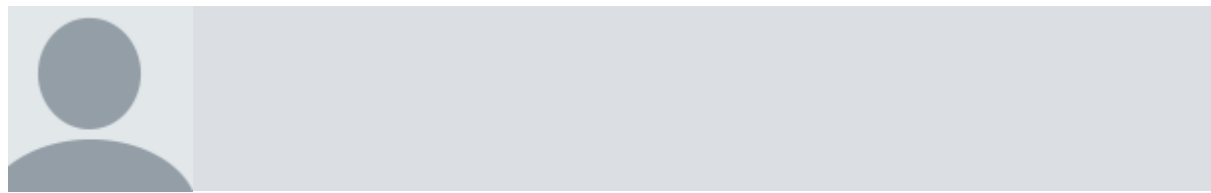
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James

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**Dora McAlpin** • [8 years ago](#)

Kevin,

I think there's a lot to be said for the 1,000 true fans model.

Here's why I think we don't have many artists succeeding that way right now:

Until that essential fan base is established, most artists have to maintain other jobs. Working 8-10 hours a day, it's simply impossible to give fans the attention and personal experience required in this model.

All the poor artists out there trying to go it alone, it's just too much. If they become too focused on fan-building, there's no time to create.

What's really needed—and somebody could make a killing doing it—is a suite of affordable services to facilitate that process.

Another issue for book authors is that there is nothing like CDBaby for ebooks. Instead, various authors' works are scattered among innumerable tiny outlets, making it really hard for authors to connect with their potential readers.

There's a definite need for an aggregator there (along the lines of TV Guide, which you referenced in a different post).

I think ultimately for book authors it's going to have to be a much higher number of fans than 1,000, maybe around 5,000, simply because of the public concept of the worth of a book/e-book and also the difficulty in identifying book-oriented merchandise that people actually want to own and/or book-oriented events that they're willing to pay to attend.

I think your concepts are sound. It's just going to take some time for us all to work out the kinks.

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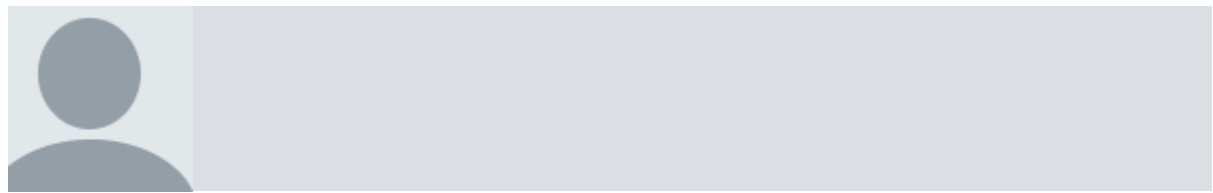
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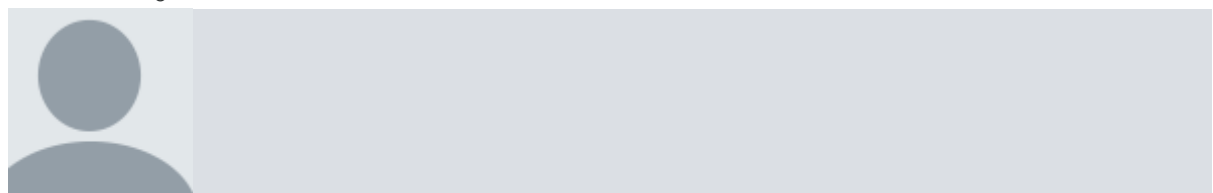
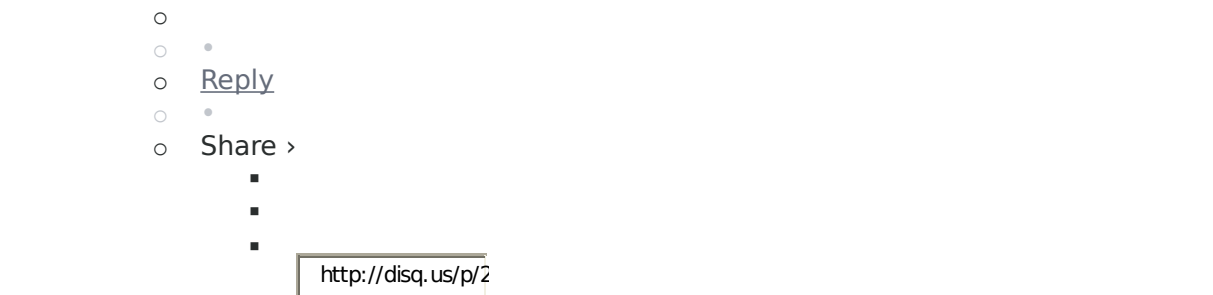
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**k** • 8 years ago

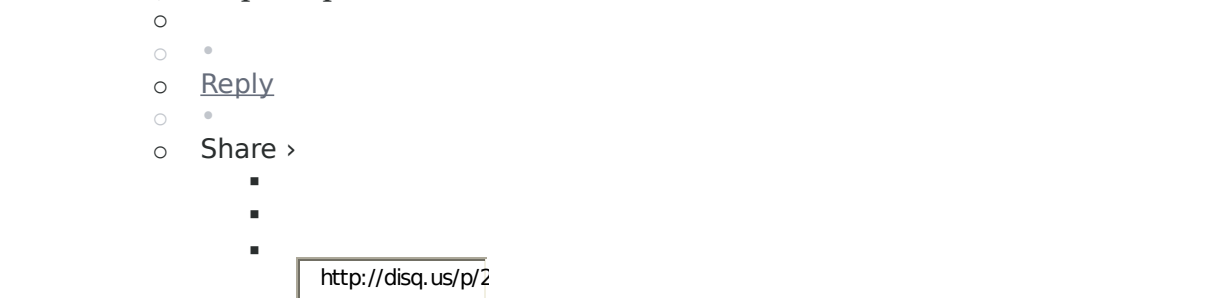
tao lin sold shares in his second novel and made \$12,000

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2008/aug/06/takingstockoftaolin>



**Bob** • 8 years ago

This is dumb. If they are True Fans (TM), only one is enough to do the job. Just leech it (install in his/her flat, ask him/her to do the shopping, wash clothes, etc.) until exhaustion, then pick up another one.





**Gipp** • 8 years ago

Thanks for a great article!

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**darrylxxx** • 8 years ago

It was great reading the article and comments. I thought I'd add that "1,000 True Fans" seems to me to be a new twist on Eric von Hippel's premise about LEAD USERS from his 1988 book "Sources of Innovation" (you can download the pdf here <http://web.mit.edu/evhippel/www/sources.htm>).

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**Kevin Kelly** [darrylxxx](#) • 8 years ago

@Darryl. Yes von Hippel's notions of user-generated innovation do have some bearing. You can use your True Fans not only for support but for new innovations.

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**Caleb Monroe** • 8 years ago

I, too, share this article often.

I shared this article with [a friend](#), who then proceeded to pre-finance his next album with the Fundable approach.

So it works. For music, at least. I'm still trying to figure out how to make it practical for myself as a comic book writer. Comics have quite a low per-unit cost.

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**Dorai Thodla** • 8 years ago

The cool thing is that it applies to a lot of solo software artists too. One or few thousand True Fans as customers is a dream come true. Some of them may pay a lot more.



I think 43Signals model is somewhat along similar lines. Few customers paying about \$30-\$50 a month.

Dorai

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**ventureblogalist** • [8 years ago](#)

great post. nit picking, but you will need more fans than that assuming that 100% of the \$100 gets carved up between distributors, etc. Granted the middleman fees are under pressure.

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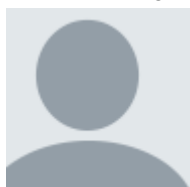
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**JaWar** • [8 years ago](#)

Thank you for sharing your information on the music industry.

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**anji** • [8 years ago](#)

I have been working in a creative field for over ten years, and have had around ten thousand customers. about half of those are fans. about half of THOSE are true fans.

I am poor but I get by, and my art is my only work.

I take a month off every year to recuperate.

I work four or five days a week. This is down from five or six up until about two years ago.

It's hard and I wish I had a manager to handle it for me, but managers for visual artists are very hard to find.

I think the majority of working professional artists have always gotten by in this manner.

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**Oliver** • [8 years ago](#)

as much as i like this article (probably the most realistic i've read so far and i've read a lot), i have to say it's not THAT easy. two things were overlooked and they're even basic economics:

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<li>

in order for hardcore fans to spend \$100 per year on you, you have to be able to offer (new) things worth \$100 per year. what would that be? five cd releases per year? merchandise? concerts? especially an author would have a really hard time as writing books take time.

</li>

<li>

you're neglecting the costs. margins are low, especially for concerts. cd production and merchandise cost money as well. if i can raise \$10,000, most of it is going into the production. especially since my hardcore fans expect quality.

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</ol>

sure, you could make \$100,000 per year if you worked your butt off. but after all expenses, i doubt there'd be enough left to make a living.

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**Fabio - Italy** • [8 years ago](#)

Thanks Kevin. I have published an article in my blog today. Good Work.

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**Revista 69** • [9 years ago](#)

Great article, Kevin. So good, I took the liberty to translate it to Spanish and post it on my website. You can check it out here:

<http://revista69.com/1000-fans-verdaderos/>

If you want me to delete it, just send me an e-mail and I will do it right away.

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**Eric Martindale** • [9 years ago](#)

Hey! Great post! I included it in [a comment I made](#) on [CommunitySpark](#) - I hope you don't mind.

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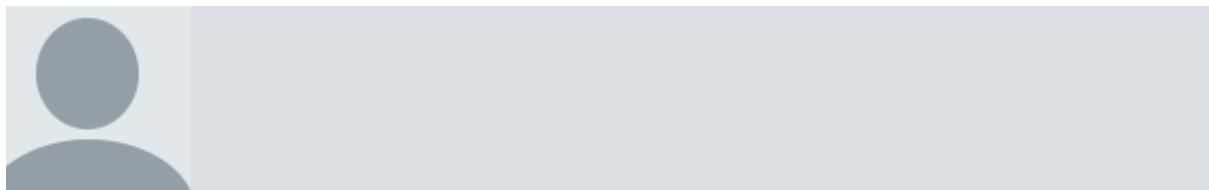
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**Tom Swirly** • [9 years ago](#)

Please cast my vote for “economics don’t add up”. I was following you fine until I got to “\$100 profit from each fan”. Even if you have an impressive 50% profit margin on the “items” you sell, be they digital music tracks, t-shirts or mouse pads, that still means you have to come up with at least \$200 of new product to sell to these poor 1000 people, every year.

\$200 in product?! What will this be?

Suppose I release four CDs a year; that’s a stretch and that’s still only \$60-80 a year. Can I tour and catch these 1000 people? Unlikely that I can charge more than \$20 so that’s only \$20K admissions (and more merch of course) to get me to travel the entire world; more likely I’d play a few large cities and perhaps 400 of my fans would come; that’s still averaging perhaps \$10 per true fan.

I’m a huge fan of some bands, I buy everything they come up with, I can confidently say I’ve never spent \$200 on any artist in any year.

Even if you could do that, running such a business on \$100K seems impossible. Unless you’re some superhuman being, producing a dozen pieces of new product a year while touring requires at least one full-time person helping and a pretty serious outlay for gear.

And you don’t get to take a break here. Your continued existence depends on keeping that pipeline full to those quickly-tiring 1000 fans. Losing one fan is losing a lot of money for you.

Your numbers are wrong. You need 10,000 true fans. At that point the economics are reasonable: you make about \$20 profit off each one and it supports three people and some gear purchases.

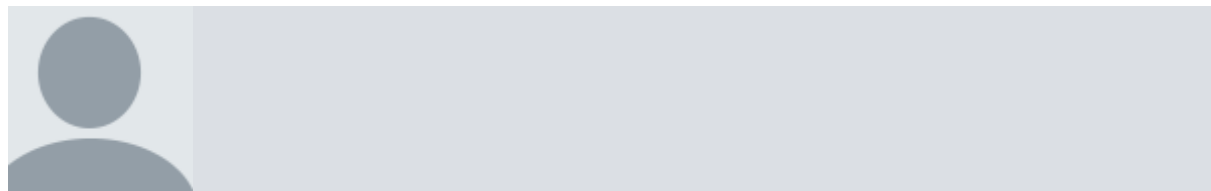
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**dollar?!** • 9 years ago

Avante-garde guitarist Buckethead has these ideals down to a science. His fan base mostly hangs out at 3 web forums, and pretty much all he has to do is get the word out on a new album on one of those and he can count on selling at least a few hundred copies within a few days. Last summer he released a 13 disc set of new material called "INSEARCHOFTHE"; each disc was hand-drawn/numbered and he sold many hundreds of sets: to me THAT is the kind of fan dedication that a major label cannot facilitate. Buckethead mainly works out of a small studio owned and run by Travis Dickerson called Travis Dickerson Recording Studio, or TDRS. He has also recorded all of Viggo Mortensen's albums there. The artists on his site can sell quality cd's, and they usually arrive within a few days of the posted starting shipping date. When artists like Buckethead make these concrete and GENUINE connections to fans and people who help them get their music out there a higher level of artistic integrity can be achieved as well as a more intimate connection to the fans. What other Guns n' Roses member (new or old) can you think of who would go so far as to produce hand-made box sets, or release 20+ albums of QUALITY material in a single year?!

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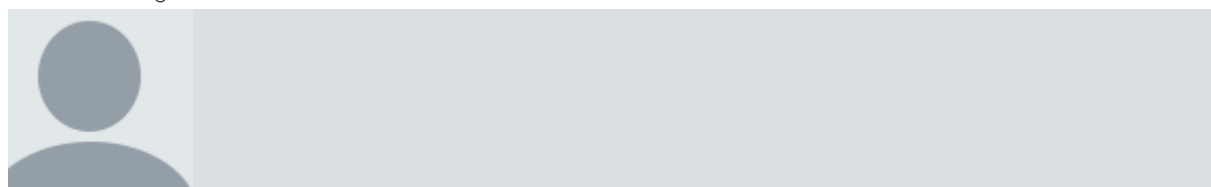
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**Ted Killian** • 9 years ago

Kevin,

Thanks for a great article with lot of food for thought.

I began as a wannabe visual artist several decades back and (in order to make a living) went into the soul-sucking world of commercial art and design as a career when family

obligations demanded that I set my sights higher (or lower) than being a starving artistic idealist. The repercussions of that choice spelled death for that part of my life that was involved in visual art. And there was no internet or anything back then to allow it to exist as a sideline enterprise.

Fortunately, I was and am also a musician. The soul-sucking day-to-day grind of my “day job” did not nearly have the impact on that area of life as it did on my visual art. In fact, it has sort of been its salvation of sorts. I feel “cleansed” when I make music. And, as a result I am rather reluctant to even attempt to merge my music making with a commercial world - beyond just the bare minimum of attempts to keep it going and obtain a few opportunities to perform.

I am extremely cautious that it NOT become a “job” in any way. I want to keep it “pure” and only to create what I want to create - without the external considerations of monetary reward. I do create and sell product, I do do some amount of marketing. But, I am really mostly happy that I am not depending on this one last “gift” (my second chance at a creative life) as a means to make a living.

Even so, I can see many useful things in this article that will help me do just that. I don’t even need 1000 True Fans. I am already making a living by other means. I just do want to continue to create and perform the stuff that interests me for as long as possible, and share it with as many people as will listen.

Thank you for writing such a wonderful and useful article. Perhaps some of the concepts in it will help me keep it going for another decade or two.

Best regards,

Ted Killian

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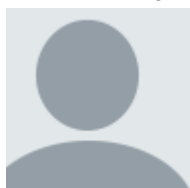
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**Lesley** • [9 years ago](#)

Wow! this particular blog is so popular! It shows how many artists already use the internet. I put a link to this on my blog. I downloaded the book <http://www.davidparrish.com/dp/uploads/TShirtsAndSuits.AGuideToTheBusinessOfCreativity> and I will watch the 800cds thing if I can find it.

People go on holiday to places where there is art, like London or Venice, to look at art, and hotel prices food travel etc make it an expensive holiday. So virtual art galleries like mine are nice because they save folks money. You only need to use a computer to see my work. Also the carbon footprint for looking at my work must be smaller than visiting a city far away. So how the xxxx do I get people to offer to buy it? All the above contributors avoid that vital question.

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**Paul** • [9 years ago](#)

Good post! Reminds me why people working in niche marketing get so excited about web2.0.

You figure there are about 1,000 people out there interested in your product, which is enough.

In the past, it would have been impossible to reach them without a massive advertising spend on billboards and newspapers - and most of that effort would be spent on brand impressions for people who don't give a toot about your widget and never will.

Without that budget, you could only reach people locally, with bill posting and ads in the local rag - and locally, there just aren't people interested in your widget.

So if you got lucky once a year there would be a widget convention to go to, where you can expand your contacts base.

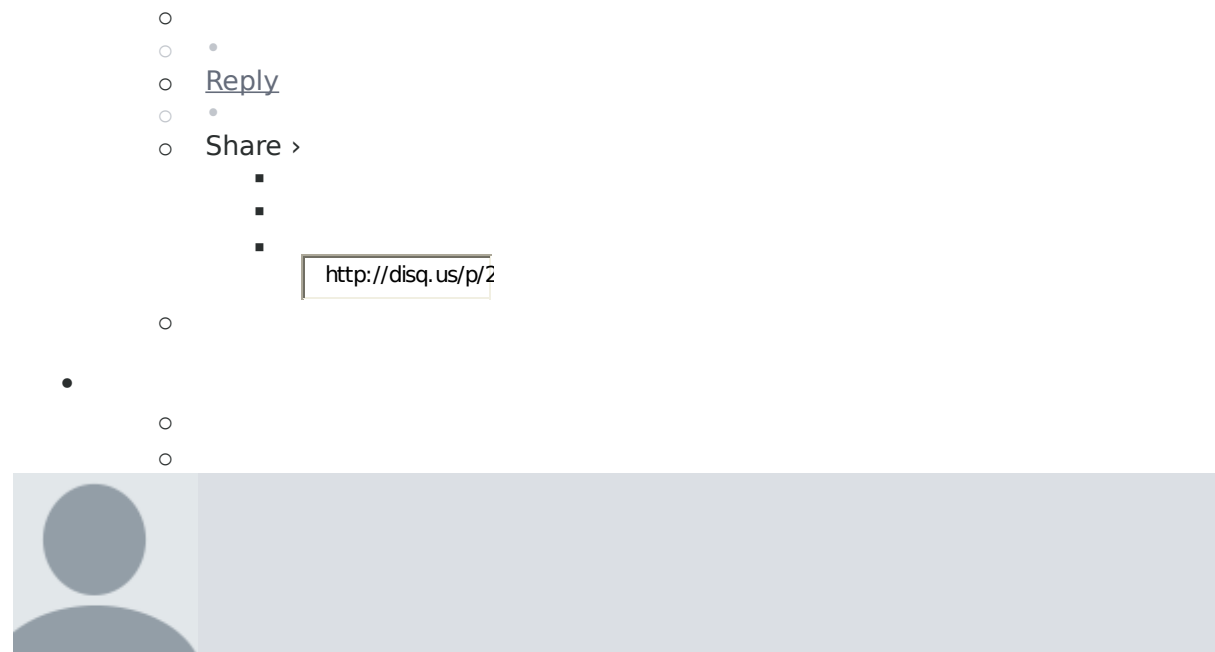
But with social media, websites, blogs etc. it's suddenly very easy to create content which appeals to your target audience and kind of sniff them out.



You can be in contact with them all the time. With their blogs you can find out what they like, and hit the people who need to know about your widget with targeted marketing material (e.g. RSS feeds from your blog).

It's like being at a trade show all the time. 1,000 fans is suddenly possible.

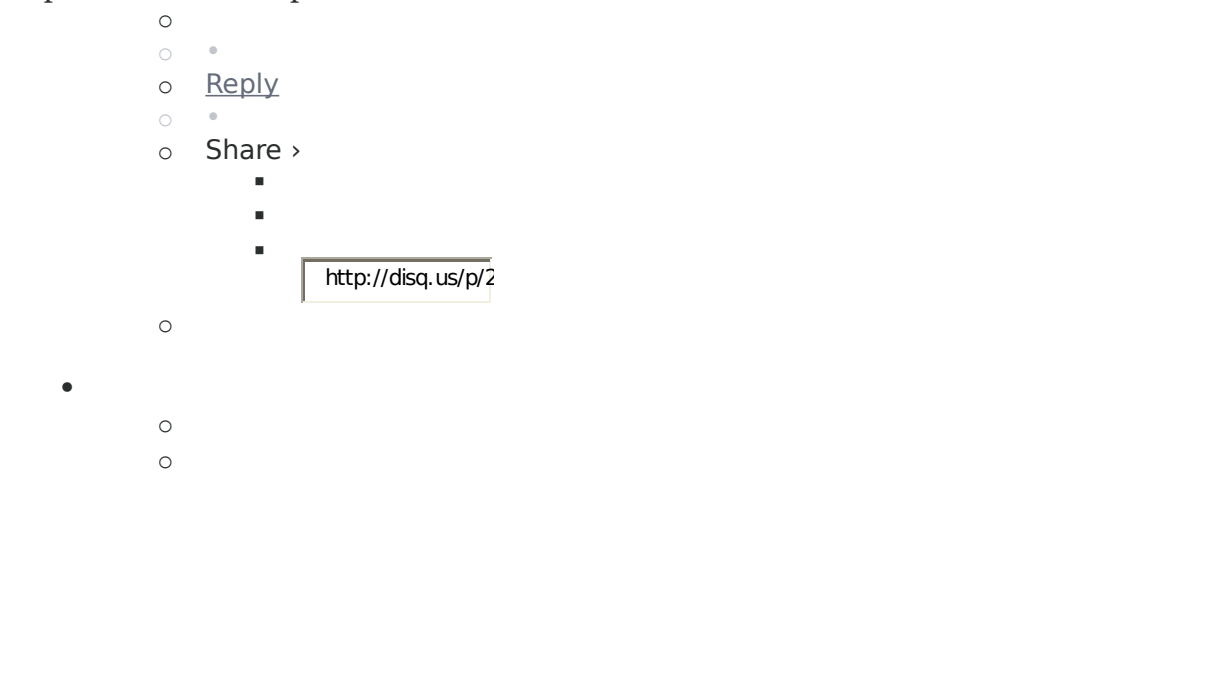
Except for me, because my widgets suck. That's why I concentrate on getting other people some fans.



**Kort** • 9 years ago

The 1000 fans is presented more as the minimum threshold of viability. More would obviously better, but the point was that it's possible to survive if you can reach 1000 supportive fans. The Internet expands the effective marketplace for any performer far beyond his local area. A performer who can't find enough local interest might well find enough fans spread around the world to support his work.

As for cost overheads - how much does it cost to manufacture and distribute digital copies of a recorded performance?





**words** • 9 years ago

Am I the only one who finds fault in this plan based on the expectation that the artist live AND fund their own work on that annual income? Factor in taxes, insurance, and all the other costs which come with running a startup company, and you're left with a pep talk that's short on economic sense.

Does the author know anything about the overhead it can take to produce \$100 worth of consumer products? It means multiple releases per year, at the very least. Sorry to be a downer, but this is not realistic.

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**Kort** • 9 years ago

The superficial purpose of compensating artists is so that they can make a living creating the art that is enjoyed by others. A more profound purpose is to encourage the continued production of valued art for the benefit of society as a whole.

A problem with the patronage model is that support of a patron turns the artist into the servant of the patron. The creativity of patron supported artists has traditionally been manipulated and directed by the whims of their patrons. Look at the centuries of religious art produced while the church was the primary patron of artists.

In an ideal world, the free market rewards creators to the extent they produce art that is valued by art consumers. An artist has the freedom to create whatever art they please, while consumers are only obliged to pay fair market value for the art they “consume”.

The current dominance of the major record labels is a legacy of the limitations of the old brick and mortar technology. It took time for physical media to be manufactured,

shipped, stocked, and purchased. The original justification for copyright monopolies was to provide time for creative works to reach consumers through the relatively slow production and distribution channels.

The legacy record labels make a lot of noise about digital distribution depriving artists of fair compensation. The problem with this claim is that the legacy recording labels have exploited their control over the traditional brick and mortar distribution of physical media to largely eliminate the compensation of creators for their recordings. Only a tiny percentage of artists benefit financially from recordings of their performances. Most artists are obliged to sign over all rights to their recorded performances to the record label. The primary benefit for most creators of having a recording in retail store is the promotional value for selling tickets to live performances.

One of the primary functions of free markets is to create alternatives to inefficient industries. The inherent costs and constraints of the traditional recording industry have created strong incentives for the market to find better alternatives. The legacy recording industry is attempting to frustrate the natural functions of a free market in order to preserve its ability to abuse that market.

One of the problems that the Internet is quite capable of solving is the compensation of creators. A modified dutch auction provides both a way for “1000 fans” to support their favored artists, and a free market means of setting fair market values on creative works.

In essence, a creator offers (some) rights to a recording for auction, setting a minimum yield/total earnings that he will accept. Consumers bid what they would be willing to pay for an advance limited edition enhanced value copy of the work. A yield calculation determines the price point that will return the best total yield to the creator (gross revenue vs number of copies). A successful auction in effect collectively purchases limited rights to copy and distribute the recording, for the public domain.

Each successful bidder receives an enhanced value copy at the price point before the recording becomes available to anyone else - they have a short period of time to recover their bid investment by reselling copies of their copy. The creator gets compensated up-front, their some rights to their recording become public domain, and those who facilitated the transfer are able to recover their costs from secondary consumers. Since rights to copy and distribute the recording have been transferred to the public domain by the auction, music piracy is transformed into a highly effective distribution and publicity system.

The current system provides little more than publicity for the vast majority of creators. A rights auction provides creators with greater direct earnings from their recordings, allows them to retain greater persistent rights to their work, and enables a far more effective means of publicity, than the legacy record labels.

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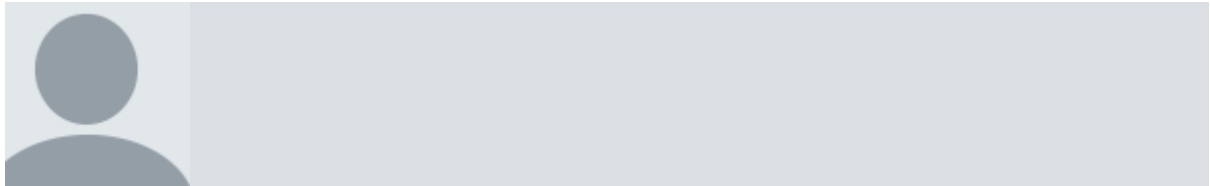


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**Lindsay** • [9 years ago](#)

Very insightful article.

I am an indie artist and have notched up some 45k in plays on Myspace, some good reviews, and still have not raised enough cash to release something I'd be happy with. I realized that the myspace page was serving as a platform for filtering 'real' fans after I noted the main site had 7k in visitors from some 20k visitors to myspace - so, there are some real fans there amongst the mud. I have sold 180 hand made eps, and my main site has 420 subscribers and I receive regular letters. Although I don't feel comfortable with a 'finan

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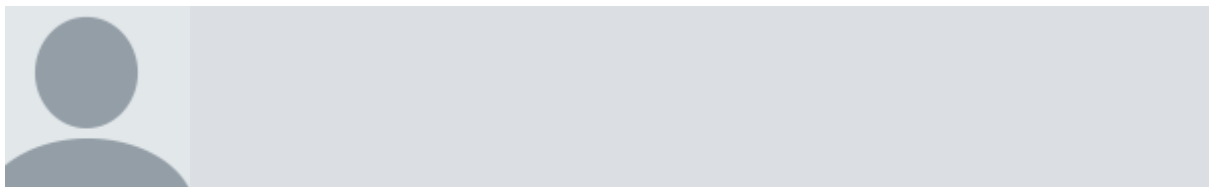


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**Nathanael Matthias Weiss** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin. You put a lot of thought into this. Thanks for the clarity. This makes being a creator in the digital age a possibility, rather than a problem. I can proceed with confidence, without feeling "overwhelmed." Thank you.

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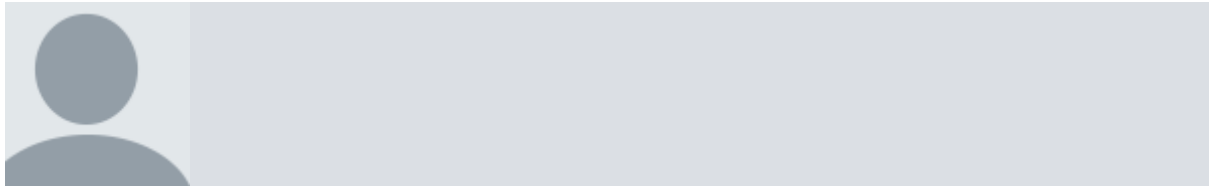
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**Lesley** • 9 years ago

I suppose it's every artist's dream to find those sponsors. Mine too of course. I am just starting out; it's a hobby for me. I'll let you know how i get on.

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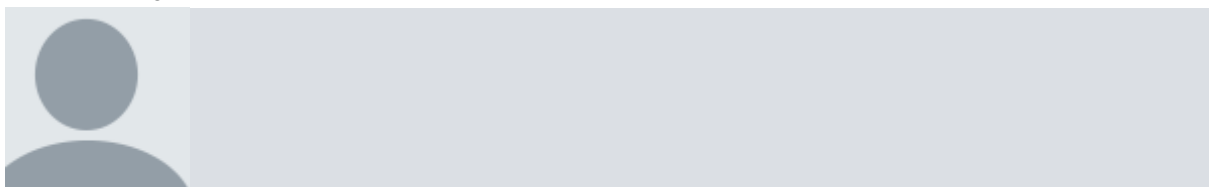
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**Randy Chertkow** • 9 years ago

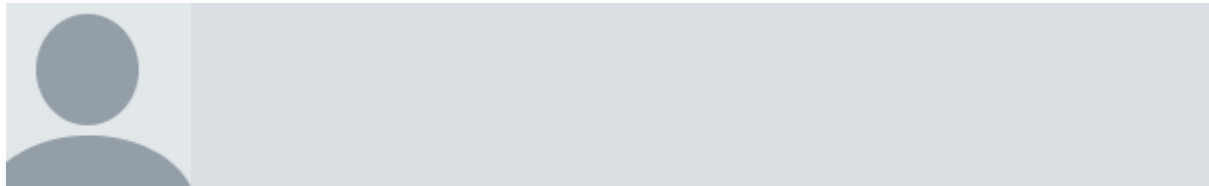
Ever since I read this post, and even made my first comment, I couldn't stop thinking about it. This is a fantastic idea, but it occurs to me that this idea has particular challenges when it comes to musicians. Primarily among them, to make enough product to sell every year. But also that most musicians are in bands, rather than singular, which makes the numbers difficult to reach.

But there's still another issue: Most pro musicians have a significant income from music licensing and similar money sources. So, my question is: do you focus on getting your fans to buy more, or do you focus on getting more fans? The latter makes it more likely to follow in Jonathan Coulton's footsteps, who managed to license a song to G4 for their show "Code Monkeys."

There's more in a blog entry [here](#):

<http://blog.indiebandsurvivalguide.com/?p=10>

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**Peter Blue** • 9 years ago

I started to play music in 1969. In those days you could only enter a recording studio when you had a contract. And those were almost impossible to get, especially in Germany, where I live.

The music I play ( instrumental guitar with feel, melody and vocal like expression ) was never something for the companies. They wanted the hits.

With the upcoming of home recording, for the first time I was able to make the music audible that I was carrying inside.

My first self produced debut *Western Skies* was released 1989. Of course we had no chance to get a wider audience, although there was some airplay and brilliant reviews in the magazines.

Since then we have released 10 albums, and it is only now that we get fans all over the world, from asia to scandinavia. It's still not the big figures, and we do some studio work and also have produced 700+ tracks of library music to make a living.

But today I know it is possible to get in contact with our future fans, and they can be much more than 1000, as instrumental music is beyond any language.

I'm very thankful for articles like this, as they encourage me to go on. Even if at times, the next step is not clear or there is a block somewhere.

Peter Blue Blue Star

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**Audrey** • 9 years ago

Annie Hardy of Giant Drag is doing something quite similar to Jill Sobule right now. She's soliciting her True Fans to help finance her album seeing as how she owes her old record label \$70,000. I think it's a great idea!

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**Andy English** • 9 years ago

This is a fascinating combination of post and comments. I am a visual artist-craftsman working in a very old-fashioned and specialised field. I live by commissions. I have always thought that I can sustain myself as an artist if just 100 people worldwide occasionally commissioned a bookplate (ex libris) from me. Time will tell.

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**Zoe Keating** • [9 years ago](#)

This is right on. Speaking as a musician, I don't want stardom, I just to make a living so I can make more music.

Most bands dream of getting signed, as an end in itself, not realizing that label money is an extremely expensive loan. They will be dropped as soon as their sales start to decline. Better to be small, to grow slowly and to have as few middlemen as possible. Micro-patronage.

Plus, given the way music is currently marketed, for those in the genre gaps, directly connecting with core fans is the only way to make a living anyway. Thanks for the blog.

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**Mike Keller** • [9 years ago](#)

Great post. (thanks Seth Godin) This has obviously worked for bands like the Dead and Phish, who didn't worry about mass marketing and didn't worry about people ripping off their stuff, but instead worked on making sure that the people who did and would like their stuff got a chance to enjoy it and pay for it. Very possibly every guitar lick Jerry Garcia played live (both the good ones and the horrible ones) are available somewhere for free, but all that did was encourage fans to go out and participate in the live shows, which is where most bands make their money anyway.

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**Beau Trickey** • 9 years ago

Kevin, thanks for verbalizing what I was trying to tell my business partner for some months now. Since true fans are now hidden somewhere in between the massive amount of free downloaders of music that are scattered around the Internet world.

We are now offering musicians in rap hip hop and reggae an opportunity to use free beats <http://rap.jairdynast.com> to remix our rapper for a chance to win a grand prize plus get featured, promoted and distributed internationally at absolutely no cost to them. We want to reach “truly talented and skills artists” and give them an opportunity to gain valuable exposure free. We know first hand that artists struggle with day jobs in order to perfect their craft and continually feed the habit of music.

Your article is definitely thought-provoking and subscribes to “out-of-the-box” thinking. This requires a second read and is achievable at any level and can have many applications. It allows someone to target, start small and build a network of true fans.

Kevin, thanks for keeping my creative juices flowing on what was a pretty slow day...lol

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**kavi** • 9 years ago

this is really inspiring. I have a deal with a Global New Age Record company and I love it! But CD sales are down everywhere, so now more than ever its down to the artist to get out there...And the ineternet is THE TOOL..My space has been very good for me to get interest and alot of love of my music...but turning that interest into 1000 true fans, well I could do with help on that!

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**Sam** • 9 years ago

Well, obviously if you're going to follow this strategy, you should aim for True Fans with a lot of money. One rich True Fan is worth infinitely many True Fans who have no money to give you patronage. Generally the noun "patron" is modified by the adjective "wealthy". So appeal to the rich. Make your art a luxury good.

Also, this strategy is more likely to succeed for certain types of art than for others. Hard to imagine it working well for something like music, since the appreciation of music is almost inherently social. If you're out with your friends, you want to listen to the same thing. Even more true if you're at a party. Going to concerts is a social thing.

Furthermore, music has strong ethnic and subcultural affiliations. It's an important ingroup/outgroup marker - the people who listen to rap aren't the same as the people who listen to country. So, what music you listen to depends on what other people are listening to. This creates a sort of positive feedback effect that makes big bands bigger and small bands smaller. Thus, bands usually wind up hitting it fairly big (at least regionally or within a certain subculture) or staying pretty small (maybe they play gigs covering popular music at local bars, but nobody buys their CDs or cares much for their original stuff).

So, if I were a musician, I certainly wouldn't count on having any success with this True Fan idea. For authors, though, the same reason why the idea fails miserably for music make it more practical for literature. Reading is almost inherently anti-social - you have to do it alone. True, people do like to read the same things as other people, so that they can talk about what they read, or also to look smart or cool by reading certain books, but

the effect is not nearly as strong as it is for music. So for writers, having a small base of isolated fans is a tenable strategy.

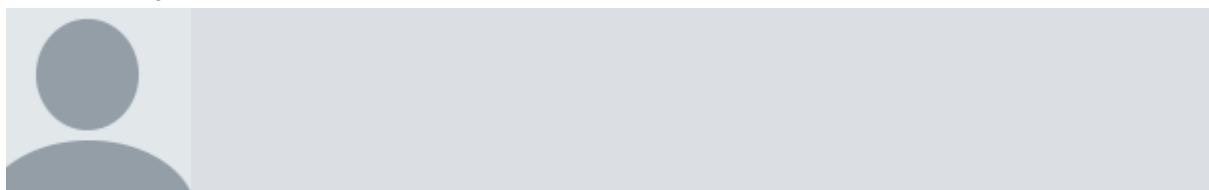
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**Jinjee** • 9 years ago

I accidentally cultivated 15,000 True Fans by filling a need in an underserved niche online while following my heart...Ummm, so like I put up a little website about my family living on a raw-vegan diet of fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds - unheated - oh, yeah, everyone knows about this now right? Well, anyway, it was one of the first raw sites about 10 years ago and after reading an article about Seth Godin's Permission Marketing in YIL (remember them?) - I put up a newsletter. For many years I slaved away maintaining my list through entourage groups - I should have my head examined, I know! But now all's well with dadamail and life is good!

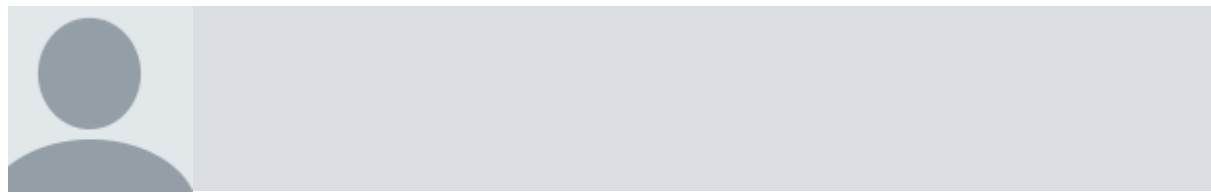
So, I understand how to do this in an underserved niche I think - But how do you stand out as a musician - my next test.....Maybe out of those 15,000 I can find 1,000 True Fans!

Thanks for putting this concept into concrete form! The Internet saves starving artists and keeps them off the street at the same time! Cuz y'know it takes a lot of work but yes it is so gratifying to actually communicate with your fans, read their emails, soak up that love!

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**Sean** • 9 years ago

My experience so far is this: I have been an independent musician for years. Traditional cd sales have been small but widespread thanks to places like cdbaby. Recently I decided to release my newest cd as a free download on my site. Within 2 weeks it had been downloaded more times than sales of my 3 cds on cdbaby combined. Yet no one had clicked my paypal donation link. So what is better? Having more copies (exposure) out there or having some form of (small) income? Right now I fall on the exposure side, I'm also giving away a lot of my sheet music. But I worry that giving things away in hope of attracting fans will diminish the likelihood that they will become "True Fans" and pay for things down the road.

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**Max Lowe** • 9 years ago

Wow. Kevin, this is just golden.

You've been able to put everything we've all been observing, thinking and talking about into clearer words than I've been able to find.

I rave about this article on my music marketing blog at [maxlowe.net](http://maxlowe.net). This will be the new model of sustainable arts and culture.

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**Slava Rubin** • 9 years ago

The 1000 True Fans concept is a simple and amazing one. I already mentioned it at the SXSW (South By SouthWest) panel I participated on; Knowing your Audience.

At [IndieGoGo.com](http://IndieGoGo.com) we are empowering artists to engage their fans. From fundraising to connecting with their 1000 True Fans, IndieGoGo was built with the independent artist in mind so they can DIWO (Do It With Others). You mentioned [Fundable.com](http://Fundable.com), but now with IndieGoGo, the artist can share their creative vision in own place and turn the 1000 True Fans passion in action.

Thanks again for the great article and I look forward to spreading the word.

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**Judith** • 9 years ago

Kevin, I will never think of it the same way again. Thanks! You (or listmates) might be interested in Steven Van Yoder's book, Slightly Famous

at [www.getslightlyfamous.com](http://www.getslightlyfamous.com). It helps you figure HOW to get 1,000 True Fans. It's aimed at businesses and self-employment in general rather than just creative endeavors.

Judith, who's slightly famous at homeschool conferences

Co-author “Homeschooling on a Shoestring” and “Educational Travel on a Shoestring”

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The reason for division by 100, is supposedly that these types of consultants tend to end

up being able to bill for 100 out of the available 240 working days a year.

So, taking this idea on a level, you can isolate your own tailored '1,000' figure based on some kind of financial target. To make it even more incentivising, this target should be based on profit.

Target Profit / average profit per item / average purchases per Fan = Number of True Fans required

Being English, I'll work in Pounds Sterling for an example and use as my target the alleged 'mean' wage here. I know of all I sell, I tend to make, say, a tenner margin per item (whether book, gig ticket, mp4, whatever). I also suspect that my True Fans would or do buy twice from me during a year. In this case, I need 1.5 thousand such followers to plough my own successful furrow:

$\text{£}30,000 / \text{£}10 / 2 = 1,500$  True Fans required

How much value do these points add for you, I wonder?

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**Tiara** • 9 years ago

Hi Kevin and everyone,

I got inspired by the discussion of the 1000 True Fans idea and I noticed a few people asking about hiring people to help you do the work of reaching out to the fans, particularly if you're more introverted and want to concentrate on your creative work.

I'm taking an Entrepreneurship class in university right now and our main project is to come up with a proposal and a plan for a business idea. My idea is a 1000-True-Fans inspired artist management and development service, which operates on a smaller scale and helps creators get the side admin tasks and connect to their fans better while having more time to create.

I would like to invite all of you to take my survey here:

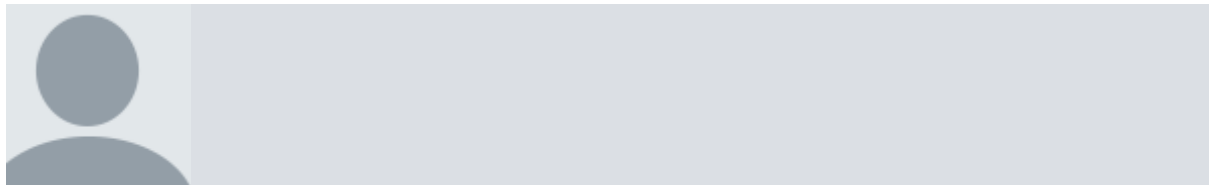
<http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?key=pEQ56W2Qsqh-TMjXxRub8JA&email=true>

No identifying information is collected. If you'd like a copy of the results, let me know.

Thank you!

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### **Resolving Digital Piracy** • [9 years ago](#)

This is the sort of marketing strategy that could use [Propagate Ltd](#) most effectively. By listing a work there and then directing “true fans” to bid on it, an artist could get his/her pay day and then sit back to watch true fans distribute the work to new fans world wide (when digital works are released via Propagate Ltd, duplication and redistribution rights are released to the public domain). Not only would the artist make a living, but the artist's work would be spread to a larger audience, and true-fans would be rewarded for doing so.

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**Cat** • 9 years ago

Interesting article. I agree to a certain extent. I used to run a fan club for David Cassidy and to this day, it's the "avid fans" that have kept him going in-between being in very well done projects.

However, he has a very split fan base of "Partridge Family" and "Post Partridge Family" fans. Sometimes he's catered too much to the PF fans by doing songs he said he'd never sing again, etc. Even though, it's the projects that have had nothing to do with the PF that have done the best. Finding a "balance" between nurturing your fans when you've become famous for something that's not really you is a very difficult position to be in though. So I try not to be overly critical about any of the choices he's made in his career. He's still a great talent and because he has been so nice to me and many of the die-hard fans, I'll always support him.

It's also true that many devoted fans will bring along family & friends and encourage others to listen to their favorite artist.

However, there are also some very "devoted" fans who become very "obsessive" over artist. They will become so "over-protective" and pounce on anyone who has any critical comments about the artist or their works and that will actually drive away some of the more "casual fans." I've also seen a few fans who have become very competitive towards other fans as they want the artist for just themselves and/or their small group of friends. Sometimes it becomes like a "clique" in Jr. High or H.S. This is when these type of fans will actually be hurting the artists career.

So I feel it's important that the artist makes it clear that they appreciate ALL their fans and that they appreciate both positive feedback and "Critical Critiques." Not every fan can afford the money and/or time to fly all over the place to see a performer. However they should feel just as welcome at a local performance and/or M&G, otherwise they may be "put off" if they are made to feel less important just because they're not rich, may have kids and a job - and a "real life" outside of enjoying a particular artists works. Otherwise, you'll see the number of "devoted fans" becoming less & less.

Still, I do agree that the artists should nurture those who do go to the extra effort to support them. It only makes sense.

Thanks for this very intersting & informative article.

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Thanks for this very interesting & informative article

- **Arjen Schat** • [9 years ago](#)

Hi Mr. Kelly,

Great post. The simplicity of this concept struck me when you talked about this, when we where at your place. Never acted on it though, it is about time I do something with it.

Thanks again for diner.

A white suit guy.

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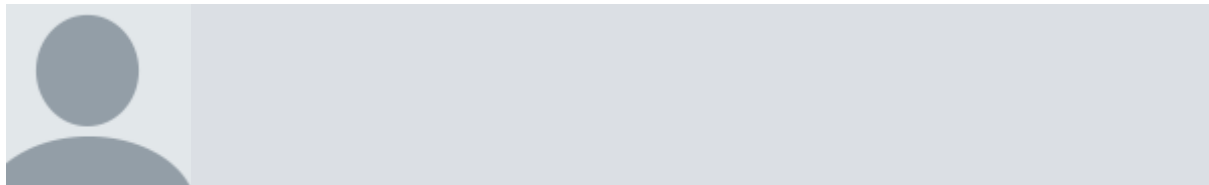
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**Jamie** • [9 years ago](#)

It might be good to stress the preferred consumption method of particular media types in your formula.

Music is totally virtual now. No need for a physical media distribution network. Movies are quickly moving in the same route.

However, the example with books is far too premature. The preferred consumption method is still ink-on-paper and that means that your costs to produce are going to much higher and the individual artist's take will be less than 10% of gross receipts (probably far less than that).

Maybe this will change in the future but it's not quite there yet.

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**Julian Merrow-Smith** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin,

Very interesting article.

I agree wholeheartedly with Keith Burtis, the web makes it possible to find those 1000 people who can support you doing *what you do* rather than *what you need to do to survive*. The necessity of living in a large city like Paris, London or New York; for a long time the only way to make your way as an artist, is no longer so important. I live in the middle of nowhere in a small ruined hamlet in Provence, I have one neighbor, (a sculptor) and a DSL line. I have managed to make a living now for ten years by selling my paintings and as the internet and blogosphere grew (I set up my first website in 1998) I gradually increased my 'fan base'. In 2006 I was fortunate to have the NYTimes published [a small article](#) on my 19th century meets 21st century life and I was given an energetic push over that 1000 base. I send out a new painting to three thousand people almost everyday of the week, I can experiment and always some people will come with me. As I mature(?) as a painter and my work changes I am confident that enough 'fans' will come with me to enable me to continue for the rest of my life (touch wood).

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**Stephen Hill** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin, this post should be called "THE TAO OF LONG TAIL."

What you've articulated here is a classic middle way. You must have some Buddhist DNA!

It's always amazed me that most of what you read about musicians seems to be focused on the exceptional success stories at the head of the power law curve, while those who inhabit "the flatline" as you call it, are left with their day jobs.

I've produced, published and advised independent musicians for 30 years, and the ones who are successful at making a living on their music have two things in common: they are realistic about where they exist in the music food chain, and they create and sustain themselves on *multiple small revenue streams*. These other revenue streams should be considered to round out the picture you paint above of direct support by users.

They include: *teaching*, *performing* on other artists live gigs and recording projects; *producing* and/or *engineering* other artists recording projects; *selling studio time* to other artists; *scoring* small films, multimedia and commercials; *building instruments*; *writing* for music periodicals, blogs and web sites; and for a few, *product endorsements*.

Then there is the whole category of "licensing income" which is only going to get bigger in the digital era: music publishing royalties from their composition copyrights (ASCAP/BMI/etc), residual payments for licensed use of their recorded music in films, television, and advertisements.

This is not an exhaustive list — there are many ways to operate if you want to make a living at music. For a more complete treatment of these ideas, please see my [long interview with independent musician Jamie Bonk](#).

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**Loribella** • [9 years ago](#)

Some of these comments from readers are asking how to go about getting those 1,000 true fans. It may not be as hard as you think. Watch a movie called “800 Cd’s”, google it. You’ll see. It works like magic, I’ve seen these people do it. It teaches you how to reach fans fast, in-person, and how to create quality relationships with them. You’ll see, as the artists try it, it changes things for them dramatically. Make sure to take good notes. Email me and let me know if it’s working for you, [loribell@xmission.com](mailto:loribell@xmission.com)

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[jordan\\_price](#) • 9 years ago

As a visual artist, I find this to be a very interesting and empowering concept. This true-fan ‘business model’ reminds me a lot of the independent rap artist from the Bay Area: Too Short, E-40, etc began their careers by “selling records outta the trunk”, bypassing major record labels and getting supported financially by local ‘true fans’.

I forwarded your article to all my artist friends.

Thanks!

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**michael** • [9 years ago](#)

simple, but possible... ;) but i don't think this plan inspire the artits, perhaps in 10 years, when the web 2.0 will get more popular.

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**JunaD** • [9 years ago](#)

Great idea. 1,000 fans is a great number. I'm not exactly sure how many we have. Maybe I should make a list.

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**Steve** • [9 years ago](#)

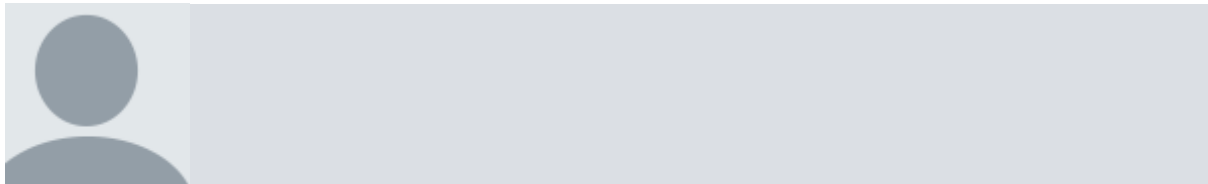
great post. i've been struggling on how to continue to cultivate a small but growing number of true fans. it's easy to overlook this very important group in pursuit of a super large crowd. i'm going to scale back, stay focused and continue to nurture this group.

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**Darragh** • 9 years ago

I found this article through Damien Mulley's blog at <http://www.mulley.net/2008/03/11/stations-of-the-cross-true-fans-and-micro-training-classes>.

It's a great read and an interesting proposition. I've seen it in action. Where the profit comes in I'm not sure, but the passion is there.

Well done. I too will be reading this again.

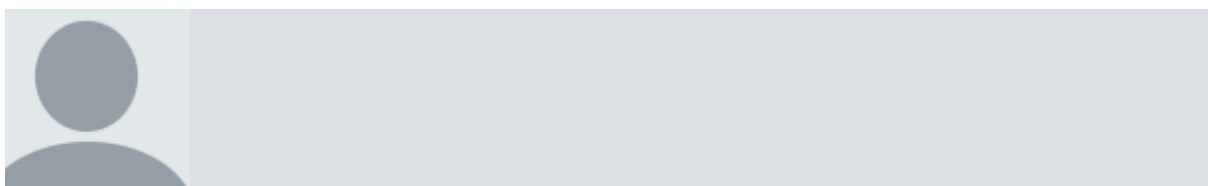
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**Baxter Orr** • 9 years ago

this has been my philosophy on being a living artist for a very long time, I am finally building it. I will get there, hell who needs 1,000 I would feel like fucking bill gates making 100k a year, I could go for 500 true fans! Great article, thanks!

Baxter

[www.baxterorr.com](http://www.baxterorr.com)

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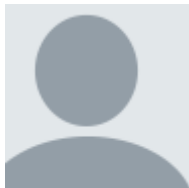
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**Cam Caldwell** • 9 years ago

Does an artist “sell-out” when they start to make money?

In this age of “file sharing” how do we pay the artist to survive another day and make more music?

In 1969 the great Ginger Baker, drummer of Cream parted ways with Eric Clapton and stated that Eric sold-out and became commercialized...in today's file sharing age would we have an “Eric Clapton”? Would we hear more from Ginger Baker?

How will we pay to keep the music going? There are costs to the musician to make the music. Whom will bear those costs?

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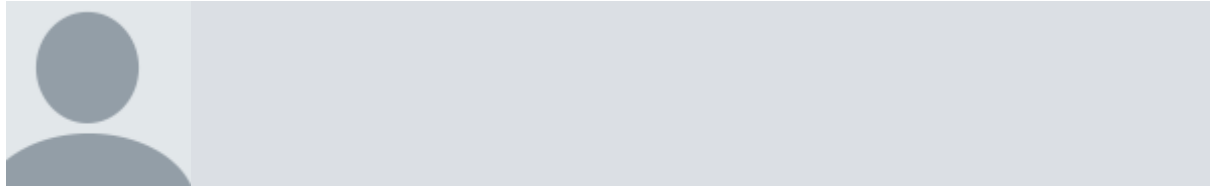
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**friarminor** • 9 years ago

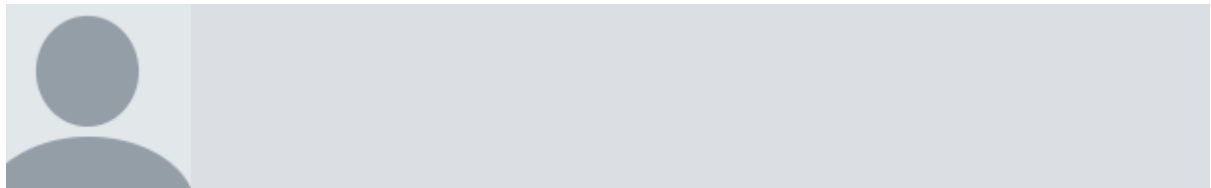
Isn't it time that 'true artistes' connect with 'true fans'. This I truly owe to the web because it became the vehicle for me to reach out to people whom I felt had no inkling that their work left a lasting imprint on me, be that books and most especially, music (as we've all been through that 'finding a role-model' stage). And in most cases, they are what we can term as 'obscure' and that no one seems to remember them.

For true artistes, 1 fan is value enough but I guess, 1,000 gets them over the hump to let them be true to themselves and continue being uniquely special in their own way.

Oh yes, count me in as a fan, kev!

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**NerdkoreDotCom** • 9 years ago

As always, content is king. One must not forget that getting 1000 people to like your stuff will take a lot of work (most likely many years) to build up. The main hurdle to overcome is consistency. Your fans must be constantly fed. Leave them without anything new and they vanish forever. It takes a LOT of work but is completely possible.

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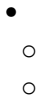
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Yes, Nerdcore, feeding fans is like feeding an animal. Constant care.

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Thanks for the very inspiring post. I'm a kinetic sculptor, animator and fan of Seth Godin, found this from his blog. I'm printing out most of this and nailing to the studio wall. I'm somewhere > 300 and < 400 (true fans) I suspect and have been at this for 15+ years, long tail indeed!

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**William** • 9 years ago

Alright KK. I'll sign up as one of your "founding 1000" :-)

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**alex** • 9 years ago

I really enjoyed reading this article. Very interesting theories. To everyone's success!

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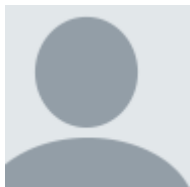
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**V11** • 9 years ago

This is good analysis for sure. I am going to summarize on my website, which is focused on providing indie musicians advice on how to manage their music in the digital age. This definitely furthers some of the thought out there regarding J. Coulton and others. Great article.

Matt

[www.VolumeEleven.net](http://www.VolumeEleven.net)

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**Sujewa** • [9 years ago](#)

Great article Kevin. I mentioned it as my DIY Filmmaker blog:

<http://diyfilmmaker.blogspot.com/2008/03/100-true-fans.html>

<ul>

<li>Sujewa</li>

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**Tricia Meyer** • [9 years ago](#)

I can completely see how this relates to my business! I had been thinking for a long time that although we still need to expand, we don't want to get too far away from our core, which is based on being a smaller business. Reading this, I can see that we need to grow

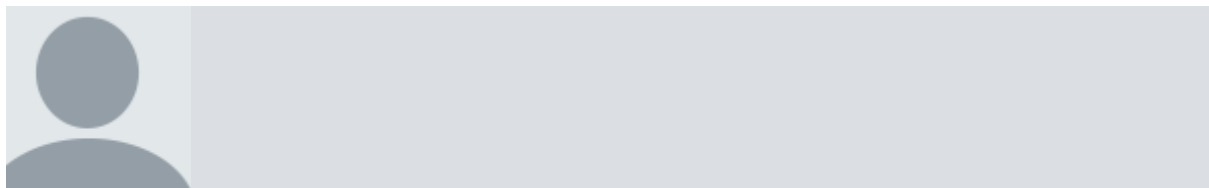
but not set our sights on being the biggest of companies. We can focus on the people that we do have and turn some of our lesser fans into true fans.

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**c.todd [phylum sinter]** • [9 years ago](#)

This article deserves note for anyone who aspires to be fully indendent and thrive on their creativity monetarily.

Personally, the idea of 1,000 true fans is probably close to where i am ethically... there are a few spots i've created online that allow people to donate as 'patrons' of my music, and included close to those tip jars are mentions of real payback or reward for their gratitude — usually in the form of mailed things or links to hidden albums i've got online.

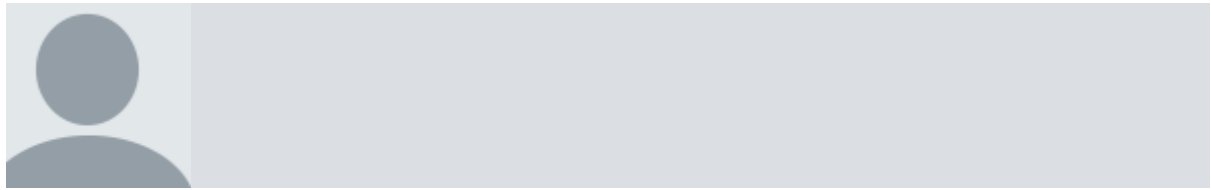
The one thing this article doesn't really expand upon is the amount of energy or time it can take to build that momentum and maintain it. As much as i love receiving fan letters, having my music propagate through the p2p and blogosphere and everything else it can get close to smothering; especially when the people gush and gush and included in this gush is suggestions of where to go next [because they'd totally buy something that sounded more blank with less blank blank]. Maybe i'm weak in that aspect, but i'm still hunting for a proper manager to filter some of the feedback and coordinate the appearance mechanisms a little more completely than i've been able to so far.

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**Daltonsbriefs** • 9 years ago

You have reached viral stage on this post, I think I've seen it mentioned in posts and twitts and such now more than any other post of the last week. Congratulations at least on that! You've struck a chord.

As for 1,000 true fans, I have to agree with a few of the commenters who suggest they would like to reach the magic 1,000 RSS subscribers so they know that each time they post they are opening possible communication with 1,000 daily readers.

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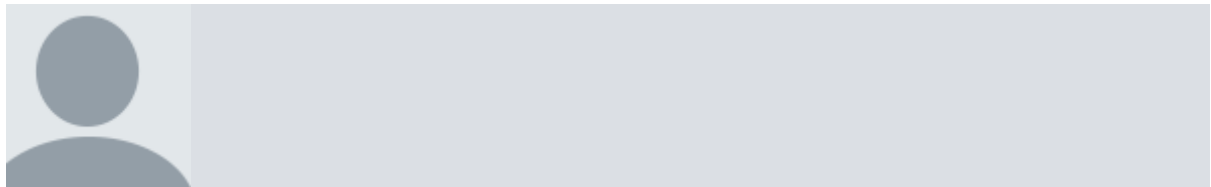
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**Christopher Bingham** • 9 years ago

We've been doing exactly what Jill Sobule is doing now since 1992, for the last six albums, though on a smaller scale - we don't need to pay Don Was \$50,000 (I'm guessing, but I bet I'm not far off) to do the producing.

I'm guessing we've got 300 true fans - but we're an eight peice band. Basically the music breaks even and I pay the band when we play. I get to produce a body of work and my wife makes the money that supports us. Without her, I'd still be back at album number 1 or doing something else that actually pays.

1000 true fans is a nice way to frame the goal. These days anything that makes this business more doable is a gift.

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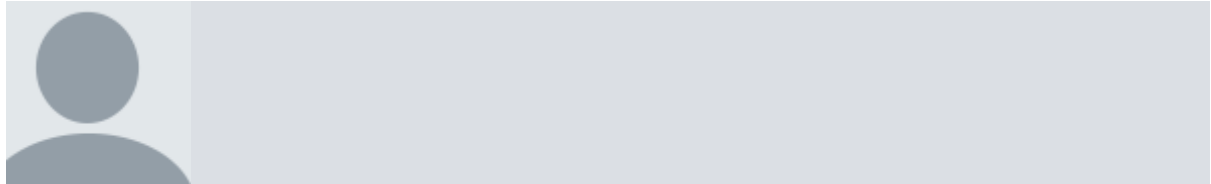
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**David Parrish** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin

A brilliant article. I'm going to publicise it widely.

Your advice to creative individuals is intelligent and appropriate. It fits in with my own experience and my own advice to the creative people I help in a professional capacity.

There is a free eBook for creative people who want to know more about cool business ideas, called 'T-Shirts and Suits: A Guide to the Business of Creativity'. It's online here: <http://www.davidparrish.com/dp/uploads/TShirtsAndSuitsAGuideToTheBusinessOfCreativityDavidParrish.pdf>  
It's free! And it's a Cool Tool !

Keep up the good work...

David

<http://www.davidparrish.com>

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**bowerbird** • 9 years ago

the main question seems to be:  
“so how do i find my 1000 fans?”

patience, grasshopper.

hopefully sooner rather than later,  
collaborative filtering will arrive to  
your rescue, finding your fans for you.

forget marketing. it will be seen as a  
kiss of death, a mark of a weak product.

go concentrate on your art.

-bowerbird



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**Navtej Kohli** • 9 years ago

I think this is based on the classic concept of customer servicing only the platform and mode has changed.. basically it works on the concept of C.A.R.I.N.G - that illustrates showing consistency, attentiveness, reliability, individualized, noteworthy and generous services towards customers so as you can maintain the long lasting relationship with them. I could get some fans if not all through this for my business. thanks



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**Don Lindsay** • 9 years ago

Writer Jack Vance has True Fans. How do we know? Well, they got together, and with the author's help, they re-edited and re-published his collective works. It only came to about 60 hardcover volumes. Check out:

<http://www.vanceintegral.com/>

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**doubt** • 9 years ago

I think one "really" needs to examine that 100.00 number to find the reality of this thesis.

Even a top 10 STAR with Millions of PR dollars spent on them each year dosent GARNER 100.00 a year from a typical fan.

Lets take Speilberg, Ford, Cruise, and a Lucas etc. etc. and lets use their MOVIE release schedule ... Even if they did release 10 movies a year, at 10.00 a ticket for a total of 100.00 per "fan" What consumer is it that can spend that 100.00 dollars an all 4 of these "stars of IP content"?

OK, lucas has hasbro toy licenses and so does Speilberg, but both didnt come from any long tail, only an all boys old media type network:)

How about Ford, or Cruise- tell me how many 100.00 action figures need to be sold for them to work outside of someone PAYING them to “act”.

You suppose we’re now expected to find another 100.00 a year to support how many “B C D” level list creators?

hmm

Again somthing smelly in this new free meme.

Only those made famous on the old media seem to believe it. Nine inch Who without Mtv and millions spent in the 1990s by an “industry”

Cottage industry and craft industry was a fine model for a world not “able to calculate” every lost cent, and every possible buyer” as in the last 50 years of the “old machine”

Nothing is ever free, everything has a cost or a effect. even Anderson had to admit it on Charlie Rose last night after 5 bumps....lol.

The Only thing I agreed with that he said is that GOOGLE is handing over Humanity to the machine....

It would be funny if we didnt already know that garbage in always produces garbage out.

no cost? we shall see....

doubting tomas

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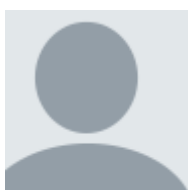
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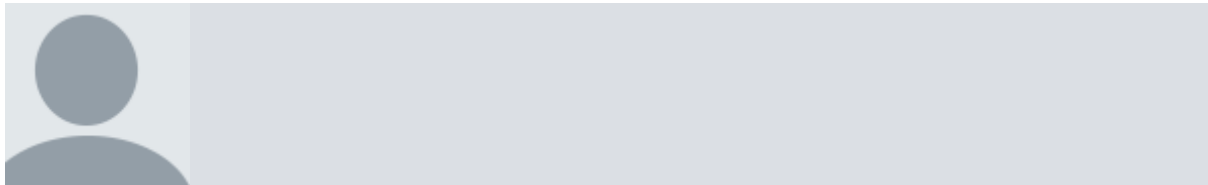
**Kevin Kelly** [doubt](#) • [9 years ago](#)

@doubt: You say “Even a top 10 STAR with Millions of PR dollars spent on them each year dosent GARNER 100.00 a year from a typical fan.”

That is right. A typical fan, even of big stars, does not spend \$100 per year on their fav. But True Fans do. Even Lucas and Speilberg have True Fans who buy every action figure, mug, and poster edition that comes out. They easily spend 100 bucks. The stars don’t have many True Fans, maybe no more than 1,000, but they do have millions of typical fans. I suggest not focusing on the typical fan and go after the True Fan.

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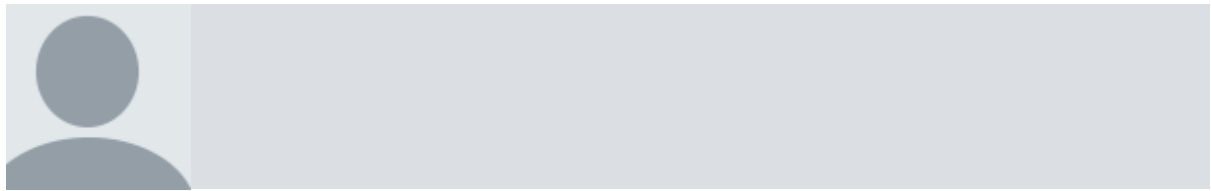
**DaveLucas** • 9 years ago

AmAZing post! Now I have to figure out how to apply the thousand-fan idea to my blog, <http://dave-lucas.blogspot.com> to build my blog into a monster. Is it even possible? One could blog for two or three years only to have a CORE of maybe 25 to 50 regular readers. How to increase that to THOUSANDS? Some lucky bloggers have been able to accomplish that: Blogs like Xu Jinglei, TechCrunch, Gizmodo, Michelle Malkin. But how do YOU or I accomplish that? Read. Network via MyBlogLog, MySpace, Facebook. Comment on other blogs. You have to make the effort, whether you spend a rainy evening on the PC or a day when you’re home sick with the flu... With a little luck, some talent and persistence, you may slowly but surely build up your own personal legion of fans... or not.

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**vaspers aka STR8 SOUNDS on the** • [9 years ago](#)

I always tell myself and other musician clients and fans, “You don’t want transitory, massive Digg-like traffic hits on your stupid shit. You want to cleverly poise and promote your stupid shit to key fans who understand your message and aesthetics. Loyal intelligent fans who have good connections or lots of smart energy.”

You seek the music aficiandos and elite change agents, plus regular fans with COLLECTOR MENTALITY who will seek out every fart you emit, and pay any price for it.

But give most of your stupid shit away for free, to generate buzz and addictive behavior modules.

STR8 SOUNDS Therabusive Noise Carnival

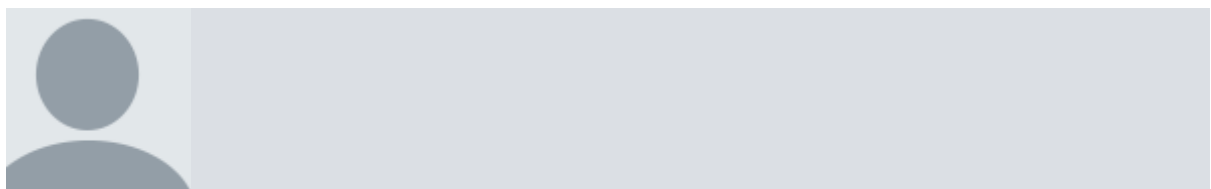
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**Dan** • [9 years ago](#)

Excellent post.

Agree completely that the trick with the long tail, is to focus on relationships with your fans and building them organically.

While with long tail an artist likelihood of being a super star is still as low as its always been, the chances of making a living have vastly increased. Its a lot easy to produce,

record, and distribute your music right now then at any point before. The trouble is finding out how to make it work.

Dan

<http://www.VolumeEleven.net>

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**Randy Chertkow** • [9 years ago](#)

Thank you for this thought-provoking article. It managed to turn what looks like a nearly impossible situation into an achievable goal. As a musician, I keep trying to wrap my head around the concept of trying to sell something that, honestly, I'd rather that my people traded freely in order to get more fans.

One of the earlier posts asked how to get those fans in the first place, which is an excellent question. That got me thinking, what about blending this idea with Fred Wilson's "freemuim" concept discussed in Chris Anderson's recent "Free" article? I don't want to write a long entry here in this comments section, so I wrote about it in my own blog here <http://www.indiebandsurvivalguide.com/blog/>

Very thought provoking article!

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**manasclerk** • 9 years ago

Great thought. The Guerrilla Marketing has argued this: cut the middlemen — screw Amazon and the other Big Guys — and go directly to people. If you can provide something for a global audience, then that 1,000 becomes a very small percentage.

I think that there is still a place for joining together, trying to get your 100.000 lesser fans to be one of mine, and vice versa.

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**David Courtier-Dutton** • 9 years ago

Great article Kevin and bang in line with our philosophy here at Slicethepie.

We are an intermediary between artists and fans that enables any artist who can pre-sell copies of their album to raise \$30,000 to go and record and release it. The artist keeps 100% of their publishing/copyright and the fans get the album plus a share of the sales proceeds.

The model ensures that the artist makes money from the first copy of the album sold and the fans begin to profit if over 1,000 copies of the album are sold.

14 artists have raised the money in the past 7 months and the first album financed this way (by The Alps) is released on 10 March.

We use Tunecore (above) for digital distribution - and they are great!

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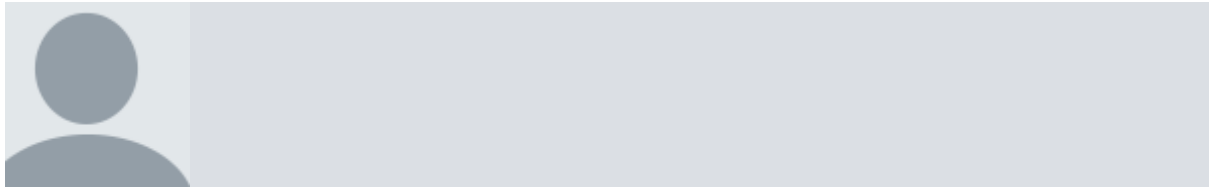
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**Andrew Munro** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin,

What an inspiring piece. I really enjoyed Anderson's Long Tail and you seem to have captured a tangible way forward for artists, be they musicians, photographers, writers or whatever. It's a great concept, "1,000 True Fans".

thanks very much

Andrew

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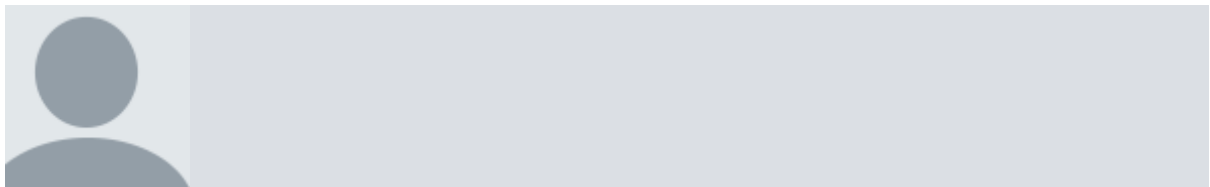
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**Gareth Ochse** • [9 years ago](#)

To Kevin and others,

The issue of how to help creators in the long-tail market and monetize their work is exactly what we set out to address with [Buzzfuse.com](http://buzzfuse.com) - a marketing service for blogs, music, photos, and flash.

Buzzfuse was created by myself (a cartoonist & photographer) and other creatives because we needed something powerful to help us both market and monetize our work,

wherever it was hosted. I'm very pleased to say that nearly 2 years later, our system is in beta but it works well - we are driving traffic at a fraction of the cost that Google Adwords can, and we are paying real money (either through our rewards program or on a pay per download basis) to our premium subscribers.

The fan model is key to us. We try to make it really easy for a creator to 'collect' fans. These fans in turn get immediate notifications of anything the creator produces, and also get discounts on any premium items released. So far, the system works well and feedback suggests we're onto the right approach.

We'd appreciate anyone to go out there and test [buzzfuse.com](http://buzzfuse.com) - feel free to email me [garthochse at gmail dot com](mailto:garthochse@gmail.com) with your feedback or simply invite me into your circle on Buzzfuse. It works (but we're young and learning so please feel free to suggest features/improvements that you, as a creator or fan would like).

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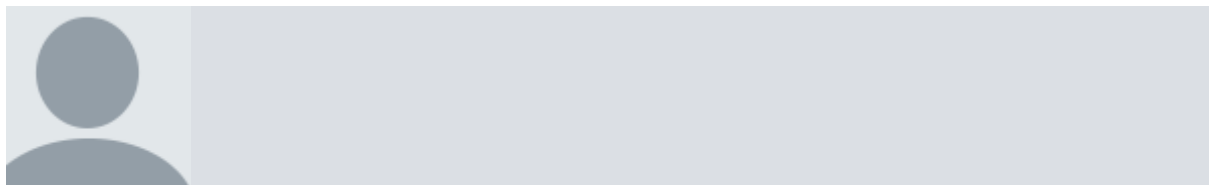
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**Zoltan** • [9 years ago](#)

Great post indeed, thanks and congratulations!

One point though and sorry if others made it before.

Actually it may not be so easy for an up-and-coming artist to create content that even a die-hard fan would spend \$100 on over a year.

Take a musician as an example.

Just by a rough theoretical calculation, content that is worth \$100 would call for 150-170 new tracks on iTunes. 10+ different CDs via CDBaby. All within a single (!) year. Of course, you can also rely on concert tickets, merchandise and stuff, but still, it may not be easy.

Just think about your favourite band or artist.

When did you really spend \$100 on them in a year?

I'm just thinking out loud.

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**Josh** • 9 years ago

Hey Kevin, great post. I also think this is very applicable to the world of standup comedy and it reminds me of what comedian Doug Stanhope has been doing (on a slightly smaller level).

He's realized that it's easier for him to play in bars (where he can keep the tix fee) and draw true fans than to go the traditional comedy club route where he would get a flat fee. Plus, the crowds he draws are way better I'm sure.

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**Alexa Weber Morales** • 9 years ago

This is inspiring. I used to be a magazine editor penning editorials to 100,000 readers, and I used to joke that I already knew what it felt like to be famous since 100,000 readers (or at least those who read the editorials and noticed the top of the masthead) knew my name. Just the other day it occurred to me how successful I would be if I had 100,000 fans of my music. The irony is, even with 100,000 fans, I would be far from

famous. Frankly, it would be perfect — no paparazzi, no plastic surgery! Now you’ve made me see that perhaps I can set my sights on 1000 (and in truth I have about 500 True Fans right now) and be closer to my goal than I imagined.

Thanks for this!

—Alexa

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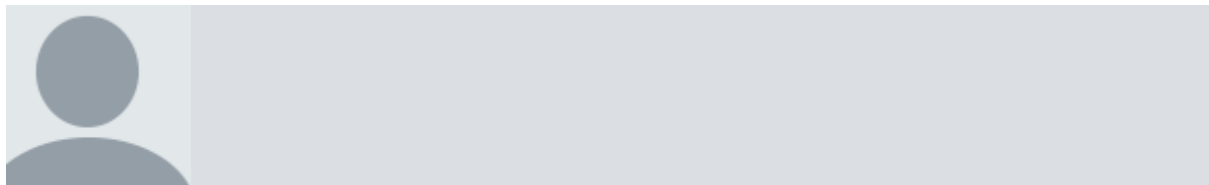
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**Michael Jensen** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin —

Great summation of something I’ve got some data on, that I addressed in a scholarly article, called [The Deep Niche](#) (Journal of Electronic Publishing), regarding our experiences at the National Academies Press.

A large proportion of the publications of the Press are exceedingly small-market publications — things that could not be affordably “marketed” in traditional terms. But many of our publications are sustainable because we’ve found the “1,000 true fans” of some abstruse topic.

While you’re mostly talking about artists — writers, artists, musicians — the same can also be true about ideas, or memes, or scientific conclusions.

In a world of a billion Web users worldwide, there’s a remarkably resilient market of interest in specific, pertinent content that is of use, and of interest to, a thousand (or ten thousand) readers who care enough to want the final publication. Making the material openly available means they find us, and can browse, and can make use of the content.

Thanks for your smart distillation of the functional application of the phenomenon. It may lead to some new economies, and new opportunities for creative expression, of small-market (and large-market) ideas.

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**robert** • [9 years ago](#)

In Walden, Thoreau writes: “I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but I had not made it worth any one’s while to buy them. Yet not the less, in my case, did I think it worth my while to weave them, and instead of studying how to make it worth men’s while to buy my baskets, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them.”

For an artist, art is that thing which simply must be done. I have experimented with a number of lifestyles and have schemed various schemes to make my art connect with money, but the result has always wasted my time and demeaned my art.

After 20 years of making art, what works best for me is doing the work without thought of consequence (neither money nor celebrity) and keeping the livelihood entirely separate.

It’s possible to find deep satisfaction in a “day job.”

I’m afraid there’s a prevalent attitude that a job must be a chore to be escaped at earliest opp, which is why so many artists and wannabes dream of instant wealth—a mindset which results in much conformist art.

They dream of the golden key which will unlock the door to a life of everlasting leisure.

In the meantime they dabble in get-rich-quick schemes and whittle down their art to the lowest common denominator.

Not everyone, of course.

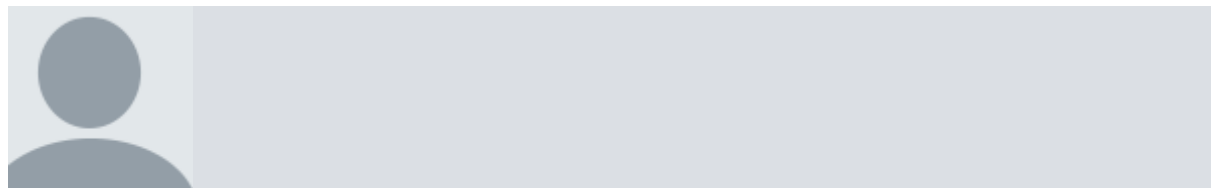
And not me. (OK, maybe once.)

Least of all you.

But I suspect those people are out there—they might even be reading this article!—with dollar signs in their eyes and a hankering for making YOU their next True Fan....

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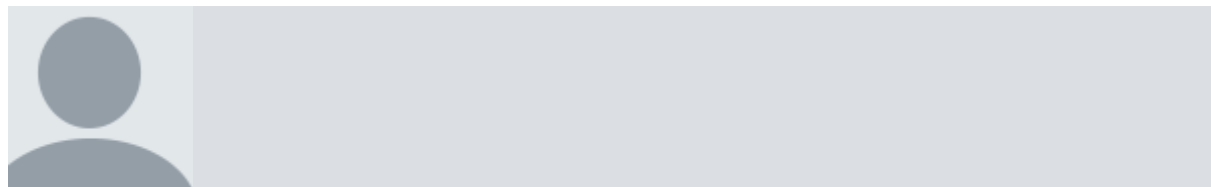


**Kevin Kelly** • [9 years ago](#)

Thanks to Swen for the data on Coulton. I am very eager to get more examples of those who are doing this.

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**jess** • [9 years ago](#)

Working on our version. <http://www.artemiseternal.com>

It's a hard, hard, hard journey that is also long as all hell.

I hope everyone who loves the “1000” idea here can and will find an artist and/or project to get involved with. Talk is cheap. ;-) Do something. Move and be moved.

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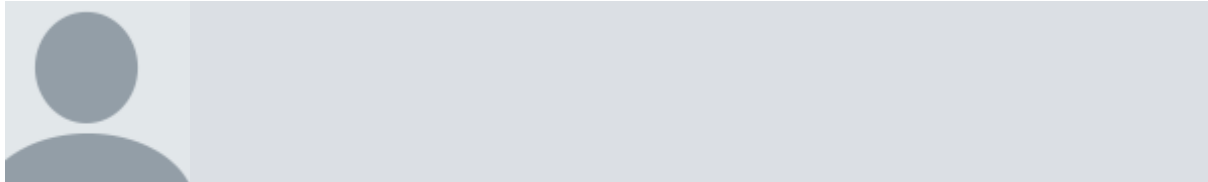
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**Maynard Handley** • 9 years ago

Kevin, you omit mentioning one obvious point --- don't get involved with large corporations who are positively hostile to true fans.

(1) We all know the sad on-going story of fan-fic.

(2) Just because you have true fans, doesn't mean they're actually in a position to send you any money. I happen to like a number of (on-American) artists from my youth in the early 70s. Has the long tail helped me? Not yet. In spite of the fact that it would cost EMI nothing to make this material available for purchase via Amazon or iTMS, it's not there. So these artists I like are making nothing, as is EMI --- a lose-lose situation which EMI appears to have zero interest in rectifying. I've no idea why they imagine that a middle-aged man with fixed music tastes is going to spend money on this week's manufactured rap band rather than the tastes of his youth, but that seems to be their strategy for getting rich.

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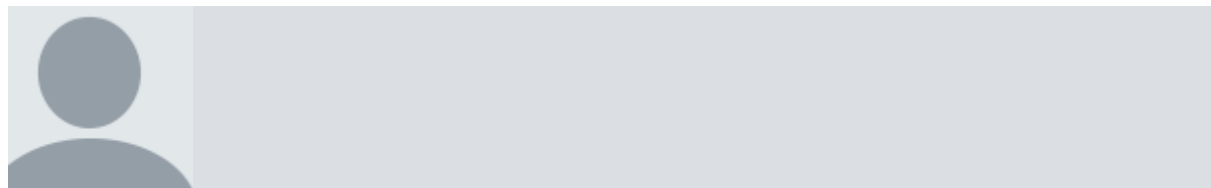


**Paul Watson** • 9 years ago

Fantastic article - as an artist I've been trying to tackle the problem of making a living as an artist in a long tail economy on my blog, and your article has really helped.

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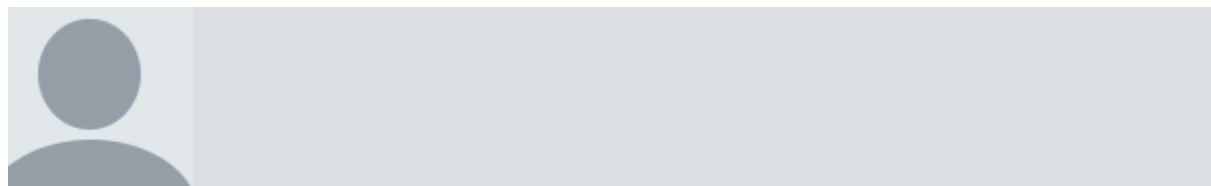


**samantha Lynn** • [9 years ago](#)

Hm, this is something I wrestle with in my professional artistic life a lot and this is the first time I've seen it boiled down to achievable-seeming numbers like this; thanks, I needed that!

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**c.todd [phylum sinter]** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin,

Fantastic insight here... and it certainly has hit quite a few heads [which i'm glad to see!]. 1,000 seems like a solid, reasonable number to me. In my chosen field (music and performance) it is definitely viable but perhaps still difficult to maintain on my own.

I'm thankful for the 'patrons' i've had so far, have a donation button on my official page and myspace page that hints at special gifts for those that donate a bit more than postage would allow, and even have a few things hidden online that i send them as a way of showing gratitude for their support. Though i'm far from a comfortable living at the moment, the inroads i'm making are in line with your thoughts here.

The one stumbling block i see in this model [even as evidenced by this page] is that there are simply SO MANY people with creative aspirations these days, and the number continues to grow. I can foresee a point where everybody with access to a computer believes they should be nurturing some outlet, and thus expect their desire to result in financial gains too.

If everybody is fostering product-involved-genius, how do you justify your want for income? Where does the money ultimately come from if it's just exchanging hands in support of one another?

As much as i enjoy the idea of being completely independent, i've enjoyed the 'old-model' way of label-side patronage for musicians more and feel it may still be the best way to kickstart one's work towards artistic feasibility. My output as Phylum Sinter has involved about 12 independent labels so far [including compilation releases] and i'm still grateful for the offers to release with those that believe in my work enough to let me realize what i want to release without oppressive creativity shaping tactics on their part.

The one-to-one contact involved in keeping my fanbase alive has been an inspiration on it's own, but maintaining it has a few implications for me — perhaps i'm not strong enough to take that much input directly and not have it influence what i had in mind?

Thanks for this one, i'm bookmarking it and will be re-reading it as i conspire in the near future.

Best regards,  
c.todd  
phylum\_sinter

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**Tough Customer** • [9 years ago](#)

Funny you should mention it. This is a large part of the business model we work on...

SITE:

<http://toughcustomer.org/>

SOUNDS:

<http://toughcustomer.org/wire>

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#### ALSO ON THE TECHNIUM

● **Adam** • [9 years ago](#)

Personally I'm a bit sick of hearing about the long tail but this article got me thinking. 1000 seems like a good number yet to find 1000 you typically need to be seen by 100,000 or more don't you? Any thoughts on how to get 1000 more quickly than building an audience of lessor fans in the range of 100 K?

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**Trace Thornton** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin,



Outstanding and infinitely inspiring post. Based on your ideas, I've started a fan-based initiative to publish a biography of 90s alt-rock giants The Smashing Pumpkins.

Details here:

<http://www.fundable.com/groupactions/groupaction.2008-03-05.4170411700/view?searchterm=>

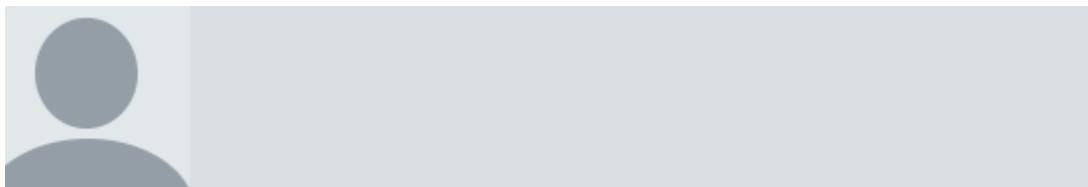
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**Kevin Kelly** [Trace Thornton](#) • 9 years ago

Trace, good luck on your fan-funded biography of the Smashing Pumpkins. Let me know how it goes.

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**charlottebabb** • 9 years ago

True fans look for the thing that lights their tree. I am a true fan of Joni Mitchell, Terry Pratchett, Saffire, and other artists, who have no relationship to anyone else—no kind of demographic or other statistic.

only a 1000 of the millions of folks out there...what a concept!

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**Kristi** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin, found this post through Wil Wheaton's blog, and I have to say it's brilliant.

The 1,000 True Fans model is the perfect compromise between endless (and near-impossible... and do you really want that anyway?) striving for (cough) Britney-level crazed stardom, or toiling for years in Ramen-noodle-fueled obscurity.

I think you inspired a lot of people with this one. Thank you.

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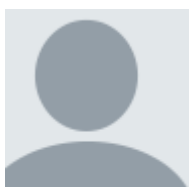
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**Guest** • [9 years ago](#)

I love this concept. It give me hope that I will be able to make even a modest amount of income with the art I am going to begin selling. Thanks for expressing this so articulately and providing real examples of how this can work.

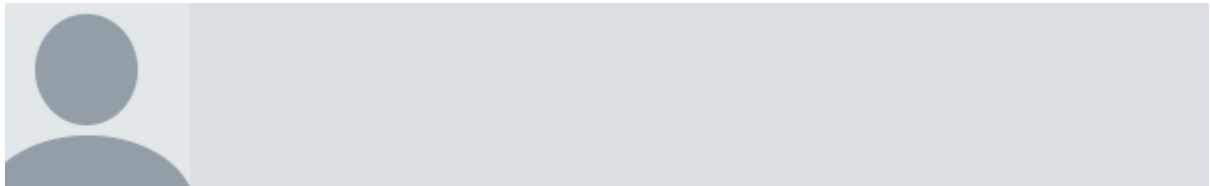
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**Bud Bilanich** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin:

This is a great post. Thanks for writing it. I love the idea of 1,000 true fans.

Your post has changed my thinking about how to build my career and life success on line coaching business.

All the best,

Bud Bilanich

The Common Sense Guy

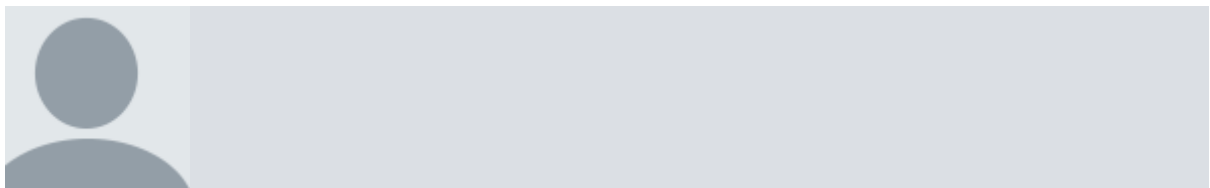
[www.SuccessCommonSense.com](http://www.SuccessCommonSense.com)

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**Anima** • [9 years ago](#)

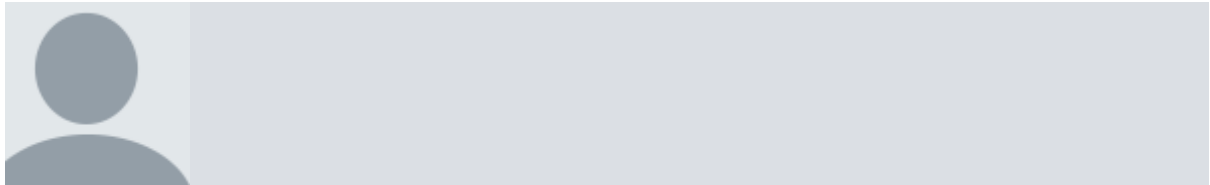
Excellent post. In the last year and a half I started seriously pursuing a career as a visual artist and have already acquired several true fans. This post is a great encouragement to keep going personally and helpful for anyone else whose just starting out.

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**Peter Wells** • [9 years ago](#)

We never put it quite this way, but the “1000 True Fans” was on our minds when we founded TuneCore. We wanted to give artists a way to monetize that relationship, and the best way was to break down barriers to the digital shelves. With iTunes now the 2nd largest music seller in the world, of any kind, it’s a place to send those 1000 folks.

Because we don’t take any %, we don’t exploit the long tail, we let the artist exploit it. Isn’t that the only fair way?

—Peter

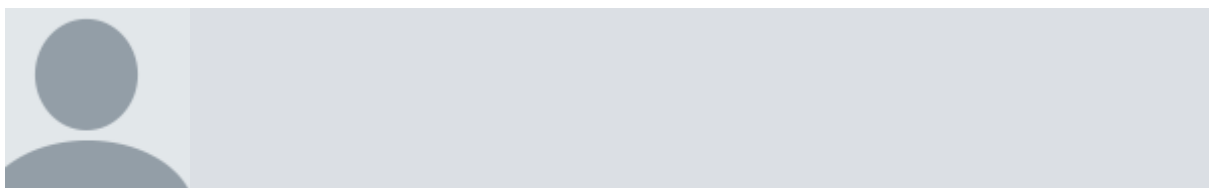
[peter@tunecore.com](mailto:peter@tunecore.com)

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**V/Vm** • [9 years ago](#)

Great article, i have been doing this style of thing for the last 4 years (of the 13 years i have been running a label). Totally abandoning the distribution deal i had and going it completely alone.

My own magic figure is lower than 1000 but i break even on a yearly basis and am free to create what the hell i want when i want it. A lot is given away for free, for example the whole of 2006 i worked on a project where each day i made and gave away audio for free online giving away over 600 tracks in this time. That is an unprecedented project even now.

Other releases are pre-sold directly to the people i know are interested totally bypassing traditional forms of distribution completely.

I also achieve this with no press anymore because i send no promos out and people just find what i do via online search and links which build up from those who support what i do.

Ultimate freedom is the way forward with no link to the dying industry and other social networking waste of times like myspace, facebook, iTunes and last fm. Although these can spread the word they also eat into your creative time it's a balancing act. Also charging for MP3s is laughable certainly in the way iTunes run their business in a per track model.

The main thing is the work and being able to work, do the work and don't worry about distribution. Ultimately it's all about what you create.

Support total independence.

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**A.J.** • [9 years ago](#)

Thank you for the words of inspiration.

It is difficult to succeed as an artist, or in my case, a fan making the case of becoming an artist. I feel that most of my peers (DJs and musicians) have this belief that the only way to make an artist living is to 'sell out' to what the majority is demanding.

That ideology has produced the likes of MTV or anything on YouTube with over a million hits. So much talent has fallen into groupthink when there were so many that could have done the 1,000 True Fan model and managed to live comfortably.

Since selling out to make a blockbuster is beyond my integrity (or skills perhaps?), making 1000 true fans will definitely be a plausible goal as I dream of getting to do what I love to do for people that find it lovely!

I once heard someone say (I think it was Dan Dennet at a TED conference) that the secret to happiness is to give your life to a cause greater than your self...something along those lines...

-A.J.

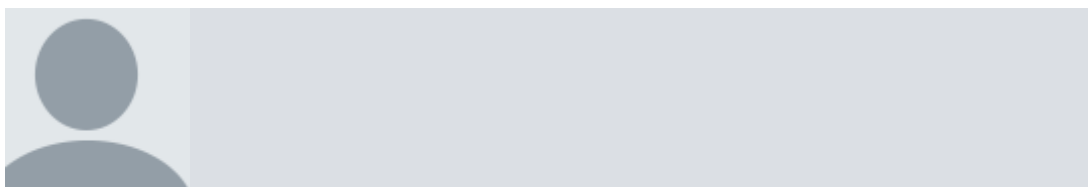
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**Kevin Kelly** [A.J.](#) • [9 years ago](#)

A.J., Whether it was Dan Dennet or not, it's good advice:

“The secret to happiness is to give your life to a cause greater than your self.”

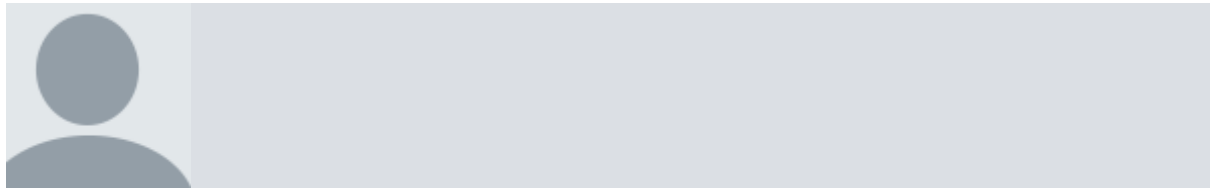
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**Greg Stolze** • 9 years ago

It's interesting (at least to me) that I arrived at my current 'fiscal plan' nt by having a vision and setting a goal, but by backing into it. Why release 'Meatbot Massacre' over the internet? Because the hobby game magazines that might have considered it were dead. Why free? Because I didn't want the hassle of building an online store. Why ransom it? I knew about how much I'd get paid, one time, if I'd placed it in one of those defunct magazines. I put a greed premium on that and asked for it. It was all a process of making sausage out of scraps.

Turns out, sausage is delicious.

Something I keep coming back to, when contemplating the changing landscape of publishing and creativity, is a William Gibson riff in 'Spook Country.' One character is an ex-pop star turned spy\* and in one conversation, someone points out that the time when there could BE pop stars was less than a hundred years. The technology had to be at a certain, very unstable point: Advanced enough to make recorded music, but still so clumsy and fussy and primitive that professionals were required to operate it. That expertise allowed the record companies to exist, because releasing a record was too expensive or time-consuming to do on a lark. Now, that's no longer so. To get a really good, professional-quality recording mass produced on a CD released into Wal-Mart... okay, sure, that's still a job of work. But so many listen to mp3s that can't even capture a professional degree of clarity, and they don't care. Why should the artist?

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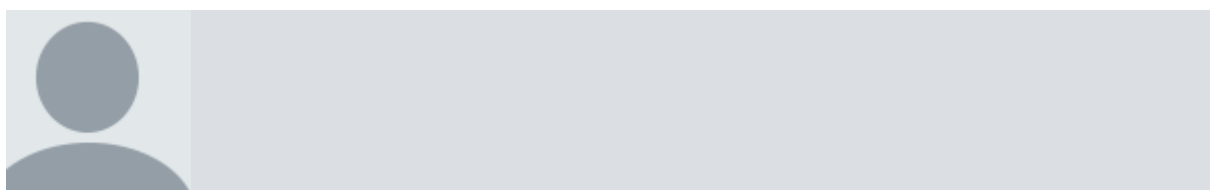
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**Steve Purdham** • 9 years ago

Fantastic post Kevin, you've clearly hit a chord with lots of people, and explained the idea in a really clean way - you make it sound so simple! As a lifelong music fan and founder of We7 which is all about countering piracy, championing and paying new artists I really enjoyed reading this and the enthusiastic response you've had. The True Fans have always been out there acting as motivated evangelists, I hope that changing models in the arts and the online world means these die-hard enthusiasts get the thanks they deserve. For all the upheaval in the music industry, this is the sort of positive outcome I'm delighted to hear being discussed.

Steve Purdham, CEO, [www.we7.com](http://www.we7.com)

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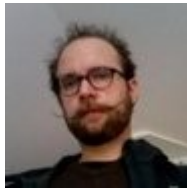
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**[Martin Olsson](#)** • 9 years ago

Good article. I've been thinking along the same path for a while, but I haven't even dared think the thought of giving up my full-time job to actually try it. I run a blog, and I create music, but so far it hasn't paid off. I'm running a few small Google AdSense text-ads, but the traffic on my site is really low so I make next to no money (\$30 in half a year). Google AdSense is obviously not intended for strange little blogs about moustache wax and fixed gear bicycles. A tip-jar would probably work better. Out of the 100 or so people who actually visit the blog every day maybe one can become a True Fan?

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**[bowerbird](#)** • [9 years ago](#)

john sinclair, the detroit poet, has espoused this identical idea for a while now (10 years?), based on actual experience from the ground up (which means it triangulates your perspective), but he pegs the number at *2000*...

so artists, don't give up if "it's not working" when you hit 1000! because the first thousand makes it that much easier to get the second...

-bowerbird



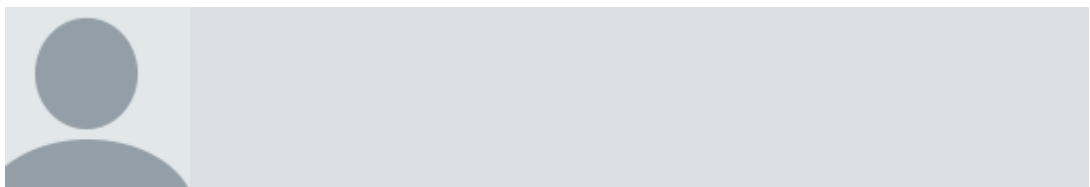
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**Kevin Kelly** [bowerbird](#) • [9 years ago](#)

Bowerbird, thanks for the tip on John Sinclair, whom I had not encountered yet.



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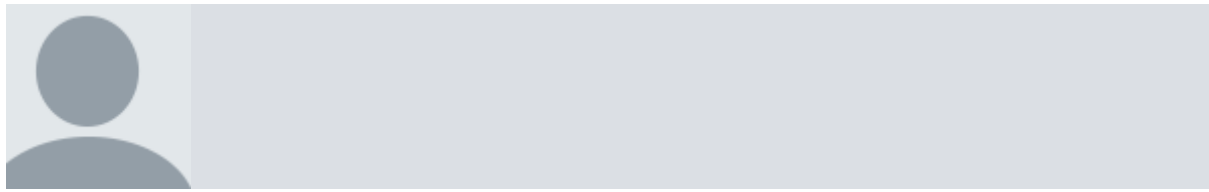


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**T. Barnes** • 9 years ago

This is a great post and I shared it on my blog. I've been thinking about it since it first posted and here's one thing that comes to mind: I'm a massage therapist and I've worked freelance for almost two decades. The third year was the year I was in the black, and that was the year that my client base reached about 1,000. That was the year I quit the day job.

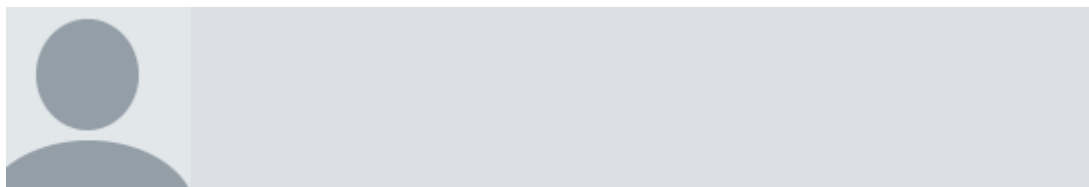
Now, 1,000 folks didn't see me all at once and I certainly didn't work every day but I always made my rent without a problem. Each client had a different rhythm. Some only saw me in crisis-mode. Some saw me weekly. Some only worked with me during birthdays or holidays. The exact number of clients was a bit fluid and many came and went.

It's worth noting that I launched my practice pre-Internet, but I still think you're on the money. Although, I wouldn't say my clients are fans although they must think I'm pretty cool or they wouldn't return.

I guess the point is that in reference to your topic, the same concepts hold true for small service oriented business and freelancers like myself.

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**Kevin Kelly** [T. Barnes](#) • 9 years ago

T. Barnes, that's a fantastic piece of data. Seems to work even in the service field as well.

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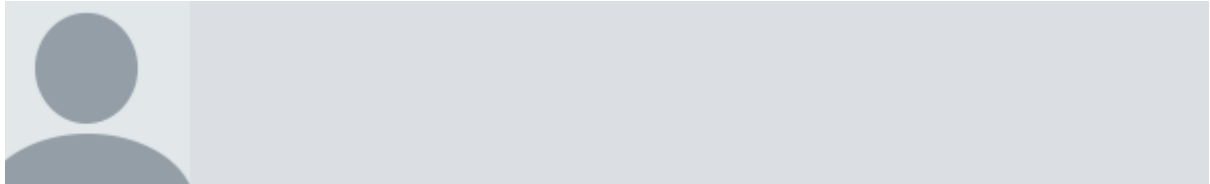
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**Mike Dunford** • [9 years ago](#)

I'm pretty overwhelmed really. In a good way. I'm a designer and entrepreneur. I have several projects in the oven and I'm constantly thinking about how to improve, make more authentic, reach out on an emotional level, with every venture. Thank you for inspiring a new level of thought and promise.

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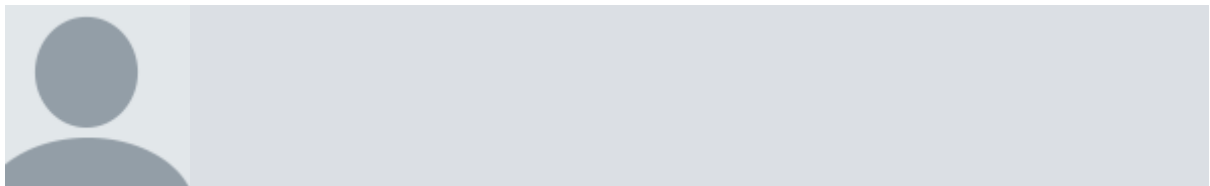
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**RichR** • [9 years ago](#)

It strikes me that some writers and publishers already pursue a similar idea through cultivating "true fan" booksellers through review copy mailings, author's personal email lists and things like that. I know a couple of smart publishers who keep individual booksellers in the loop about writers we've reviewed or blurbed before, and some go above and beyond by occasionally getting new writers to us whose work they think we might enjoy (based on those earlier reviews) and hence sell to many, many "casual fans." But most just take the review and run, pursuing the holy grail of high-profile TV show appearances, and discounting the importance of frontline booksellers who can handsell

50 to 100 copies of writer X's new book (and keep handselling past the first 15 minutes of TV fame).

You find 50 true fan booksellers and they'll find you 5000 sales. You build on that and pretty soon those 50 booksellers are accounting for solid, dependable backlist sales and an ever-growing frontlist success.

I love this idea. It's a great way to reframe the way we think of our businesses. Thanks, Kevin.

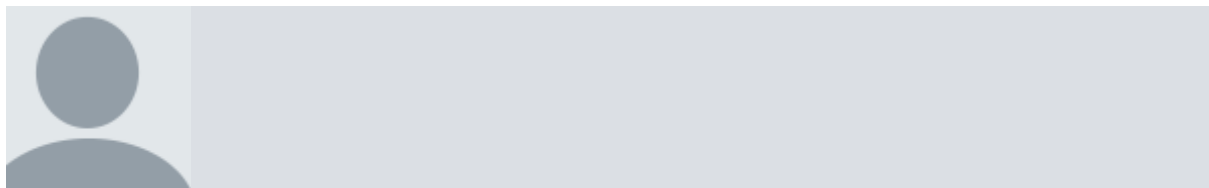
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**BrentD** • [9 years ago](#)

This is an excellent post. You have inspired me to beleive once again that success is possible.

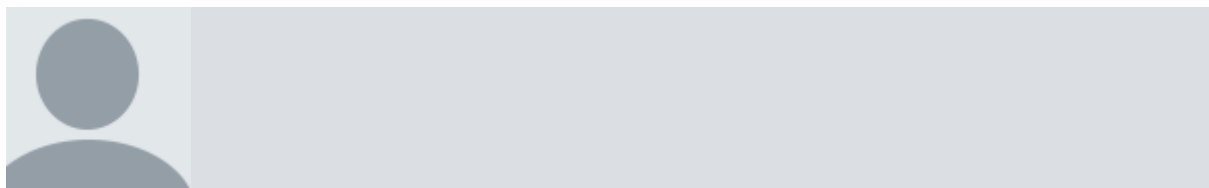
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**Courtney Act** • [9 years ago](#)

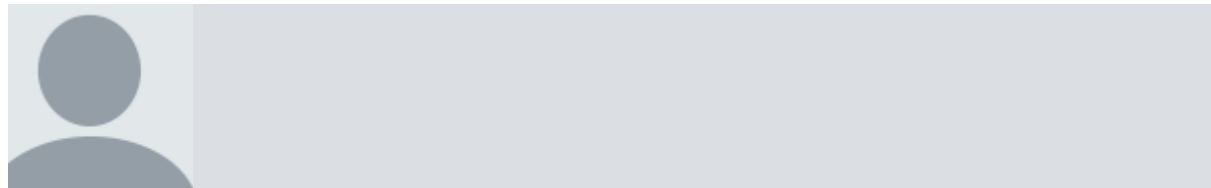
I am an Australian Singer who has just launched an interesting concept to fund and promote my new EP. I have a mosaic image divided into lots of little pieces, each one can be purchased for AUD\$10 each. Each purchase gets to include a hover over message with their piece and they get a limited edition copy of the EP when it comes out!

I am interested to hear any feedback on the concept!

Thanks

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**Madeline F** • [9 years ago](#)

For visual artists out there looking for more ways to get the word out about themselves: I once found an artist because someone had made a LiveJournal icon of their work and put the artist's name in the icon info. I thought it was a neat bit of art and wanted to see the rest, and searched for the artist, and found that she only showed her work at a physical gallery in Tennessee. Might have bought something otherwise. Anyway, the thought is, perhaps if you make icons/avatars of some of the neatest bits of your pictures and release them under a free attribution license, you'll get totally random fans.

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**Chris Baggott** • 9 years ago

Check out Jambase [www.jambase.com](http://www.jambase.com) Dan Heimbrock told me exactly this number back in 2001 and they have built a fantastic business helping musicians do exactly this. Beyond Art and Music this theory has a lot of application to business as well. The Long Tail is alive and well in the mundane world of Dry Cleaners and gift shops too.

A lot of people think that the long tail only is applicable to dispersed geography. The reality is that it's about being able to find small niche audiences. Home Depot is on the far left, Joe's Hardware in Greenfield Indiana is towards the far right. But thanks to the Web Old Joe can compete fair and square with the big box through blogging, email etc....

Joe actually has an advantage....he lives in Greenfield.

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**Kevin Kelly** [Chris Baggott](#) • 9 years ago

Chris Baggott,

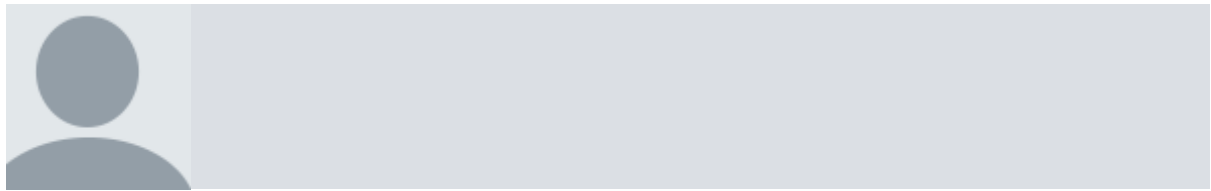
I'll have to check out Dan Heimbrock. Thanks for the pointer.

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**Tyson Yerex** • 9 years ago

Hey Kevin,

Really enjoyed this article. I play in a Canadian based band just starting our career in music and the article has given me lots of new ideas about ways we could potentially generate income to keep our creative dreams alive.

On a similar note: I'm sure you must have seen how Nine Inch Nails recently used their "true fans" to almost instantly sell out 2500 copies of their Ultra Deluxe Limited Edition packages of their new record for \$300 a piece. Obviously they are an established act who sit a lot higher up the long tail, but still, they used their "true fans" to cut themselves a \$750000 paycheck in an era where many formerly successful bands are fumbling to find a way to convert their popularity back into cash.

Anyways, looking forward to reading more of your articles.

Cheers,

Tyson

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<http://www.acresoflions.com>

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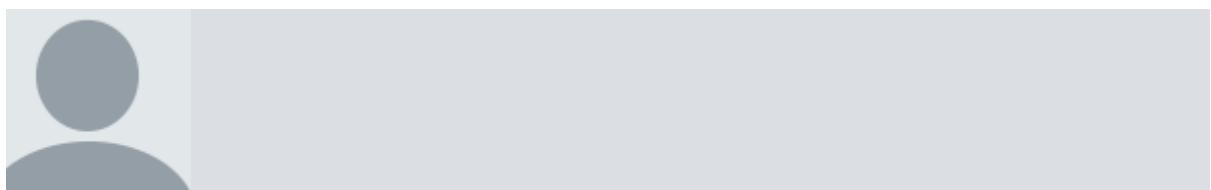
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**Jason Comely** • 9 years ago

I've written a book for a very niche target audience (classic longtail stuff), and while Oprah still hasn't returned my calls, the ride on the longtail has been a rush. Many of my

readers who have written me have become friends (what the “F” could stand for in 1KTF), and I’ve paid a few bills with my book sales. It’s been hard work, but that’s the new barrier of entry into the longtail market, isn’t it?

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**Mike Cane** • [9 years ago](#)

It all sounds so easy. Until it meets real life.

### [When One Thousand Means Over Fifty Thousand](#)

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**Matthew Stoltenberg** • [9 years ago](#)

The value of a network is not  $n^2$  where  $n$  is the number of nodes. It is  $n \cdot \log(n)$ .

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**Daniel Sroka** • 9 years ago

Feh, superstardom has never been for me. My goal as an artist has always been simple: make a living from my creativity. The 1KTF method makes sense, and puts in words some of the ideas I've been batting around.

My challenge is that my current True Fans by one of my products for one event - their wedding. My job has been trying to figure out how to convert these specialized Fans, into fans for all of my work.

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**cainmark** • 9 years ago

The awesome animator Nina Paley of

<http://www.ninapaley.com>

used her true fans to get a 35mm print of her cool animation feature *Sita Sings The blues* out in time for a showing in Europe. Each person who contributed gets a credit at the end of the film, which is funny as it's a whole on-woman film show.

But she got what she needed in time from her true fans donations.

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**Kevin Kelly** [\\_cainmark](#) • [9 years ago](#)

Cainmark, I appreciate the pointer to Nina Paley.

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**Dawid Michalczyk** • [9 years ago](#)

An interesting article but I think unrealistic for most starting and even established solo artists.

I'm a freelance artist and have been trying to make a living selling my personal art since around 2005. Even though I have had a website since mid 90s and know the web tech well (I enjoy programming almost as much as art making) the process of promoting my work has been enormously difficult for me.

I find the recommended no/low cost methods of online promotion mentally exhausting to the extreme. Networking on social networks, social bookmarking, participating in blogs, forums, link building, SEO, adwords, etc.

If it wasn't for my persistence and good knowledge of the web technologies I would have given up the whole idea of making a living online doing what I love long time ago.

You wrote that "Not every artist is cut out, or willing, to be a nurturer of fans.", I think this is generally true for most artists. Artists, the majority of them, are introverts. They thrive living in their worlds (writing, painting, composing, etc) and get quickly overwhelmed by too much external input. And hiring a manager is not an option for most artists either. Yet, promotion through social interaction is essential for success.

You end by writing about the study in which "Sociologist Ruth Towse surveyed artists in Britain and determined that on average they earned below poverty subsistence levels."

My guess is that the primary reason for that is the nature of most artists. They are not made for things like promoting their work, selling it, or maintaining and increasing their fan base through constant social interaction. Artists are made to create art - first and foremost.

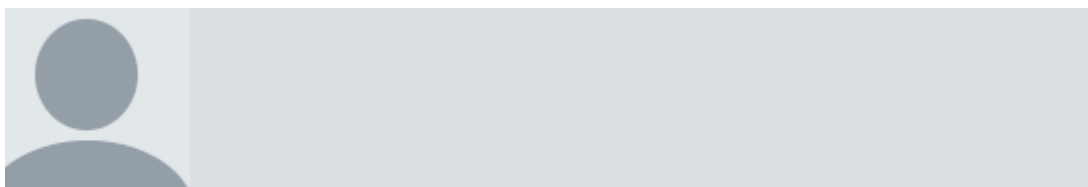
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**Kevin Kelly** [Dawid Michalczyk](#) • [9 years ago](#)

David Michalczyk,

The purest, most introverted, most maniacally focused artist has to reach his audience somehow. Great artists will have patrons, or managers, who let them work and deal with the messy stuff. In fact many world-class artists have a True Fan base of LESS than 1,000.

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**Steven Lareau** • 9 years ago

Good old boingboing, they've just turned me on to this site, and I'm soaking this up like a sponge.

I'm a digital artist, and over the last 3 years, am pushing to make a go of my artwork. I've been getting fine art prints into local gift shops and stores, and have my first real gallery opening coming up in May.

This article is just perfect, it adds a piece to the puzzle on how to get things rolling. But I'm still struggling to find an avenue for my work, to find my audience. Once people go through my online galleries and see my artwork, I receive quite a few emails from visitors, saying they've never seen anything like the work I create, and they love it.

So my biggest obstacle right now is a very fundamental, basic problem- exposure. I have set up online galleries at the usual artist promoting websites, but my work is lost amongst thousands of other artists. I'm residing near Knoxville, Tennessee, which isn't a hotbed of artistic growth, although things have been improving the last few years. I don't know if my work is too modern or cutting edge or what, but I can't get things rolling.

My work is pretty unique, so I'm either doing something really cool that people just haven't seen before, or I'm so far off into the weeds I'll never be discovered.

I've about run out of options on what to try next. I've emailed the link to this article to numerous struggling artists I know, and I know that help in trying to figure out how to find your audience would be most welcome by a lot of people.

Thanks for this article, it gives me hope that I might actually make this art thing work.

Steve

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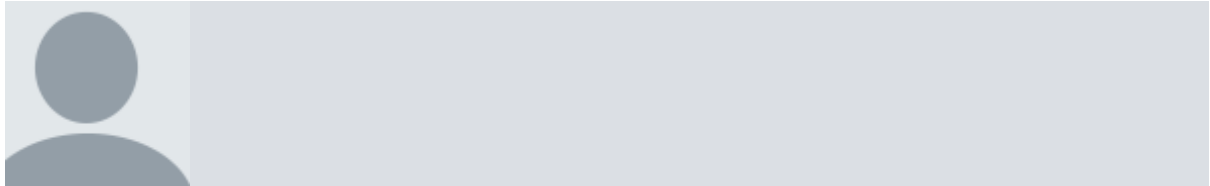
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**Winston** • [9 years ago](#)

“Not every artist is cut out, or willing, to be a nurturer of fans.”

That is true, but that doesn't mean that a major record label is required. If a solo artist can nurture enough fans all by themselves to make a living, then can't the artist who isn't interested in doing it themselves hire one person to do it for them? Perhaps someone who does it for several artists.

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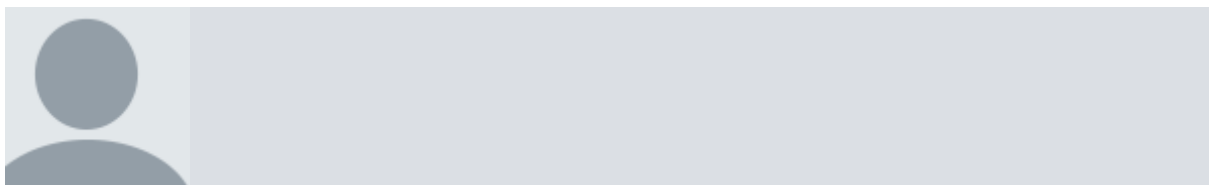
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**Dick Carlson** • [9 years ago](#)

I've been doing a lot of thinking, lately, about how I might move from the world of “corporate jester” to providing something creative that a smaller audience might find more useful. Right now I engage with a very few corporate types (about four) who value me very highly to get to that 100K — actually more than that, as expenses to find and satisfy them are pretty high.

I'm going to do some thinking about what it would look like to make 1000 people a little bit happy instead — would it be writing, or helping them improve their skills, or offer them a way to lessen their pain? I could do all or some of those, I'm sure.

Nice post.

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**MattFriedrichs** • 9 years ago

Nancy Baym has an entry in her Online Fandom blog about musician Jill Sobule raising almost \$74,000 from fans to record a new album.

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**steve** • 9 years ago

Coincidentally the Center for an Urban Future held an event yesterday on Brooklyn's creative freelance economy. According to the Center Brooklyn has 22,000 creative self-employed workers -independent artists, writers, photogrpahers, jewewly makers, designers etc.

I also think your point is broader than artists. There are roughly 21 million personal businesses (self-employed and/or solo practioners) in the US and their numbers have been growing much faster than the overall economy. The majority of these folks are not artists, but they all need "true fans" to survive and thrive.

The center is at [www.nycfuture.org](http://www.nycfuture.org) and a post on the event is at [www.smallbizlabs.com](http://www.smallbizlabs.com).

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**andy batt** • 9 years ago

amazing post - thank you. this is one more piece of the puzzle in figuring out how to be a profitable 'content creator' in this economy. I'm a professional photographer, and am curious about your thoughts on adapting this model to B2B. I can see how fine art print sales dovetails nicely with the True Fan model, but I'm looking for a new model for selling commercial illustration. The most successful (currently) model for commercial photography appears to be microstock sales. Under scrutiny, however, it's a great model for the companies that sell/license/own the images and a terrible model for photographers (minus the few rock stars making a pile of money - but that's true in any business model) -

thanks

andy

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**Robert Burton Robinson** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin, thanks for putting your concept into words, and doing it brilliantly. Your 1000 True Fans idea is sort of what I've been trying to do on my site. It's nice to know I'm not the only one thinking this way. Looks like I'm not crazy after all. (Oh, wait—this might not actually prove that.)

Two years ago I decided to go directly to readers online, figuring that if enough people enjoyed my writing I would eventually earn a living from it—and probably make more money than I would have through the traditional publishing route.

I write and post mystery novels on my website at a rate of two to three chapters per week. I'm now on my fourth book. It's taking a while to earn enough True Fans, but it's happening for me.

Thanks again. This is encouraging.

Robert Burton Robinson

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**Waxwing Slain** • [9 years ago](#)

This is very interesting.

What's been keeping me a going as a recording artist for the last several years has been the “commission-only” music that I make available. For a fee, I will create an album (more like an EP, actually) of music for someone, and then transfer all of the rights to the composition and recording to them. They can do whatever they want with it, including put their own name on it and sell it (although I warn that doing so will lower the value). I



charge on a sliding scale based upon income (and yes, I request proof of income) and political orientation. I started this experiment in 2002 and in that period, these commissions have been my best source of income as an artist.

It's allowed me to connect with a small group of people who have an interest in my music (I'm not comfortable calling them "fans") and then to create a relationship with them that spills over to the people in their lives, with whom they share the unique work that I made for them.

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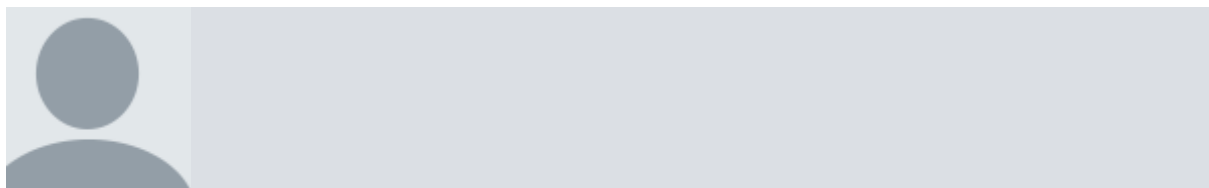
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**Colin Page** • 9 years ago

I'm a painter who's made a living selling my own work for 7 years. I've never thought of it in these terms, but this is essentially the idea that has allowed that to happen. I may only have 200 true fans. But I would guess I have several hundred average fans. With the prices of original art this has allowed me to do quite well the last few years. Every year I gain some new fans, and every year I can expect certain customers to want to buy a painting again. A lot of my sales are to repeat customers (who I would consider True Fans.) My goal is always winning over people who are just learning about me. Once they've bought one painting, I feel like I'm halfway to a second sale. And the best part is that I am able to continue painting the pictures I want to.

Great Article. Thanks. And by the way I found it through a link from [www.linesandcolors.com](http://www.linesandcolors.com), which wrote a review.

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**Crosbie Fitch** • 9 years ago

Independently of the SPP, I came up with the Digital Art Auction (<http://www.digitalartauktion.c...>). This let's all fans keen enough to overcome the decision cost of pledging anything for their favourite artist's next work, express the maximum price they'd be willing to pay for a copy. Bearing in mind the shape of the long tail, the Digital Art Auction reveals the revenue available at all price points and the artist can pick the price they want, e.g. that maximises revenue. Each fan whose max price covers this, pays just the artist's chosen price. and gets a copy of the work. Everyone else pays nothing, gets nothing - but this doesn't stop them buying a copy from anyone else (or getting one from a file sharing network).

QuidMusic is a simpler variation, e.g. the 'True Fans' pledge a quid for the musician's next single - no matter its quality.

I'm now working on [1p2U.com](http://1p2u.com) - A blogger's 'True Fans' pledge a penny for their next article.

You can tell I'm continually lowering my sights can't you? ;-)

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**Ryan Michael Galloway** • 9 years ago

Congratulations and THANK YOU for an amazing post. I'm sending it around the world.

Ryan Michael Galloway

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**dot** • 9 years ago

This makes really good sense to me as it gives artists a tangible goal to work towards and lessens the fear of the unknown.

For musicians, what do you think of applying the model of “100 True Fans” in major cities, for ticket/touring purposes?

Thanks for this, the wheels are spinning...

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**Steve Ball** • 9 years ago

Hi Kevin -

You might check out Jane Siberry (now Issa) who has been operating under many of the 1KTF model for quite awhile:

<http://www.issalight.com/>

Also, Robert Fripp runs his label/online distribution site Discipline Globabl Mobile Live much like a 1KTF business:

<http://www.dgmlive.com/index.php>

Of course, there are many others.

One idea: it may be that there are more ‘formerly successful’ artists moving away from the head toward the long tail who could benefit from a 1KTF model. These artists have already proven they have ‘something to offer’ for True Fans, and converting a subset of 100K passive fans to True Fans may be easier than developing 1K True Fans from scratch?

Keep up the great work and best wishes,  
-Steve

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**Mark** • [9 years ago](#)

Great post! I’ve heard reference to this from a music perspective but you really captured how this thinking can work in other arenas too.

I’m a baker and am working on building my “true fan” base, contacting them directly (with permission of course) and baking based on their wants and needs. In a few short months I can already see the concentric circles forming. Until now I hadn’t really thought about what my magic number is, but I suspect it’s less than 1000.

Wow, you know, I’ve been struggling with how to expand my operations to bake more and get more customers. This might be the secret to knowing how small I can stay and still make a living. Thanks!

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**HowardTayler** • 9 years ago

I like the way you've quantified this. It nicely describes how I've been making a living for the last four years. I sell an average of 4,000 books (collections of my online comic, *Schlock Mercenary*) per year to pretty much the same two- to three-thousand people. I pre-sell the book, and with each release I pay the bills for about six months at a go.

So... from where I'm sitting, you've nailed it. You've described what I do, and more importantly (for me, anyway) you've described why it works, and what I need to do to keep it working.

Thanks!

—Howard Tayler



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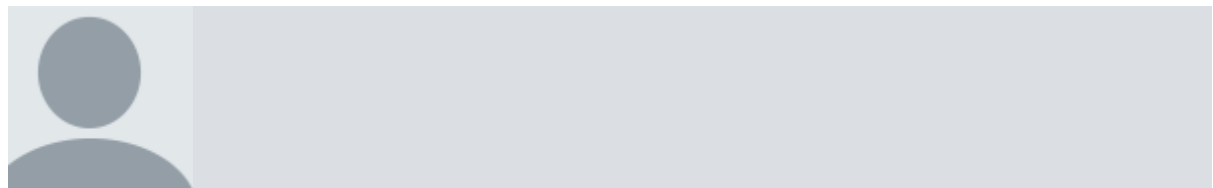
**jennydecki** • 9 years ago

If nothing else, having a goal of 1,000 true fans gives a person a realistic, attainable goal. Even if an individual doesn't get there in the first months or the first year, you have a number to tell you that you're on your way.

Thank you for such an insightful and logical post, it is truly appreciated. Plus, I've seen it on at least four different Twitter streams.

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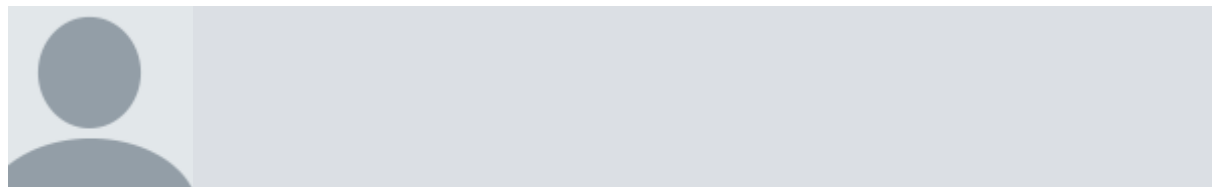


**J Johnston** • [9 years ago](#)

I really really enjoyed this. As someone who is trying to think outside of the box when it comes to making my creative mark in my world it was insightful and fresh.

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**Xander Becket** • [9 years ago](#)

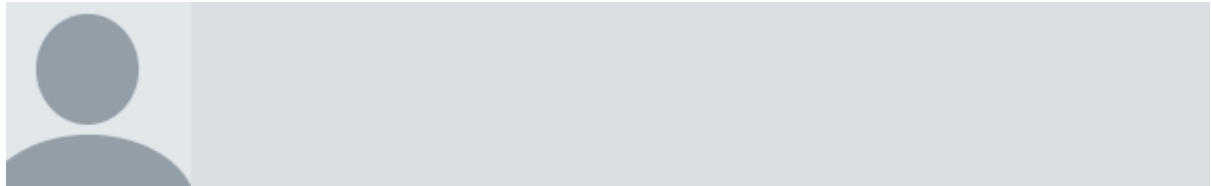
I should think that a company would do best by trying to convert their customers into “True Fans” as well. The catch, though, is to have a remarkable product that people will get excited about.

Or make your existing, boring product the best it can be.

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**Rick Liebling** • 9 years ago

Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails) gets it:

<http://www.psfk.com/2008/03/nin-markets-new-album-from-free-to-300.html>

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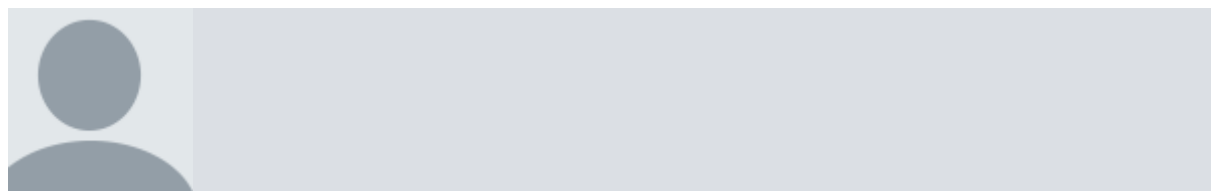
**gwern** [Rick Liebling](#) • 5 years ago

Speaking of Reznor, his discussion of how to go about being a niche online musician seems very apt and in the spirit of this post: <http://forum.nin.com/bb/read.p...>

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**Geoffrey Longman** • [9 years ago](#)

IMO the film “Be Kind Rewind” illustrates the points laid out in this blog perfectly.

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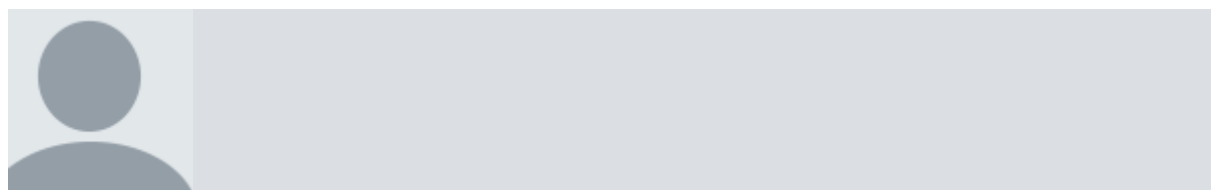
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**michael** • [9 years ago](#)

great essay...it's the way I've built my magazine...

1 rider at a time

1 reader at a time

1 subscriber at a time

I boil this philosophy down to one basic idea:

either you are a beach ball or a ball bearing.

Beach balls are bright, seen everywhere and require a tremendous amount of air to keep them afloat. One major prick, and they run into trouble...

Ball bearings are small, continually polished and while they are hard to find but leave a huge impression.

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**Lee Stranahan** • 9 years ago

This is so great - thanks very much.

I'll add another strategy based on the same idea - maybe you need 10 Superfriends.

These Superfriends are probably companies. If you're a musician, maybe in addition to your 1000 True Fans you need 10 contacts who place music in TV shows and films. Any one of these superfriends could be worth \$10,000 or \$50,000, all at once and all of a sudden. They buy a song, they hire you to score something...you get the idea.

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**Julia Stewart** • 9 years ago

Personal coaches, who are creative entrepreneurs, use this approach. Actually the number of True Fans needed for a coach to prosper is probably much less than 1000, because coaching clients pay a pretty high fee to work one-on-one with their coach. Perhaps we could call these Ultra True Fans.

Fortunately for coaches, most of us love nurturing our fans. As a former choreographer, I must say that for me, co-creating with my clients is much more fun than being an artist!

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**Vince Daliessio** • [9 years ago](#)

I am a True Fan of at least two people who seem to recognize the phenomenon, musician Robert Pollard late of Guided By Voices, and presidential candidate Ron Paul. Both of them seem to be following, among other strategies exactly what you have laid out here, the beauty of the approach is that dead-weight overhead is minimized, and the ability to diffuse the message by multiple paths is unhindered by the lack of conventional “blockbuster” success. Superb article.

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**Alex** • [9 years ago](#)

This is a brilliant piece of work. I just printed it out for my teenage daughter who wants to be an artist.

BTW, your post made Boing Boing. You should increase your own number of “true fans” today.

Alex

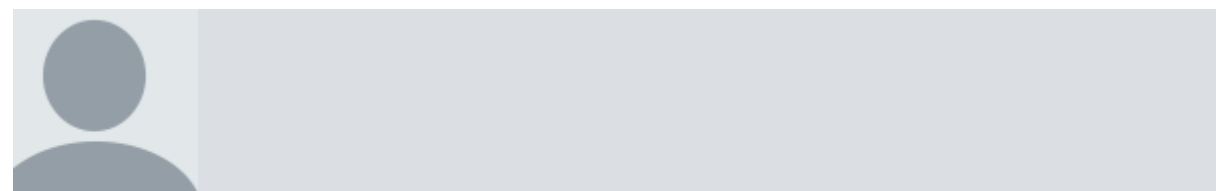


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**hyokon** • 9 years ago

On this one, I seem to agree with you. I have my own thoughts on this, which I am writing online. See <http://paragraphr.com/pages/show/11>. What you described as 1000 true fans seems related to what I call success 2.0. We are entering the longtail world, where we will have so much variety in everything. But we still want the fame and fortune of mass production age - the billionaire, the world star. In the world of longtail, especially in the mass niche kind of longtail, we will have more of smaller successes. Rather than a company of 10,000 generating 100M dollars of profits, we will have a one-person business earning 100K a year.

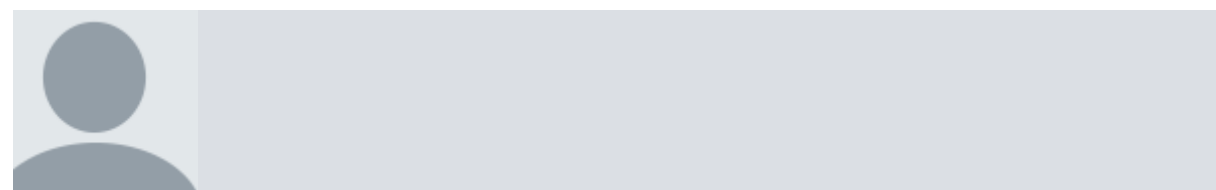


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**Alfred O'Neill** • 9 years ago

This is EXACTLY what pharmaceutical marketers do when we work to connect with patients who will tell other patients about our products. We call them Advocates, and

they're people with long-term conditions such as lupus or diabetes who have successfully managed them using pharmaceuticals, lifestyle changes and education. I wrote a lengthy post about Advocates on my blog.

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**Paul Chaney** • [9 years ago](#)

Thanks for this. It supports my notion that what former CEO of Technorati, David Sifry, called the “magic middle,” is the place to strive to be. While having a hit would be great or being an A-lister something to envy, I think reaching the plateau you’ve described is very realistic. The other is not. And, as your argument so expertly outlines, is unnecessary as well.

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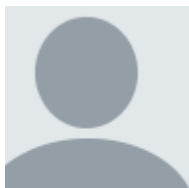
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**Daniel** • [9 years ago](#)

Great article.

I’m so glad that you explained the concept so clearly.

I've had a similar model in my head as I started my own business, publishing illustrated books/products about friendly monsters.

It wasn't named "1000 true fans" or anything like that, but it just seemed like creating and selling directly to the fan-group is the way to go for people like me.

I hadn't really equated it to how *many* fans it might take; I just know I need to bless as many as possible.

Here were my thoughts: (echoing yours)

<ol>

<li>Don't rely on a big break; I don't want my chances of success to ride on the back of an endorsement by Oprah.</li>

</ol>

I'd rather build my base myself, by hand, because this doesn't require a rare, crazy-lucky break. I also don't buy lottery tickets for the only chance to live my dream.

<ol>

<li>

Create relationships directly with the fans. Talk to them, listen to them, and offer them products, directly.

</li>

<li>

Produce quality stuff that I can be proud of. I'm tired of seeing great ideas watered-down by committees.

</li>

<li>

Think long term. I try to make things that I can hopefully be proud of 10-15-20 years from now. If I can still be selling my first book when I'm 77, then I'm probably doing something right. (And have probably made a good return on that effort)

</li>

</ol>

The *Big Challenge* for someone like me is creating enough products that can engage the super-fans for your \$100 per fan example.

\$100 per person a lot of product, since I can only afford to produce one book per year.

However, you've spelled out some other ideas (virtual product, print on demand, donations) that might fill that void.

Okay, back to building.

Thanks again.



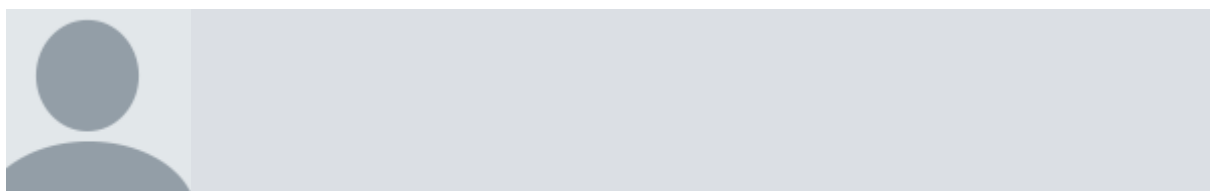
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**Julian Moore** • [9 years ago](#)

Great post again Kevin. I've tried to elaborate on your thoughts and give some tips on how to actually go about doing this on my own blog.

Fundable is a good tip. One of the problems I see people having is that they have mailing lists but still aren't engaging properly with their fans. Fundable is still 'asking for the sale' and artists are still scared of doing that.



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**[mechlin](#)** • [9 years ago](#)

The proverbial nail has been hit on the head. A small group of artists here in Chicago have been talking around this belief for some time.

The trick is: how can part-time artists find enough avenues to reach the 1000 true fans. If you consider standard “conversion rates”, somewhere between 1000-10,000 people need to be exposed to your recorded works to capture that one true fan. Maybe it’s less, but that’s a popular ratio.

For a songwriter, live shows provides the greatest potential to capture true fans. In my experience, live shows yield about a 200:1 ratio. So, if you believe this formula, after playing to about 200k people will you find 1000 true fans.

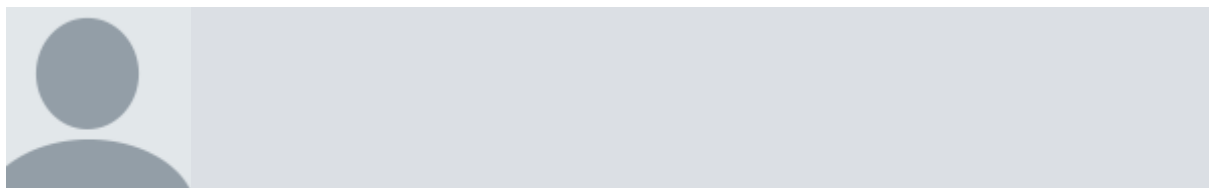
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**Robb Montgomery** • [9 years ago](#)

I think you have hit the nail on the head here. This is a really fascinating report. I am an artist and journalist and have for three years been out on my own as a sole proprietor running an indie music label company, a consultancy that takes me around the world and the founder of a non-profit charity. Maybe I have 1,000 true fans but not in any single one of these jobs I perform.

So it is interesting to also consider running multiple solo ventures as a business model. That’s what has worked for me. I started the non-profit to give back to students and pays me nothing.

Yet, through it - I have become networked to many hundreds of others “True fans.” People who support me indirectly through my other businesses. That wasn’t the original plan but it has worked out that way and benefits everyone in a really nice way.

The one thing you need to have is a lot of patience and remain nimble if this is your calling. Things change fast.

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**Brett Evans** • [9 years ago](#)

I love this idea.

I help out a nonprofit that doesn't have a marketing department and I run fund raising events for them. The 1000 fans idea would be a great model for us to get money from donations.

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**joe bruzzese** • [9 years ago](#)

Brilliance! Seth pointed me in your direction. I'm a budding author (first book to be published spring 2009)generating a growing base of "true" fans. I love the idea that 1000 seems like a doable number. The obscurity associated with the publishing industry coupled with my recent arrival in my fan niche left me feeling doubtful about potential success. Thanks for moving me forward.

Regards,

Joe

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**Erebus** • 9 years ago

VERY interesting thought. My wife and I are looking at starting a landscape photography business and I see a lot of wisdom in the 1000 True Fans. Used to work near a Thomas Kincaid gallery and you are most right about how much True Fans are willing to spend. Their devotion is aweinspiring.

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**Fred Hundt** • 9 years ago

Kevin-

Great post! I'm a longtime marketing guy who has been teaching young musicians a CRM approach to building their fan base. We usually divide fans into three or four levels...at one end are the "super fans" who will book a berth on your music cruise...at the other are "casual fans" who get dragged by friends to your show and buy a CD. Setting goals for numbers of fans at each level and then customizing a set of money-making offerings for each level can help the artists build a sustainable following without selling their souls to the record companies. The direct connection tools of the Web 2.0 world help facilitate this approach as they make the traditional record-company model obsolete.

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**Jesse Arost** • [9 years ago](#)

Getting fans to fund artists has been something I've been thinking about for a long time, and after a couple years of talking about it, my friends and I are working on the idea at [paycreate.com](http://paycreate.com).

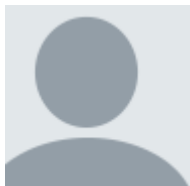
Drop me an email, let me know what you think.

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**Neerav Bhatt** • [9 years ago](#)

That's a very insightful post.

I fall in the category of someone making a comfortable living through my blogs - do you have any suggestions to make to people like me about how to gain "true fans"?

At the moment bloggers tend to use the number of RSS readers as a measuring stick of "fans" they have but I'm not sure if it's an appropriate measure

FYI I found this article via <http://www.seobook.com/can-you-build-1-000-true-fans>

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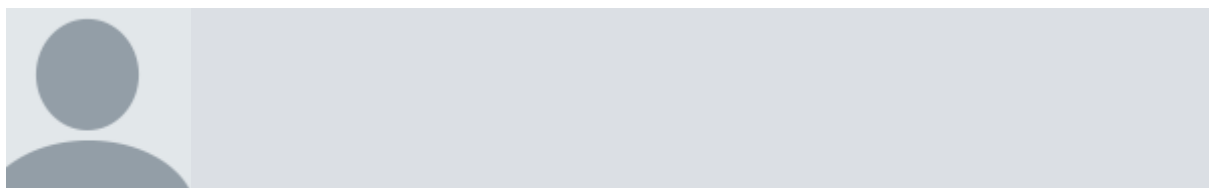
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**Heather** • [9 years ago](#)

Wonderful post, I don't have 1,000 True Fans yet, but now that I have read this, I want 1,000 True Fans. I have never been shooting for stardom, but living above the poverty level is my main goal. I have accomplished this [living above the poverty line from my work] but it has taken 10 years to get there. With this model, I know it could work a lot faster. Lots to think about, thanks for that. :)

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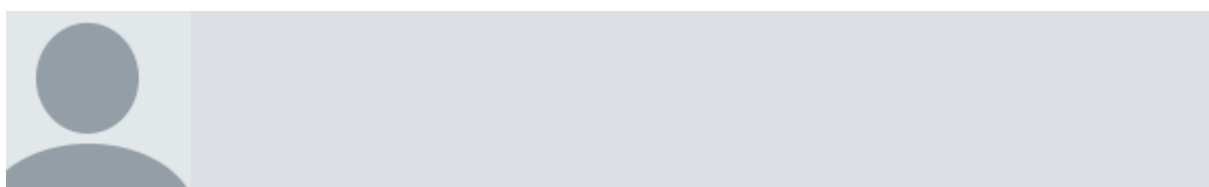
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**Marco Montemagno** • [9 years ago](#)

Simply a great post!

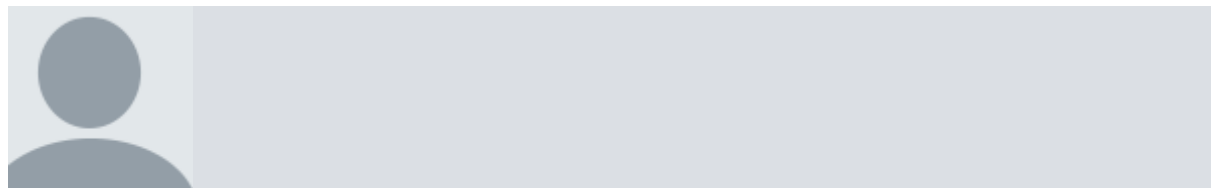
Here my post to spread your theory also in Italy:)

<http://internet.blogosfere.it/2008/03/1000-veri-fan-questa-teoria-e-gia-nella-storia.html>

Monty

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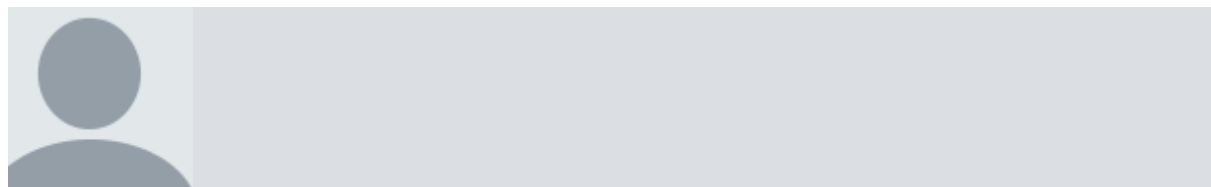


**Dini Dangerfield** • [9 years ago](#)

Fantastic. I love how it quantifies and places a finite (although slightly arbitrary) on the concept. So many times wonderful ideas fall short in their ability to convert to practical application without work by the user. Not saying this should not be done, but it's refreshing when an "author" takes that further initiative. Will let you know when I have successfully used this model!

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**Niyaz PK** • [9 years ago](#)

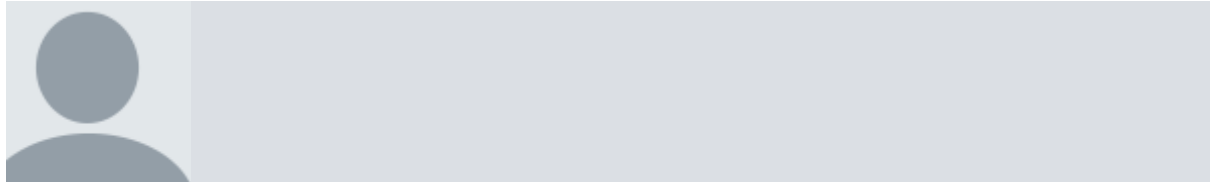
That is true.

But everybody dreams big. That is why nobody will go for a 1000 true fan policy.

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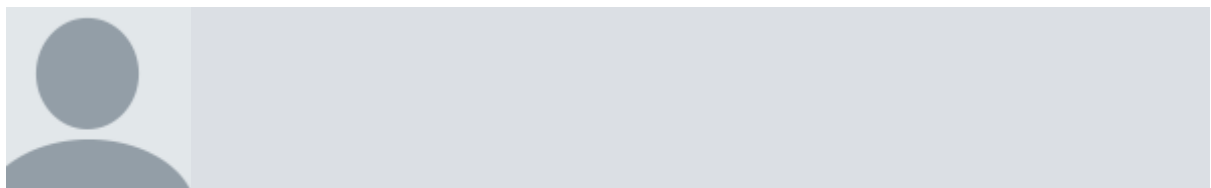
**BoTo** • 9 years ago

Hey, just a correction to the info above regarding Jill Sobule. Jill is an American (not Canadian) artist, born in Denver and currently residing in Los Angeles. She was interviewed recently by the Associated Press about her fan-financed CD project ([www.jillsnextrecord.com](http://www.jillsnextrecord.com)), and the resulting article was picked up by a number of media outlets, including the Canadian Press. Just thought I'd set the record straight on that.

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**Gael Ovide-Etienne** • 9 years ago

Really great post. I doubt that most artists would take the time to gather and manage 1,000 true fans. Most of them do not have time/patience/know-how to do such thing. So there's a great opportunity for "a mediator, a manager, a handler, an agent, a galleryist" to promote long-tail artists and manage their tribes/fans. But that's a real full time job, and it also requires the artist and the manager to collaborate well together.

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**Ivan Kirigin** • 9 years ago

You linked Tipjoy as as tip-jar that is an exception to the most common blogger route to monetization: Ads. Links themselves are a form of currency exchanged in a blogger support network with link, commenters' URLs, trackbacks, blog-rolls etc.

Links are an interesting micro currency because they are really all about building notoriety to increase the fan base. A good example is Instapundit, a lone power blogger. I've seen it countless times where a linked smaller blog posts an addendum saying "Thanks for the link, Instapundit. Readers, check out the rest of the site and stay a while"

To use your parlance, the blogger network is a recommendation system to bring new lesser fans and hopefully True Fans to a blog.

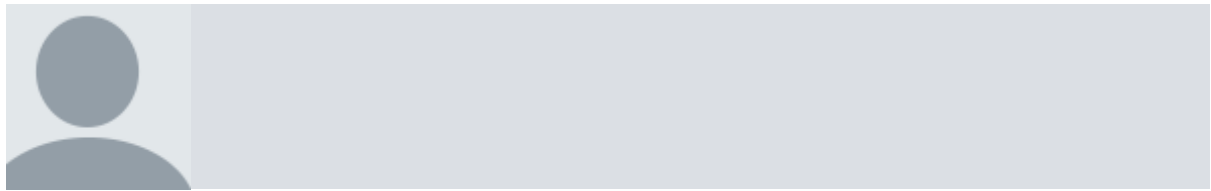
Services that nurture and grow a fan base, connecting fans to content creators in new ways, will grow. MySpace exploded because the connection between musicians and fans scaled perfectly from high school punk bands to major musicians. The former use it as a forum for friends with the latter as a news and information dispersion system.

I've seen a number of new startups going after the patronage model. A well designed mechanism to allow connections between creators and patrons online needs to scale well across fans categories. A very small number of True Fans can give significant support, some will use tools like Tipjoy to give micro-support, and a great many will simply discover the artist with their work available, distributed, and promoted through the system.

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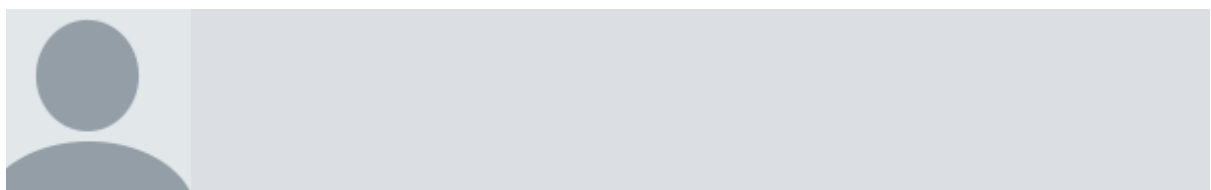


**Guest** • [9 years ago](#)

Excellent article but I think there is another thing worth mentioning. Most creative artists I know would rather create things than market them, but I think this is because of two main reasons. Firstly you need to learn marketing the same as you need to learn to compose music, paint, perform etc. Secondly most creative people cannot distinguish between the mendacious hype of wall to wall, bad advertising and true marketing, i.e. reaching the people who are interested in what you do. I am certain that no matter how shy your are there is a marketing style that will be concomitant with your personality. We all know about the private lives of many singers and seen provocative photographs of them. Yet there are also people like Enya who has kept her private life almost entirely to herself. This shows that many different ways work within the same business.

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**Robin Good** • [9 years ago](#)

Thank you Kevin for this enlightening write-up - for those who like me and my readers who strive to become independent of the existing work system, your ability to have articulated this out is absolutely fantastic.

Not only.

I believe that the greatest outcome of this may go actually well beyond the economic benefit that such people could gain.

It is in fact in our newly conquered ability to do what we really want and what we are inspired to that in my humble opinion will create the biggest impact and the most positive consequences.

Identifying and articulating so clearly how those who have something to share can indeed not only survive but also create more wealth and opportunity for themselves and for others is certainly the greatest news you could ever bring here for me.

Thanks from the heart.

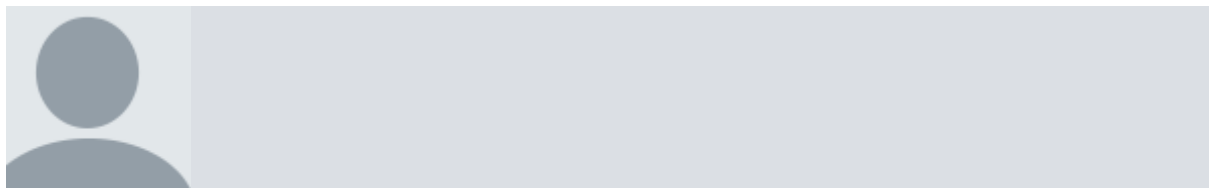
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**Conor Neu** • [9 years ago](#)

This is excellent, thank you. I have been meaning to do some more research on understanding the long tail and this is an informative place to begin.

This clearly makes sense to the creator/artist, but I am more curious how well this parlays into the niche service industry.

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**Keeyai** • 9 years ago

Great article. This is an approach that often gets overlooked, but it is probably the most rewarding for creators who value their work and its results over their own personal fame. That being said, 1,000 true fans will last you a lot longer than the standard 15 minutes from 10,000 bandwagon jumpers...

Good writing, good examples, good point. You may have earned yourself a new fan.

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**Steven Jacobs** • 9 years ago

Selling out at its apex. Needs to be done? yes no... maybe. interesting post to say the least.

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**Kevin Tostado** • 9 years ago

Kevin,

Thanks for the great post. It gave me a new approach on how I really should be tailoring my marketing campaigns as an independent filmmaker.

Kevin Tostado

Director of indie award-winner Yellow Lights

DVD Now available at <http://www.yellowlightsmovie.com>

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**Shawn@MoneyBrick** • 9 years ago

Great post, Kevin! I totally agree with what you're saying here, and so does Malcolm Gladwell. He once wrote that becoming the "famous superstar" is like a tournament - many people start, but only one comes out on top. And as you mentioned, too, the chances of getting there are slim to none. Furthermore, according to Duncan Watts (<http://www.fastcompany.com/mag...> the chance of reaching super-stardom status are quite random!

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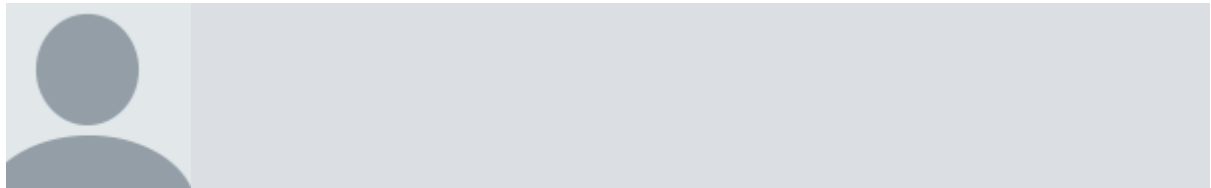
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**Mark** • 9 years ago

You mention [fundable.org](http://fundable.org) as a good resource... my absolutely favorite site for raising funds and creating useful campaigns is [www.thepoint.com](http://www.thepoint.com). Their site is really well put together, community-driven, and is effortlessly integrated with a lot of social networking stuff to make it easier to spread the word.

Before you ask, no I don't work for them, but my friend does, and the company really is a super useful tool for artists to raise funds via a tipping-point model.

-Mark

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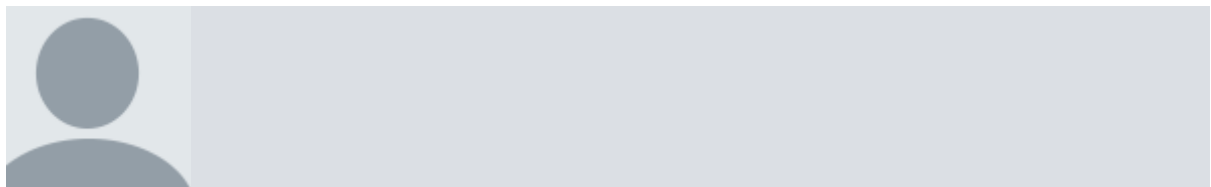
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**John Leeke** • 9 years ago

I think this is just about right on.

I've estimated I have about 300 of what Kevin Kelly calls "true fans", and I am earning about 1/3 of my living with my self-publishing (in print and eBooks). Over the past three years it has been my objective to shift my position left-ward on the "long-tail", increasing access to my "fans", and increasing my income, largely using interactive video over the internet to connect more closely with those who can pay me for my helping them care for their historic buildings.

This past year it really seems to be working and Kevin's essay "1000 True Fans" crystalizes my thinking on this and gives me new criteria for measuring my success, and two new ways to push in that direction.

Kevin, thanks for posting this.

John

by hammer and hand great works do stand  
by pen and thought best words are wrought  
by cam and light he shoots it right

[www.HistoricHomeWorks.com](http://www.HistoricHomeWorks.com)

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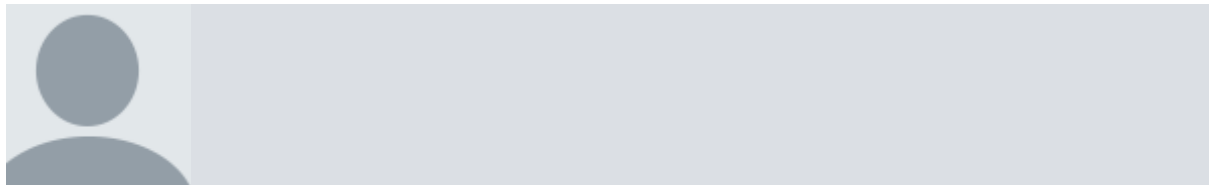
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**Jeff** • 9 years ago

Well-developed theory and, as you point out, already in practice by some creative people who don't have delusions of blockbuster success, yet would prefer not to be completely starving artists. However, I wonder if more thought could be paid to this note of caution:

“Not every artist is cut out, or willing, to be a nurturer of fans. Many musicians just want to play music, or photographers just want to shoot, or painters paint, and they temperamentally don't want to deal with fans, especially True Fans.”

Even if they have a manager to help be the front person for their fan-cultivation needs, there are still more marketing responsibilities required of artists (even indie ones) than in the past. And this weeds out many introverted, yet ingenious, creators.

Therefore, I wonder, is the *popular* reclusive artist a notion of the past? Will nearly every artist of the future have to be a little bit more marketing-minded, a little more in touch with their fans? And, if so, what will that do to art? Will the world simply miss out more often on the next Salingers, Jandeks and Pynchons?

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**Patrick** • 9 years ago

My goal is to get 1,000 true fans.

My website is about overcoming addiction. I currently have 40 true fans (RSS subscribers....these are the people who have elected to read every thing that I publish on the site).

In some niches, 1,000 RSS subscribers isn't worth a hoot. In fact, 10,000 isn't worth all that much in some niches. But because my particular niche is so young in the online world, it is prime real estate.

I don't think the monetization is so important just yet. Having a 1,000 true fans represents a turning point with a blog such as mine. It starts building on itself, and creates leverage for other projects and monetization options.

I definitely think 1,000 true fans could put me into "make-a-living" territory, if I play my cards right. Awesome ideas here, thanks for the excellent post!

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**Marc Johns** • 9 years ago

This is absolutely brilliant - bang on.

As an artist myself, I always wondered exactly how I would fit into the Long Tail. Turns out I'm already on the path to 1000 True Fans (well, just part of the way there), without having defined it that way.

Thanks so much for sharing this.

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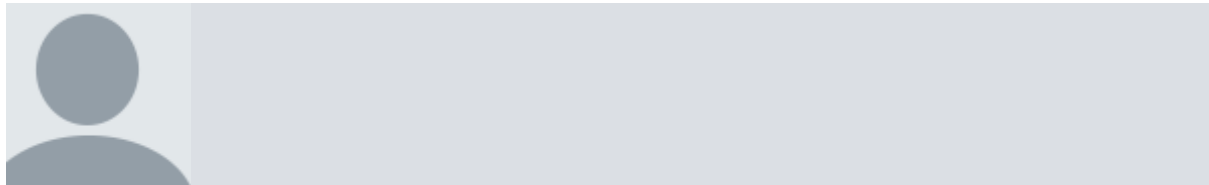
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**Steve Sammartino** • [9 years ago](#)

I think this is the most compelling factor on the long tail... we don't have to reside in the infinite to benefit. we can simply find a cluster who care. Steve.

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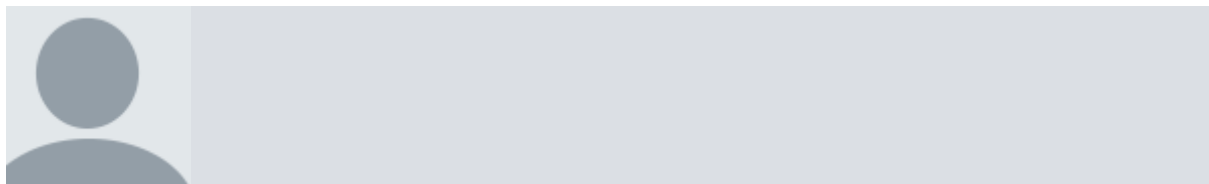
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**Mike Piper** • [9 years ago](#)

Wow...quite thought provoking. Definitely going to be on my mind for a bit while I try to figure out how to work it into my business.

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**Keith Burtis** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin, first off I saw this because Seth Godin sent out a tweet, and I believe it's one of the best articles I've read in a long, long time. I am a woodturner. I turn exotic bowls, wine stoppers, and make small items for wedding favors. I think you are right in that 1,000 true fans is something to shoot for and should make an artist sustainable. I also believe that 1,000 true fans will obviously lead to more than 1,000 true fans due to just sheer mass. I would say, online I have between 50 and 100 fans. I am not sure exactly how I would define "true fans" I have not been in it long enough to generate a lot of second and third purchases. However, I did do a social media experiment where as by I needed to make a last ring payment for my girlfriends ring to ask her to Marry me the night before Podcamp Toronto. I sold more than I needed in bowls and it was the busiest 4 days of my life. This being said, I hope to have generated some "True" fans through this method. I also plan to do some partial charity work where inspired pieces will go to "The Frozen Pea Fund" I think following your heart, being upfront and honest, and helping where you can will go a long way to building a very loyal following of "Super Fans"

I am an artist, and I know many artists...I think their one stumbling block is not staying in contact. I went to an art show and wrote my name on every mailing list sheet I could get a hold of. I was never contacted once by any of them. So in my estimation, it will not be hard to stand out, it is not hard to be different, and it is not hard to be "Excellent" as Seth Godin would say.

Seth was interviewed by Mitch Joel at Tedd, and I listened to the podcast. One thing he said really resonated with me and please don't quote me. The gist was that the barrier to entry has been dropped. You could have an obscure craft that was in demand by 5000 people 50 years ago, but these people were located all over the world. That artist would probably have starved. These days with the barriers broken, those 5,000 (Fans) people, purchasers of your product can keep an artist thriving!

I guess, I see my self as that obscure artist who does beautiful work, but not always in the mainstream eye. If you ever wanted to work one on one with anyone and test this theory, I would be 1000% game. I am very committed, and I work smart. If nothing else I am a

true “Fan” of your blog now.

Thank you for the post

Keith Burtis



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**G. Steve Jordan** • [9 years ago](#)

Kevin- was referred to your post from Seth Godin’s blog. Your observations are insightful and, it seems to me, mostly accurate. I think your comments also tie in nicely with what Seth observes about branding, and also with some behavioral economics as noted in the fascinating new book: “Predictably Irrational” by Daniel Ariely. Ariely might say that “True Fans” derive add’l value from the knowledge that they are unique and “in the know” regarding (insert name of artist here) I am a photographer about 90 miles north of NYC in a lovely area of NY State that receives a fair amount of tourist traffic and I have been able to operate a gallery in the black, including a FT employee, due to: 1) exploiting an unfilled niche 2) providing a quality product at a reasonable price 3) making the gallery presentation museum-quality (see Ariely where he notes that a high priced menu item generates sales for the lower priced offering) 4) branding my name with advertising. Not everyone will be able, or want to do all these things, and the variables, e.g., proximity to a metro area will not always be possible, but the principles are the same and technology, esp the web, is the new railroad — a paradigm-buster. My weak link remains the web but we’re re-designing the site and looking to utilize this venue more efficiently and in keeping with our customer expectations. It’s a wonderful time to be an artist because of this technology! Though I am not a designer, every year I design on my computer and have printed in China (!) 2000 calendars for \$2.50@ and sell them here for \$14.95 - thank you technology! And every year the True Fans come out of the woodwork to purchase them. At this point, like Jimmy Buffet (perfect example of a True Fan artist) says about his hit song “Margaritaville,” “It’s not really mine anymore - it’s theirs.” Thanks for the insights!



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**[Alquiler de Autos Py](#)** • [3 years ago](#)

This is an amazing article, very inspiring. Thank you for the insight.

<http://www.gorentacar.com.py/>

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**[Jonathan Colgan](#)** • [3 years ago](#)

Love this article. I'm a musician, entrepreneur, and all-round creative type. This is some of the most practical advice I've ever read, for me.

Check out my current project <http://www.CellBreaker.com>

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**Eliza** • 5 years ago

Find out how many loyal (True) fans you need using 'the formula'<http://www.thefanformula.com/t...>

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http://disq.us/p/5



**andre miller** • 4 years ago

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