## You Probably Don't Need Servers For Your SaaS

by Andrew Curioso

I've built very involved products (including APIs) without booting any servers or paying for any fixed cost infrastructure at all. I don't think I'll be going back to servers any time soon.

If you can build your project without servers at all there are clear advantages:

Less upfront IT operations cost

Pay for only what you use

You don't have the worry (as much) about scaling

There are three basic ways to build a product without servers:

Use a hosting platform that is app specific (like a Wordpress host or a Jamstack service)

Use a no-code platform

Use FaaS (Functions as a Service) and BaaS (Backend as a Service)

Right now I'm building a no-code platform that I think will be a great choice for new projects but since it's not up yet (follow me to know when it is), here's how I use serverless to run my projects:

I follow the Jamstack pattern where I have a static webpage (no code running on the server when you view the page) backed by microservices. This scales really well, is fast, and very inexpensive to run.

I host the websites on Amazon S3 (a file storage Service) with CloudFront (a CDN) in front of it. This costs me pennies a month until the site takes off, then I might be paying dollars! CloudFront also lets me run code on certain events (like a cache miss) to insert dynamic content.

I build my sites with Next.js, which lets you build your site with React JS but compile it to static pages.

I launch microservices using a FaaS called AWS Lambda, which is practically free until my product takes off. And I use DynamoDB for a database, which is also very inexpensive to start since you pay only for what you use.

This entire setup costs me < $1.00 a month to host a non-trivial SaaS app.

And if the app takes off, it scales automatically! Of course this is a double edge sword because my bill will also go up at that point but I think it is a fair tradeoff because it is cheaper to get started and when the site is getting no traffic (like in the middle of the night) I pay nothing!

And as a benefit, the costs grow linearly proportional to how many customers I have, so it makes predicting the cost associate with each customer, much easier. No giant leaps in server cost as you hit scaling milestones. I can confidently say, "at X users my IT costs will be Y".

A year ago I would often run into use cases that I couldn't handle with this pattern but as time goes on, I run into less and less of those.

I'm an AWS guy myself, but of course there are other options for serverless. Google, for instance, I hear is very good and CloudFlare has some products.

This setup, of course, requires code and technical knowledge. It's not for everyone. But if you want to do it without code, give me a follow so you'll know when I launch the no-code platform I'm working on.

Who else is building without servers?

Also if you have any serverless questions, leave them in the comments. I'm happy to share what I've learned!

***Andrew Curioso*** on October 2, 2021

I would go for servers, faas and paas don't give enough flexibility and limit the possibility of a whole lot of things. You can't switch languages, nor get an off the shelf cm line app to run or process stuff for you. You have to be restricted with what the provider offers. I think servers less is good for very elementary apps but the feel of Linux through SSh is something else.***Tomshwa*** 2 years ago

This article was written for you!

I used to agree with you fully. Now not as much. So I'm sharing the evolution of my thought process in the hopes of being helpful.

I am running extremely complex non-trivial backends serverless on AWS with reasonable performance.

At one point I was lead on a team that handled a decent sized Kubernetes cluster. However, with AWS EFS (NFS) mounts inside of Lambda, edge functions, Docker containers as functions it's a tight race now. Pretty much the only issues I've found that still exist:

Cold start times (which depending on your use case may or may not be an issue)

Anything that requires a persistent socket connection that isn't Websockets (you can do Websockets now with AWS serverless).

SQL compatable databases. Yes, Aurora Serverless exists but it has nightmare cold start times.

Specialty databases like ElasticSearch and MongoDB still need provisioned capacity.

RE #1, for most use cases the customer won't notice the cold start time.

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Now, to change topics: Regarding SSH, I get it, the control you have with SSH is amazing. But for production workloads you may want to consider ditching it in favor of "immutable infrastructure" and "infrastructure as code". It is harder to setup but much more secure and you don't have to worry about hot fixes and things accidentally getting reverted when you make it impossible to do a hot fix.

I could write a whole article on Immutable Infrastructure (probably not the right content for Indie Hackers).

Even when I'm a 1 person team I do immutable infrastructure and infrastructure as code. Just incase one of my projects takes off, it makes PCI, SOC II, and onboarding new team members much easier :)

If I must have SSH, I actually have an alarm setup that pages on call if anyone SSHes into a machine (that can be temporarily overridden if someone gets authorization).

Example: When your infrastructure is immutable an attacker can't put a rogue script on your server. Of course that means you also can't hot patch things but hot patching tends to cause issues in the long run. The 10 minutes you save doing a hot patch instead of a proper release have bit me enough times.

I still use SSH daily on dev machines to try stuff out and get my configuration correct but once my config is solid... SSH goes away.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Could you expand on immutable infrastructure? I just recently started learning about aws step functions and I think they are quite suitable for the type of work I need.***Fredguth*** 2 years ago

Yes, of course. As I mentioned, I could write a whole article just on that so I'm going to just summarize here at risk of oversimplifying...

To mutate is to change. So immutable basically it means that once something is deployed it can't be changed. For example:

If you want to change the configuration of a server you don't change the server that is already running, you boot a new server with the new config and shutdown the old one.

If you have a small change to the code, you don't SSH in and change it, you deploy a new server (or container if you are using Kubernetes or similar) with the new code.

If it is part of your policy, one way to enforce it is to:

Disable root on your server.

Make the filesystem the code and config is on read only.

Disable SSH entirely.

Why would you do that?

It gives you a known good state to roll back to.

There is no danger of having an undocumented change (like a hot patch) on your server then losing it when the server reboots.

If the immutability is enforced: it means a bad actor can't change your code or config.

It makes disaster recovery easier.

Code running in serverless is inherently immutable since the cloud function runtime is torn down down every single request and once the code is loaded in memory it generally can't be changed.

In practice, AWS Lambda reuses ("freezes" and "thaws") containers so this isn't quite true but since you can't control when Lambda completely destroys a container, it is effectively true.

Infrastructure as Code comes in because if you go and directly modify your cloud function in your console, you are mutating it, which breaks best practices. Infrastructure as code makes deploying a new cloud function as easy as manually mutating it so doing it the quick and dirty way is not as desirable.

The reason I brought it up is because a lot indie developers don't work with immutable infrastructure because it takes more up front setup and policy. And in my opinion, for the security and stability reasons, they should be.

And if you practice immutable infrastructure, all the sudden a lot (not all) of the reasons not to use serverless go away because an immutable server behaves a lot like a cloud function and has a similar deployment flow.

For further reading, another devops concept that is very much related that you can Google when you have time is "pets vs cattle"***acurioso*** 2 years ago

I am sold. I am terrible in devops. I just need aws step functions triggered by apis and acting on APIs. Do you think I should use something like terraform to create lambda functions and workflows or this is overengineering?***Fredguth*** 2 years ago

Definitely not overkill.

That's the Infrastructure as Code part. You can do Immutable Infrastructure without Infrastructure as Code but it is, in my opinion, more difficult.

I personally use AWS SAM + CloudFormation since I am on AWS. I think if you are on AWS to then Terraform may be an unnecessary level of abstraction. But I know a lot of people find Terraform easier to use.

https://www.serverless.com/ is also very good. Before AWS released SAM I used to use them a lot.

What I think you should avoid is creating resources directly in the AWS console. The only time I ever do that is in the very rare case where CloudFormation doesn't support a feature.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Thanks for your thoughts. Really helpful. There are so many options in this field: Sam, cdk, amplify, now serverless, terraform…. I need to choose one to start learning. At this moment, I am inclined towards using SAM (aws seems the best for what we will need). I will start reading the docs today. Maybe even looking for an online course.***Fredguth*** 2 years ago

AWS SAM is just CloudFormation with better tooling and build tools (vs straight CFN you need to zip up your lambda project and upload it to S3 manually). If you learn either one you more or less know how to use the other.

If you do straight CFN I'd recommend not building and uploading your zip to S3 directly but rather scripting it with something like Bash or Make.

But again, if you learn SAM you pretty much also know CFN so you really can't go wrong.

Also, Googling "cloudformation INSERT\_AWS\_SERVICE\_HERE" ... i.e. "cloudformation s3" and you find the exact documentation you need... and it is extremely good documentation (not too long, but still contains all the important things).***acurioso*** 2 years ago

You should know that although you can do web sockets via serverless, there is a time limit to serverless execution, so it still makes sense to run a VM for this.***maxk42*** 2 years ago

I should have specified I was referring to inbound connections. Inbound web socket connects to AWS API Gateway have no time limit. It runs a new function every time you get a message and provides an API to push a message to the connection.

If you have a use case that requires an outbound connection that is long lived, pure serverless is not a good fit for you. Though you can boot a really small/cheap machine(s) just to do that part and done the rest in serverless.

The downside is, there is a lag compared to a dedicated machine. So if you need very low latency, then a server may still be a good fit there. But for most applications that ~50-100ms delay is pretty reasonable.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

@acurioso you know of any good resources for setting up websockets on NodeJS AWS Lambda with AWS API Gateway? I’d like to try it, but haven’t found enough resources to put a solution together***fromtheexchange*** 2 years ago

@fromtheexchange None that I can vouch for. I tend to fallback on the AWS documentation which is good but can be a lot.

If you use AWS SAM (which you should be using either SAM or CloudFormation), this example seems pretty good https://github.com/aws-samples/simple-websockets-chat-app

Basically you have three lambda handlers:

On connect, store the connection info in DynamoDB

On message, read all the connections from DynamoDB and broadcast the message to all the connections

On disconnect, remove it from DynamoDB

Hope this helps, follow me on Twitter and send me a DM if you have any other questions.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

agree 100%***Ghidra*** 2 years ago

I agree and have it the same. Yes, my costs start at $5 unless it's a static site on Netlify, but I have all the flexibility of a full VM.***strzibnyj*** 2 years ago

Lambda and Dynamo are going to bite you in the ass with the pricing once you start to gain any semblance of traction. I'd take a $10/month DO droplet or Render/Heroku any day of the week.***malshoff*** 2 years ago

Can you give an example? I'd be curious to hear it.

In my experience running large scale workloads on Lambda, $10 a month on Lambda + DynamoDB + API gateway will get you about 2 - 3 million API calls. That is about 1 to 2 request a second. Which admittedly isn't a lot. However, you'd also need to consider:

For high availability you should be running multiple servers

Your traffic is unlikely to be evenly distributed so while that droplet may handle one request per second easily, you're more likely to have spikes. So if you capacity plan for the spikes you end up paying for capacity you don't use.

Serverless solves those for you.

If you break it down, can you save money by using servers? Yes, if you know your workload very well and it is extremely predictable or your system responds very quickly to changes in capacity needs. Otherwise you're likely to be overpaying during certain times of day which negates any saving you made not using serverless.

Now, if you had a DDoS attack that is a different story. But there are ways to mitigate that with serverless.

Edit: To clarify that last point. Serverless will scale instantly to meet the extra traffic demand. If you don't have some sort of WAF in front of it you're going to end up with a big(ish) bill. But that's the same with servers. If you are auto scaling, you're going to end up with a huge bill with servers too. And if you're not auto-scaling you're going to crash and customers will have a service disruption, so it's a tradeoff. And if you're willing to have a service disruption: AWS Lambda lets you set maximum simultaneous executions (scaling limits).***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Well said.

My processing needs are bursty. Sometimes there are no requests coming in, sometimes there are hundreds of requests all at the same time, requiring the server to perform some long-running task.

My Lambda costs are much higher than a DO droplet, but I don't think I could run the same setup on a VPS. I pay higher fees for the peace of mind that Lambda scales if I need it to.

Not everyone needs this, but if you're doing any kind of bursty batch processing, it becomes essential.

p.s. if I had a dollar for every time someone with zero knowledge of my back end said that I "could run it for $50 on DO" I'd be a rich man.***yongfook*** 2 years ago

I'm with you 100%. I've been default serverless for 4 different projects now and I think it's actually a much better way to build. (That being said, if you're faster on servers, stick with what you know.)

Wrote about it here: https://dev.to/levinunnink/how-to-pick-the-right-tech-stack-for-your-startup-4cgo***levinunnink*** 2 years ago

Good article. Thanks for the link.

Very good point that decisions on infrastructure are often less important than shipping product. Please, I hope no one spends so much time trying to get serverless to work that they lose the forest from the trees.

With that said, I personally find serverless faster to market in most cases because of things like auto-scaling groups, web server configuration, etc that are needed if you want high availability but just come by default with serverless. But knowing how to set up a server is always a good skill to have in your tool belt.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

In my latest project we started out serverless - it was great!

Then over time we realized because we needed 24/7 processing for social scanning it was cheaper to use EC2 for the workers.

Then, once we set the workers up we realized it was cheaper to piggyback the front end stuff on the worker servers too.

It's just due to our specific use case. If I was making a general purpose SaaS app that didn't require a fleet of 24/7, always working, workers I would start out serverless for sure (if the app supported it).

I found these resources very helpful to get a serverless PHP / Laravel site up and running in a matter of days:

https://serversforhackers.com/c/fathom-analytics-serverless

https://serverlesslaravelcourse.com

https://vapor.laravel.com***justinvincent*** 2 years ago

Scanning/spidering is a great example of something that is a poor fit for serverless! Assuming you have some sort of stream/firehose and not polling.

Polling may or may not be a good fit for serverless depending on how often it polls. I've done the math and polling every few minutes is questionably cheaper serverless and polling every second is definitely more expensive serverless.

Once you already have a server, I get that piggy backing the FE is very often cheaper depending on your use case.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

As an AWS certified Solutions Architect pro and certified developer with a few years consulting under an AWS advanced tier partner, I would also agree with many here who suggest servers.

FaaS is not the direction I would take a product. The only way I would even consider serverless for an fully functional application would be if you were using AWS Appsync. However, that requires an extremely high overhead to learn.

Most dynamoDB database schemas I see are incredibly inneficient and are not scalable. Many people see serverless as a cheap way to get an app running and it's true that costs and deployments are easier to reason about, but I highly suggest l, in an official capacity, moving away from that as your primary application layer.***lwrightjs*** 2 years ago

I agree with DynamoDB. My first few DynamoDB implementations were garbage, but it can be done efficiently for many common use cases. But in any case, you can always run a serverless API in front of a database server if you really need SQL or something Specialized like ElasticSearch.

AppSync is interesting. I think a lot of the comments here are very mobile app focused. I've found API Gateway + Lambda to be very effective at running APIs, but that's just my anecdotal experience. Your milage may vary.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

I'm fully onboard with this. I've built SaaS using similar stacks and setups, and I even wrote a book about building with serverless AWS. Most people are more familiar with servers though and don't know how to shift their development and architectures over to serverless which can result in higher cost. Seems like most people need more insight and patterns to follow for shifting to a newer paradigm. Like any architecture or technology though there are shortcomings, so knowing those and working around them is most important. Even though I am a serverless fan, I know that there are loads of use cases that benefit from using provisioned resources instead.***thomasstep*** 2 years ago

@boristane just tagging a founder who has the same idea***hieunc*** 2 years ago

Thanks for the mention @hieunc!***boristane*** 2 years ago

Lack of connection pooling is an immediate non-starter for me.***rlfrahm*** 2 years ago

Yeah. As is JS on the backend. Yuck.***cpursley*** 2 years ago

Yeah I used to be like that until I ran my own business. My negative opinion came from my days building everything with jQuery... Modern tooling is wayy better and more interesting, especially when you switch to Typescript. Plus, having to only hire for one language is far easier than hiring for multiple in my experience.***rlfrahm*** 2 years ago

That's a fair point. It's not for everyone. It's best for connecting to stateless systems.

As an FYI, some things to consider, though (only for AWS Lambda, others might have similar features but I don't know them well):

If you're worried about the overhead of making a connection: Lambda doesn't shut down the container it uses but instead freezes it, so if you don't close the connection at the end of your function and the server doesn't ping or close the socket, it will still be there on the next run (assuming your lambda did not get disposed of -- which happens if it's not called in 5 minutes)

If you're concerned with too many open connections to your server and you are using AWS RDS: they do have a solution for this (called RDS proxy). Though it charges per hour and has some limits so you effectively have a server at that point.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

It may very well be due to how I architect software, but serverless is a cute concept until you start a serious business that needs to scale.***rlfrahm*** 2 years ago

I would like to add to the list that an additional advantage is more secure. No database = nothing to hack.***shockwave*** 2 years ago

Well, you could certainly hack DynamoDB serverless database if the AWS secret gets leaked. But from a network standpoint... no open ports, nothing to connect to. And it shuts down when it's done so no way to have a persistent in-network machine to launch attacks from.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

That’s right. My statement was very blanketing without prior experience with the DynamoDB. In this case, I assume it’s more or less like Redis but hosted on AWS. With the database shutting down, it’s an instant notification and not letting the hack to persist for a long time.***shockwave*** 2 years ago

I'm using this approach exactly. Optimize for initial cost because the project might not even take off.

I'm using cloudflare workers-site to host the site and cloudflare workers as FaaS that runs on the edge. It is much faster than both AWS Lambda and Google functions, both because roundtrip from client is shorter and the first hit startup time is almost nothing.

Also using other SaaS such as MailerSend for transactional emails which is free up to 12k emails.

Wasabi is S3 compatible, and costs just a fraction of it

Firebase as DB is free to start. Cloudflare k/v store is fast and I use it whereever possible.

Cloudflare is free to start or $5 including workers and k/v when you need to scale.***Danbars*** 2 years ago

AWS free tier is also pretty decent. DynamoDB is one of the AWS products with a lifetime free tier. AWS also has edge functions that you can run on AWS CloudFront but they are more expensive than regular Lambda functions.

But mostly I use other products on AWS (like SQS, EC2, S3, Route53) and like to keep things all in one place if the prices are ballpark for me. And I don't use enough storage for having a second vendor for S3 to be worth it with my use cases. For me, in my unique case, the extra $0.50/m is worth it to keep all my security, billing, etc in one place.

I've heard good things about Cloudfront. I'll need to give it a try. That new product they announced to compete with S3 sounds promising.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

The folks from Fathom analytics have a nice read in dynamoDB: https://usefathom.com/blog/ditched-dynamodb

In general I think if you use faas instead of servers you will just trade good known problems with new not known problems.

It is the same with SQL Vs NOSQL.

I mean SQL servers and their problems have been around for decades.

If you do not know anything about any of them you will have a hard time anyway sooner or later.***ajfriesen*** 2 years ago

DynamoDB certainly has a unique set of challenges because of how limited its key schema is. If you don't (or can't) design your keys right it will be much worse.

But NoSQL databases have unique scaling and performance properties that relational databases just can't match. So if your use case is appropriate to take advantage of those properties, it's worth looking into NoSQL.

For example:

Many NoSQL databases (including DynamoDB) beat relational hands down on key value pair lookup.

Relational beats most NoSQL databases (but not all -- i.e. ElasticSearch) for querying and sorting by fields other than the keys.

Sounds like what Fathom did was start with Dynamo and switch once they were able to take advantage of economies of scale. Which I think is a reasonable thing to do.

They also moved to another SaaS not managing their own DBs, which sounds like the right move in their case.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Jamstack is my favorite pattern so far. I don't think I'll move from it except if I really have to***Mazenode*** 2 years ago

I really wanted to go serverless and started down that path but ultimately stopped and went another way. I agree that serverless is the cheapest way to go but the sheer amount of code you have to write goes way up as well. You're paying for scale that may never come with upfront dev/engineering time. As far as actual cost, $1/month sounds wonderful and matches what I saw. However, the alternative is $40-60/month with EC2/RDS. I deffo spent more than that in time with the serverless option.

For me, it had to do with a few things.

My data model was largely relational and, as such, I ended up having to write a bunch of code to handle things I would have gotten for free with a relational DB. I feels hard to justify writing this sort of code when you really want to focus on the product instead. It's also a lot more difficult to model things correctly and you kinda have to have a feel for what queries will be important up front. Finally, serverless options for relational databases are universally expensive -- it turns out these are harder to scale :)

I actually like JS/Typescript quite a lot and use it for work a ton. However, I stay away from it for any non-trivial side projects for a few reasons. You're typically dealing with smaller libs/frameworks rather than larger opinionated frameworks (esp w/ serverless). That's fine w/ 40 hours a week and a team to establish/enforce patterns and keep all the dependencies updated but less so when you have to do all that yourself and are taking away from focus on the product. I could go on but the gist is it take more effort/discipline to do things right, and the costs are higher if you don't since the JS ecosystem moves particularly quickly.

All of that said, I've run an Express app on serverless w/ PostgreSQL after trying raw Node Lambdas w/ Dynamo DB and it worked just fine. On the next project I'll be going EC2/RDS once again with Phoenix and suspect I'll be able to save $$ with smaller instances -- curious to see how it plays out.***vlexaargas*** 2 years ago

In my experience it is the same amount of code as a standard from scratch-app. Granted on servers there are a ton of frameworks you can leverage. But that's just anecdotal.

I agree that some projects are 10x+ more difficult without relational databases. Though I do think Lambda backed by RDS is a viable solution.

I like Node.js / TS and use it for a lot of my projects but lately I've been writing my Lambdas in Go and getting a pretty big performance and cold start time boost. I also know some people who write Lambda in Java and Python. Unfortunately lambda edge functions are still JS only, but I try to keep them small with no NPM dependencies if I can.

Regardless, good luck on your project!***acurioso*** 2 years ago

I followed a guide utilizing the free tier GCP to deploy/host for couple of my projects.

I've done it 2, 3 times now and almost near getting a deployment script ready so it's relatively short in terms of getting a deployment set up.

Granted, it's not automatic deployment. But still, paired up with a language (Elixir) that compiles down for the virtual machine (BEAM), things are just packaged up nicely for deployment, with sort of WYSIWIG compared to my local environment.

But I'd totally go down JAM stack too if I were more efficient / know how to do it well.

At work we've looked at how fast lambda services eat up service costs so I have this inherent fear for it haha.***MekusigJinn*** 2 years ago

At work we've looked at how fast lambda services eat up service costs so I have this inherent fear for it haha.

Yeah, that's a downside. The upside to instant scaling is that traffic spikes won't crash your site or slow down the user experience.

An auto-scaling group (not sure what GCP calls it) that boots up servers as the load increases can also do that to you. But Lambda scales far faster than you can boot servers.

No matter what architecture you have to decide what you want to do if too much traffic is ballooning your costs:

Scale up to meet demand

Slow down (decrease performance)

Go into maintenance mode

What I like to do for mature production services (Lambda or servers):

Set up AWS WAF (Web Application Firewall) and set up some IP rate limiting to shut down IPs that get out of hand. It has a monthly cost but worth it on production systems. It pays for itself in one attack.

Setup alarms to alert me ASAP if something odd is happening.

Setup an alarm that triggers AWS to put of a maintenance page (in extreme cases).

And for lambda specific: optimize performance best you can. My typical billable duration for Lambda is 5ms at 512MB RAM which is very inexpensive. 100ms is 20x more cost. Which isn't much at low volume but at 10,000,000 hits (not unheard of if you are popular and/or under attack) it adds up.

Since this is Indie Hacker I feel compelled to also say: don't let performance optimization delay your launch.

Not sure the equivalent techniques for GCP but I'm sure there are some.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Good read, thank you for sharing.

As a stone-aged developer (I had my startup more than a decade ago :)), it's amazing to see how technology has evolved and how much easier it is to start a SaaS or e-commerce business these days.***eisabai*** 2 years ago

Don't say "stone age"... that must make me pre-historic :) But it has been really cool to see the progression through the years. Definitely much easier now... and less upfront capital requirement. But that's good, it means business can focus more on business problems instead of tech.

RE, eCommerce, I just tweeted about that yesterday https://twitter.com/AndrewCurioso/status/1449039599670603781***acurioso*** 2 years ago

I'm curious why you wouldn't just use NextJs API instead of using AWS lambda? Seems like it'd offer about the same results but 1 less product and it's free.***Harrjm*** 2 years ago

I've answered elsewhere but pretty much: personal preference. I have nothing against Jamstack hosts and if it fits your use case, that's fine. Much better than servers.

For my SaaS the APIs are themselves a standalone product / microservice and not tied to the website. It is written in Go (vs Javascript) and tied closely to other AWS services like EFS and SQS.

Even if it weren't for the tight AWS integration, my site would need a paid plan on both Vercel and Netlify so it wouldn't be free. In fact my AWS bill is 1/20th what the cost of either of those is (currently, that may change).

Vercel and Netlify also charge per user, whereas AWS does not.

I also didn't want anything to learn. My background is in AWS so it was an easy setup for me and I already know all the gotchas and tricks. And since I'm already on AWS it's easier for me to manage security and billing with everything on one place.

But that's just my particular case.

If I was just a website or a simpler API (vs a stand alone microservice) then I'd probably consider a Jamstack hosting service..***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Well explained. I am a fan of server less. I used Chalice by AWS to build the backend for generately.ai. It is seamless, i just have to run a command to deploy.***kambanthemaker*** 2 years ago

Chalice looks really cool. I'm not a Python programmer so it wasn't even on my radar. But if you are Python it looks like a great choice!***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Used to run all my stack from custom deployed Kubernets on fixed priced servers on Digital Ocean, until I decided to move all my servers into serveless architecture on Google infra using Google Cloud Run.

I usually serve 100k unique users per month, it's not a huge number by any mean. But running on Cloud Run with Cloud SQL gives me a peace of mind that my stuff will keep running overnight and if anything fails on IT google got my back.

Even the cost went down 90% because I only pay for the second spent running my stuff.

There are some trades that you got to make when going serveless, one of them is to make sure your app follow some practices. And the lake of ssh handle some stuff you could do. But even that makes you fix the problem the right way.

I couldn't agree more with what you wrote.***arthurbarros*** 2 years ago

I used to run a SaaS that had a Kubernetes cluster. K8s is an amazing tool but it has a lot of overhead and if a cluster node becomes unavailable it can be a nightmare. I may choose k8s for a future project at some point but right now I'm very happy with serverless. Especially now that AWS (not sure about Google) lets you run Docker containers directly as cloud functions. I almost never use that feature but it takes away one of the k8s advantages.

I couldn't agree more with what you wrote.

Thank you. Glad to hear it.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Google Cloud Run and AWS Lambda are mostly the same product but on different vendos, running Docker containers as serveless, auto scalable to accomodate traffic and billed just for the second it run***arthurbarros*** 2 years ago

I have an API that web scrapes specific sites on demand. I use Lambda and DynamodDB and I'm very happy with it.

One thing that has hurt a little bit is setting up SQS in front of the Lambda functions to control load on the sites. I don't want there to ever be a huge burst on a specific site causing any problems for the host so I have reserved Lambda concurrency and an SQS queue in front of the Lambda function. Lambda is constantly polling in the queue and I get charged for each of these polls. With 50 different queues for prod and 50 for dev, I eat through 1 million free SQS requests in a day or two with no traffic at all.

Kind of a bummer. But it does give me peace of mind that I won't suddenly crash a Secretary of State's site with a large burst of traffic from multiple customers.***jordbhansen*** 2 years ago

@jordbhansen I've been thinking about this use case. If you send me a DM on Twitter (link in my profile) I may have a solution where you can skip SQS but keep serverless.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

At this moment I'm using Netlify (FaaS) with succes for over 2 years now.

I'm not going back to servers, everything runs serverless smooth with very high availability, low latency and cost effective.

Just plug and play, as simple as that.

It does have a small learning courve, but you'll get how functions work after few simple tests.

+1 for serverless.***alexmano*** 2 years ago

Nice - but why not use something like Netlify or Vercel to host rather than S3 + Cloudfront? You have one service rather than two, its has a generous free tier and even gives you a https domain out of the box.***seattlehacker*** 2 years ago

Good question. Both are good services.

My article was primarily in comparison to servers as an alternative and I think serverless wins hands down against servers (in my opinion). So the take away was not meant to be "use AWS" but rather "don't use servers." AWS just happens to be what I know best and I use other bits of their ecosystem.

But with that said, I think if you can fit in the free tier of either of those, go for it. But I think the AWS route is more analog to their Business / Pro tiers (due to access control, enterprise features, etc that are built into AWS).

In fact, Vercel explicitly says you can't use their free tier for business projects.

Some quick back of napkin math:

If you have one pro seat on Vercel and use the max "1000 GB-hours of execution" it is much cheaper than AWS (~$70 vs $20).

If you buy "Provisioned Concurrency" on AWS it becomes a closer race but Vercel still wins purely on price ($30 vs $20 if your workload is evenly distributed).

But since Vercel charges per seat, if you have multiple seats, AWS starts to become cheaper around 4 users.

But one thing to consider (and I'm sure Vercel counts on this). Most of the time you won't be maxing out the 1000 GB-hours. If you don't max them out, AWS is cheaper by a mile. For example, with a SaaS I am building I would need millions of API calls for AWS to start costing me more than Vercel.

Of course, Vercel is probably easier to use and less set up for most people. Which is a huge bonus and you have to consider your time in the equation too.

But to come full circle, both are great. Both are better than managing servers, in my opinion.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Thanks for the detailed comparison! I've been surviving under the free tier but this is good info to know incase I have the envious problem of needing to switch :D***seattlehacker*** 2 years ago

You're only supposed to use the free Vercel tier for non-commercial projects, so a SaaS probably wouldn't qualify. I personally just stick with the free tier until it starts taking off but I think thats against ToS technically.***Harrjm*** 2 years ago

Good points and examples; very convincing. I'm currently running on AWS Free Tier running containers on an EC2 VPS (to avoid accidental charges.) My two cents:

While cumbersome (serverless is likely cleaner and easier, especially for those unfamiliar with Linux/server management,) the benefit of a server is no vendor lock-in. Once this AWS free tier trial is up, I'll painlessly switch to Oracles free VPS service

On the flip-side, vendor lock-in can be alleviated with IaC tools like terraform (easily switch cloud providers by just using code)

There is going to be overhead and trade-offs with server or serverless; while OP has good points, the choice truly boils down to what developers and teams are comfortable with supporting

If I had the funds, I'd personally choose serverless. Primarily for the peace-of-mind when scaling (and security.). Much easier than maintaining a distributed system, such as k8s clusters ! Spending more time on the business than the technology seems imperative***MikeQDev*** 2 years ago

I personally don't find, vendor lock in for Cloud Functions is not much of an issue anymore. Best practice is to have interface code that is the only code that is vendor specific. Then, as long as the runtimes are compatible you can have different interfaces for different Cloud Function providers.

The biggest lock-in is with serverless Databases. You can also do interface layers here but it is difficult since DynamoDB for instance is very unique.

But the way I see it... it's going to take me X hours to setup and manage a server no matter what, as long as I write the code generic enough that I'm not locked it, I saved X hours until I need a server.

RE funds... having managed a k8s cluster... I found serverless to be much cheaper. I would never do a k8s cluster for a startup unless I had a lot of funds or required very few nodes. Here is where AWS gets killed, because they charge for the control plane and things like NAT so running a k8s cluster has a significant cost floor, whereas serverless can go down as cheap as $0. If I were to do k8s AWS would not be my choice.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

It's okay to go this way, but the problem is scaling in this pattern. The above pattern will definetely lead to a lot of rework when you are scaling the platform.

It's better to follow known deployment strategies with servers and scaling in future won't be a big issue. If you decide to go with FaaS, I am not sure how you will be able to manage a big code base (which will be there in future, if you scale).

The best way out here is to use shared hosting servers, which starts from $5 and then scale up the machine as the request grows. Initially you can keep all your DBs and code in the same servers only.***aayushsinha44*** 2 years ago

If you are running a DB server you might as well do that (run them on the same machine until you outgrow it). You can use a FaaS with a standard server but IMO it works best with serverless database.

However, for production workloads you also need to consider the cost of downtime. I would avoid running one server in production unless downtime is no issue (like a dev environment). My rule is at least three (so, to your point, $15!). Something that is virtually free and built in with FaaS.

When talking about scaling, what are your concerns?

If you're talking infrastructure, the FaaS deployment patterns are the same as if you were managing Immutable Deployments and you can use Infrastructure as Code with FaaS as well. I've scaled up both, I find them to be comporable. Unless you don't use IaC and Immutable Deployments out the gate, if you start with hand built servers scaling is way harder.

If you're talking code, FaaS pushes you into a microservice pattern. You can run multiple endpoints using the same code but microservcies are very low friction with FaaS. And when growing teams and code, I find microservices much easier than monoliths.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Static sites are faster than serverbased sites but what about Saas like customized chatbots? I heard this phrase(serverless) first time can you pllease educate me about it(or atleast send me links to understand it)?***csjay08*** 2 years ago

Serverless is much better for chat bots in my opinion. In fact, if you're writing an Alexa skill you are forced to use serverless.

When using Functions as a Service (FaaS) you only run your chat bot code when you actually get a message. So if you have 0 messages you pay nothing and if you get 1,000,000 all at once, it scales up for you automatically.

One thing that is tough with chat bots is state. With FaaS you have to persist your state somewhere if you want to know the context of the message. Which is much easier to do when you have a single server (or multiple servers with sticky sessions).

Also, if you have a large Machine Learning model it can be trickier with serverless.

But I still think going the FaaS route is better.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Thanks for the inspirational message Andrew. I'm building a serverless MVP as well with the stack you recommended. Because of modest I.T. skills, I could not do it without the AWS universe Lambda / DynamoDB/ SAM/ Eventbridge/ SNS/ StepFunctions/ ECS/ ECR/ Comprehend. It's a steep learning curve to fit everything in its proper place on the overall landscape but terrific once you get productive. All the best.***BigHireio*** 2 years ago

Awesome to hear. Good luck on your MVP!***acurioso*** 2 years ago

That's one reason why I'm using SvelteKit for my current SaaS project

SvelteKit compiles all endpoints to cloud functions. Plus, it's platform agnostic.***joshnuss*** 2 years ago

I've been meaning to try SvelteKit! My experience is with Next.js but I've heard good things.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

slightly off topic but I would like to know what framework you used to easily integrate with shopify api? I am building something and I want to do it fast and easy because of time constraint.***althur321*** 2 years ago

I'm using the official npm package***joshnuss*** 2 years ago

oh okay. Thanks!***althur321*** 2 years ago

Umm, check out Firebase.

-Former AWS advocate

PS most people I know are already doing serverless.***code*** 2 years ago

@swebdev would you recommend firebase over aws amplify, or are they roughly equivalent? I'm interested because I'm about to look into both and would value the perspective of someone with more time in the trenches.***hazmath*** 2 years ago

To second what @swebdev said... FIrebase can get you up and running very fast. I haven't heavily used Amplify or Firebase since my use cases are mostly API first SaaS and both really shine in mobile apps. But AWS anything has a steep learning curve.

Two things I'd ask yourself are:

Total cost of ownership for your expected use cases

Which ecosystem you want to buy into, Google or Amazon. AWS is very robust and I think their console is easier to deal with that Google Cloud Engine but both are great choices.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

Thanks, this is helpful (and @swebdev too). My takeaway is that both are good choices if I want a productive platform to build upon, but more macro-level considerations like TCO and "platform name risk" should be the deciding factors.***hazmath*** 2 years ago

Utilizing Firebase is verrry fast, they provide almost all the useful service out of box for setting up and running saas quickly. The speed advantage is very material to me, and that's why I'd recommend it.

Firebase tends to get expensive as you scale, although that's a good problem to have if the product works out.

AWS is also very mature, although it may slow you down due to integration effort (not to mention the complexity but I assume you're already well versed in it).***code*** 2 years ago

Firebase is good. If it suites your needs go for it. A lot of products can definitely get away with just Firebase. Especially if your product is a mobile app. I just happen to like AWS better. Especially for a SaaS where your API strategy is often part of your product. But I'm sure you can do most of it with Firebase too. As I pointed out at the end, AWS is not the only game in town.

Glad to hear most of the people you know are serverless already! I made this post because I personally know a lot of people on Kubernetes and provisioned infrastructure. So to each their own, some are further along in the journey than others, based on the feedback at least some people found it helpful.

Edit:

AWS also innovates a lot. To add an example, AWS recently allowed mounting of NFS volumes via EFS (Elastic File System) in Lambda cloud functions. This helped a major backend issue with my SaaS that would have required a server otherwise. Is that possible with Firebase? (I legitimately don't know)***acurioso*** 2 years ago

I agree to all the things you said; seems like our use-cases are quite non-overlapping :)***code*** 2 years ago

This is very interesting and upvote worthy! Thanks. It's amazing how all of this keeps evolving to remove backend lift and cost.***unemployability*** 2 years ago

Glad you found it helpful.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

I have been doing this in the company I work for but haven't tried next.js in production though. Is the static site generated by nextjs search engine friendly? I am building a personal dream project soon and that problem is bugging me and I have no time to try it. Tia!***althur321*** 2 years ago

So the static pages it generates using SSR (Server Side Rendering) are HTML so you can have all the SEO tags you would with an HTML page.

Likewise, statically compiled pages are really fast, which is great for Core Web Vitals which are getting to be really important for SEO!

With that said, it did take me longer than I'd like to admit to get it to generate a proper sitemap.xml and robots.txt file.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

thank you. This is noted.***althur321*** 2 years ago

Curious - Does SSR gets any advantage for Google specifically? I thought they (google) do client side rendering before their search indexing, so in my naive view, SSR shouldn't get an SEO advantage there. Please correct me.***code*** 2 years ago

Good question, I'm not sure.

I was thinking more along the lines of the generated markup is the same as any other HTML site from a SEO perspective so all things considered you can SEO optimize it the same as any other site.

You are 100% correct that Google executes Javascript (not all spiders do) but I always feel it is best to have the SEO related tags immediately accessible without JS because you never know what tools are being used to index your site. It may be old fashioned of me but since search engines are black boxes I figure every bit helps.***acurioso*** 2 years ago

👍Thank you Andrew!***code*** 2 years ago

Yep, it can generate static pages at build time and SSR pages at runtime if you needed it***brunocalou*** 2 years ago

I was in the same boat as you. Wanted to try Next.JS for the speed on a project, but didn't get time to try it.

Ended up using Clutch.io.

It's a great tool to build front-end components in React, and especially useful if you're building a serverless infrastructure, as it allows you to connect any backend via Axios, and visually build a data-driven web app.***abhibavishi*** 2 years ago

## 7 opinionated tools

I always use to build my SaaS, and how I go to market faster.

by Rishi U.

Part 1 of 2

Your startup is going to the moon 🚀, your mom and sister are super excited. Nobody else cares, and until they do here are my thoughts on the tools stack most solo founders should use for a micro SaaS startup.

Hopefully this list will help you avoid the burnout and disappointment that I and other founders experienced.

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Do not roll your own Auth.

Do use what you know.

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Database - Keep it simple stupid.

Don't waste more than 45 mins on logo design.

Do spend at least a week on your domain name.

Transactional & marketing email.

Collect dollars only when your fake billing page breaks.

❌Do not roll your own Auth

As much fun as it was the last time around, there's only so much JWT's vs Sessions & Cookies Vs Local storage arguments you can have in one day. 🥱 It's not worth building a scalable user authentication system on your own. But sure you can take a deep dive down the endless rabbit hole and watch this and this oh and this and dont forget to read this. But in production, go with one of the big boys.

Auth options

Firebase Auth

Magic Links

Supabase Auth

AWS Cognito

MongoDB Realm Authentication My pick

Auth0 & Okta are the OG's but pricey when you scale. Also, I'm not sure if they're still cool?

✅Do use what you know.

Don't waste time learning that new tech stack you saw on fireship.io. Astro with CloudFlare Workers & Solid JS comes to mind; Instead, go with what you know to get traction quickly, then tweak/learn/improve. If it's Rails, then go with it; if it's Django, perfect. In my case, Vue 2.x SPA with pre-rendering. Just no PHP. 🤭

✅ Serverless + JAM stack Hosting

There is no excuse for not loading fast in 2Ø21. Indeed, not all cities are within reach of edge locations, but sub 3 second load times for FCP is certainly doable. Managing servers are great, but handling both the front and back end coupled with SaaS marketing and two crying kids is HARD. Focus on the fronty part of the site and spend the rest of your time figuring out how to GO TO MARKET. Let cloud functions and server less do the rest. IMO don't bother with managing or scaling hardware.

If you need to scale hardware, that's a high quality problem to have, and perhaps you should be writing articles instead of reading this one.

Hosting options

Vercel

Cloudflare - My Pick.

Render

AWS S3

Alibaba Cloud Object Storage Service

The last two are object storage which works great for hosting static files, but do need to be managed and shoved behind a CDN.

plus literally 100 more options.

✅ Database - Keep it simple stupid... said someone mean 🙄

Or they might have said keep it open source and hosted stupid, whatever, I did exactly that. Simple was using either documentDB's or SQL.

Hosted DB options

MongoDB Realm.

My pick Realm allows me to execute database updates/queries from the client which is a game changer, no backend needed and fiddling around with backend API's to make a db connection. Time saver and a joy for my clients to use.

Supabase looks promising postgres managed DB.

Firestore You already know this, not opensource.

Fauna DB Simple pricing, auto scales, worry free, but has a learning curve, \*FQL whaat? - Not opensource.

AWS has a tonne of hosted options, but apart Amazons own DB option, none of the others are native, I would rather go and sign up with the provider direct like MongoDB, if I was looking for a document store.

Air Table, Google sheets are options too, but not really opensource and you need to learn their API.

❌Don't waste more than 45 mins on logo design

If this is your first SaaS, then I'm going to tell you the exact opposite of what I would recommend everyone else. Go on, spend 3 weeks fluffing about with some fancy Adobe package crafting that awesome abstract logo, you're going to do it anyway, after all its all part of SaaS building fun 🤗, hugs and rainbows and unicorns 🌈🦄.

Once your done wasting your time, come back to reality and just TYPE in your logo, shove it in the top left of your <nav> and your done. You can thank me later. 👏🏻

For second time founders these tools take 10 mins and the result is a million dollar logo :

No Logo just use a 24px font size and <em> tags and voila.

Logology Ask for Lucie she's amazing with an eye for design. 10 mins svg and eps logo done.

NameCheap Logo Maker formally Launchaco nice free option and done is 7 mins.

Whatever you decide save your logo as a SVG.

✅ Do spend at least a week on your domain name 😜

Finding your unicorn domain name, has almost zero effect on the success of your business but is inherently exciting. I always recommend searching for a domain while you build and not before. If you lose interest in your idea 7 days in, at least your not out of pocket 24.99. More importantly you save yet another domain name from biting the dust in your already lengthy list of dreams in your GoDaddy account.

Don't use traditional registries like GoDaddy when searching for your perfect name, they tend to store cookies and increase pricing on subsequent visits! Clear your cookies when searching for the same domain over again. Their also known to buy up your domain just before you do.

Instead use tools like:

DomainR Scans several registries at once with a really nice UI.

Cloudflare Register No markups, nice UI.

Hover - No ads, no upsells, costs a little more but worth it My Pick

✅ Transactional & Marketing Email Options

Introverts tend to mourn the thought of actually reaching out and saying 'hi, hello, how r u'. Sadly in SaaS, you do need to talk to people... Well, at least your app does, so it's not all that bad, below are some options to help you with your SaaS communication. There are many options above $60 per month with automation and drip marketing, but they might be overkill for a solo founder, so I will not list them here.

Email Options

👍🏻 Postmark Transactional One of the best and easiest API for sending transactional messages, support is genuinely remarkable, ask a question, get a helpful reply within a couple of hours. $10 for 10K transactional, you can't go wrong. I use this for email verification, lost password, etc. Lots of customizable options via the API. The downside is Postmark is not a marketing suite, and they don't want to be. You can send broadcast messages, but they kinda want to stay away from the whole drag and drop template builder and automation aspect of marketing. Still an amazing transactional service.

👎🏻 Mailjet Not for me, tried them several times, support wasn't there , dated UI Don't use them; could be wrong but I have nothing else to say.

DRIP Good if you have an eCommerce site or selling tangible items, but if it's SaaS, I think they are more focused platforms.

Courier I'll be using this one soon. The cool thing about Courier is that it scales, and you can get started for free. You bring your mail service to them. So if you have a Postmark Account or Amazon SES, Courier will use your keys to send all your Email through their beautiful interface. You now get templates, automation, transactional, and other shiny things all within Courier. IMO Postmark + Courier could be a winner.

🙏🏻 Noteworthy mentions I have tried and used in past projects include:

a. Sidemail Patrik a fellow Indie Hacker built this, great UX.

b. AutoPilot

c. ActiveCampaign

d. MailerLite

e. Parcel For coding your email templates, ask for Avi.

💰 Collect dollars only when your fake billing page breaks

Back in the early 2000's I remember setting up a lengthy merchant account with Authorize.net, the days before PCI compliance! Yes this does date me, but if you think dealing with payments is hard now well, you should have seen it then. Merchant accounts, discount rates, customer service, paper reports, thousands in setup fees, it was a real mess especially for beginner devs like myself.

Thankfully two Irish boys saved us all from dying a slow poor death. Thank you Stripe 🙏🏻🍻☘

Still even with Stripe, don't get too excited and build out your custom payment flow too early, get traction first. In my early failed startups, I've spent countless days, weeks setting up custom billing, accounts, upgrading and downgrading all for nothing, no-one visited, nobody paid, hence please don't do this.

I now use a fake payment page for new projects 😁, and when someone tries to pay me, only then do I implement Stripe. The user gets an error message and is contacted later to the stripe payment form a day or two.

I highly recommend Stripe for two reasons. Their API is relatively easy to understand, and if you get lost in the docs, they have live chat support for all account levels. Support is friendly and super cool.

Payment Options

Stripe Checkout - Simple way to build checkouts quickly hosted on stripe.

Stripe Elements -Custom styling, more finesse , inputs on your page.

Braintree Yeah I would now say there API is as good as stripe, not sure about the support, but they do have PayPal payments built in!

Paddle - Lots of SaaS using this now

Charging Bee - Looks cool too.

Did you find this post helpful? Let me know what other tools you use?

Part 2 will be landing soon.

Follow me on IH and twitter for more opinionated views on building SaaS

***Rishi U.*** posted to Software as a Service on November 9, 2021

So many golden nuggets in your post. So on point. After a lot of pain and trial and errors what you wrote is pretty much what I follow.

I vouch for :

Cloudflare Workers so much enjoyable to use than Lambda

Carrd for single page sites. Crazy cheap $49 year for 25 sites. No brainer.

MailerLite really good for marketing emails, reminds of basecamp/37signals in the early days

Postmark like you said they rock on transactional emails

Stripe Payment links, don't even need to setup a fake page anymore

Namecheap for cheap domains payed 4.99 for neologin.co

Btw, I'm tackling "Do not roll your own Auth" with neologin.co***eduardosasso*** 2 years ago

Awesome, glad I could relate.

Cloudflare workers looks pretty cool, although its more like a worker then a real function as you cannot add all node modules as yet; technically workers cant use TCP/UDP and only HTTP hence wont work with some third party apis like cloud databases. However I'm eager to switch all my functions to them due to the no latency stuff.

Caard yup you're right - for a one page front end site, launchaco does allow for multiple pages, duda for saas is another option -- however I don't use them as usually build out my own in a few days, but my UI may show it! 😛

neologin - good idea right now, looking forward to your updates.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

my 2 cents — do not implement everything from scratch - use starter kits/templates (I have a list here https://github.com/smirnov-am/awesome-saas-boilerplates )***smirnovam*** 2 years ago

personally not a big fan of starter kits, you probably have to maintain them anyway., plus a lot of those tools are not free. IMO i would go with tools like i mentioned above that you can stitch together and maintain without complexity, but that is just my opinion.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Good post—I agree with the vast majority of what you've shared here. There are so many tablestakes required to launch a SaaS product and at the earliest stages, getting something to market quickly and efficiently should be the priority so you can focus as much time on what actually matters—product development.

My start-up, www.outseta.com, is building a tool for founders like you that delivers these tablestakes functions so you can launch faster. We cover authentication, Stripe billing, and transactional & marketing emails out of the items mentioned on your list.

The product is very much a kindred spirit with many of the ideas shared in this post. This will likely resonate if you appreciated this post as I did! https://www.outseta.com/twitter***GeoffRoberts*** 2 years ago

I think one of the major issues with billing services isn’t billing itself. It’s dealing with the taxes of gazillion countries and states out there. Yes, there is Stripe tax but it’s still challenging. I think a merchant of record like paddle has advantage here.***shockwave*** 2 years ago

Hi Geoff, thanks for your input, im going to be checking out outseta, looks like it covers a lot of bases.

Best, Rishi***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Awesome! If you have any questions at all, just let me know or feel free to book a 1-on-1 with me here: https://calendly.com/geoff-outseta/45min***GeoffRoberts*** 2 years ago

Hey Geoff.

Great product!

Can it be used for an API-only product, such as https://ipinfo.io/ ?

Do you have any examples? Was not able to find it in the online demo.***graileanu*** 2 years ago

Hi @graileanu! Outseta does support usage based pricing models, but from a quick look at your pricing page it's not flexible enough to support your current pricing model (the part where you pay an additional $50 per 100k API calls).

https://go.outseta.com/support/kb/articles/dpWr3mnq/how-to-setup-usage-based-or-metered-pricing

You might want to take a look at saasify.sh—this product is meant for monetizing APIs.

Geoff***GeoffRoberts*** 2 years ago

Thanks!***graileanu*** 2 years ago

Good posts, thanks for reminding these again***nikhil\_WebFosters*** 2 years ago

sure thing.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Good Post, really helpful***aicode*** 2 years ago

Thanks!***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Love this!! -> "Collect dollars only when your fake billing page breaks"***cameron8*** 2 years ago

"Just no PHP"

Lol, ok.***codegeek1001*** 2 years ago

" Just no PHP. 🤭" 😂😂😂 Love it!

You know, I failed on this one "❌Do not roll your own Auth" and I feel like I could do better definitely I'm going for this path on the next product I create***VictorGonz*** 2 years ago

I wish someone else told me the same, thanks for your reply.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Great post! Looking forward to part 2!***justinem*** 2 years ago

Excellent post. Im throwing Namestation in there for hunting down excellent domains. They also have name contests which can save you alot of time for a small fee.***RyanMonolyth*** 2 years ago

Thanks. Nice addition with namestation. I do like the contests, that would distract me for hours!***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Great post full of excellent info. Cannot wait for part 2. 👍***Checkify*** 2 years ago

I like this post. Possibly one of the best posts on IH for devs to take a look at.***lucid*** 2 years ago

As you talked about stripe payment. I have few questions:

If I want charge users based on usage then how can I do that using stripe or do I need to implement some logic on backend side?? Eg: Lets say I have social media site and first 100 posts by user are free but for next every 100 posts I want to charge user $1 how can I do that? Any suggestions?

If I want have multiple plans for my micro saas product for example free plan then paid plan or enterprise plan etc then how to segregate features & users based on that? Any suggestions or resources which I can follow?

Thanks in advance :)***aditodkar*** 2 years ago

Hi! I would highly recommend either talking to the free live support on stripe.com or jumping on their awesome discord channel : https://discord.com/invite/stripe, replies are usually very quick.

All of what you said is possible, with either stripe , paddle or chargebee, however i am sure Stripe is the most malleable as you can handle all the logic in your backend using their api.

For no.1, it seems like the user roles will have to handled on the backend, stripe only handles payments, acts as your customer database, and keeps records of subscriptions. You can use meta data and your backend will pull data from stripe, check the meta data and you assign the roles yourself.

For no. 2 i have exactly this setup. Segregating features and users is all done on your side, not stirpe.. Stripe has no idea what features you want to add.. and why should they..

You can create different subscriptions in stripe, Free, Pro, Business and thats all you need. Your backend / front end handles the rest.

Remember this very forum IH is also owned by Stripe!***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Thanks a lot for discord link I will check it out. Regarding second point which I mentioned how should I implement backend side I want to segregate features and users depending on plans they sign up for. Any tutorials or reference material? Note: I am use supabase with React and some APIs on Nodejs + Mongo atlas.***aditodkar*** 2 years ago

Great post - thanks for your sharing,

but whats wrong with php for saas building like laravel 8

is use other is more faster or easiest.***yahyahashim*** 2 years ago

hi Yash. sorry maybe my sarcasm did not translate well.

Absolutely nothing wrong with php, its just a common internet meme to make fun of php (said many js developers better then me). I also know that there are many laravel utilities that help you build faster.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

use nocode!***Marinajedi*** 2 years ago

ha! yes quite possibly, i just came across https://automatio.co/ a fellow indie hacker @kinder , however i do feel even with no code you need to pick and choose your tools. You're also very much in a walled garden perhaps not being able as flexible as you are with just code. ask me in 10 years my opinion might change.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Thanks for mentioning Rishi. Indeed no-code space is most likely come with a cost of hitting some limits or customizations. It's depend on the tool/platform it self, how much is invested in it.

But I believe more time it pass, the no-code tools becomes more flexible, powerful etc***kinder*** 2 years ago

What a grateful post you shared here and I would like to share some best saw tools that they have been collected here.***ursld33*** 2 years ago

This is a solid list! As a Laravel Developer, I personally use Laravel Wave, it is a SaaS starter kit that comes with a lot of things out of the box like:

Authentication

User Profiles

User Impersonation

Subscriptions using Paddle

Subscription Plans

User Roles

Notifications

Announcements

Fully Functional Blog

Out of the Box API

Admin Panel

Customizable Themes

Simple integration with the DigitalOcean App Platform

https://devdojo.com/wave***bobbyiliev*** 2 years ago

Forgot to mention that it is free and open-source too***bobbyiliev*** 2 years ago

if only the JS eco sytem had such tooling.. oh wait npm.. 😱***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Isn't npm a package manager and not a SaaS starter kit? 😅***bobbyiliev*** 2 years ago

yes indeed it is, ultimately any JS starter kit would be using parts if not all packages from npm.. this post which is admittedly opinionated is basically my starter kit, you could say.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

A lot of great points and tools here, thanks!

I’d add that Netlify is another simple option for hosting JAMstack. I’d say it’s comparable to Vercel, though personally I’ve enjoyed using it more. It was just easier for me to pick up. And they provide some additional features like their own Auth or Forms you can add fairly easily.

The MongoDB realm sounds interesting. Wondering about how secure it is to trigger DB updates from the client? I’ll have to read their docs to better understand.***rain2o*** 2 years ago

Hi Rain,

Tks for the reply.

Sure Netlify, I didn't add it as i've only played around with it and found with all the services and auth it quickly gets expensive, and this is a opinionated piece. Moreover their CDN nodes at the time were not as wide spread as cloudflare, but def a excellent choice for static hosting and functions.

MongoDb Realm is similar to firestore, where you can make queries from the client side. Their SDK will only allow queries to be done if the user is authenticated using rules etc and must be combined with Realm authentication or your own JWT, its quite flexible and more secure then any auth i could roll! Realm Docs***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

That's interesting about Realm, I'll check that out for sure. I've never used Firestore either, though I constantly hear about it. Keep telling myself I'll try Firebase/Firestore one of these days.***rain2o*** 2 years ago

you can check out sawolabs for passwordless Auth too!***varunjaggi*** 2 years ago

Looks good, do you use them? whats good and bad about them? and how is the interface and account management?***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

This was an awesome post, @Rishi\_Uttam

The fake payment page is interesting. Had heard @levelsio on YouTube mention using this strategy***goutham8*** 2 years ago

i need to follow @levelsio, thanks for your feedback. what you working on?***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Sure, definitely an awesome entrepreneur.

So I'm currently working on https://www.astramind.io where a community of SaaS makers, founders are building in public & engage with potential customers watching their product timelines***goutham8*** 2 years ago

cool like a mastermind buddy system!***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Great read!***phillip\_ninan*** 2 years ago

Hey philip, thanks man, what you working on?***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Totally agree with "spend zero time on logo". Also I use https://leandomainsearch.com/ when I look for a domain name (especially if you want a .com)***MikeyTrades*** 2 years ago

will check them out, did you buy your last domain from them? how was the process?***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Auth0 is still cool! I've been super happy with it on my stack.***Weaves87*** 2 years ago

thats great! thanks.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

The fake billing page tip was priceless. Thanks Earl***alex\_totolici*** 2 years ago

Yup, believe it or not its true! Combine this with logrocket.com for session reply and you can see what your customers do on your site. When the intention to give you money is there thats when you can continue to build.***Rishi\_Uttam*** 2 years ago

Thanks for sharing. I think that technical suggestions are doubtable, but keeping it simple totally makes sense to me.

The email marketing tips are especially useful as we are currently working on, so double thanks for them :)***alexjackson*** 2 years ago

## Deploy your SaaS projects?

(Where and how do you) by Mohamed A Djadoun

Hi hackers,

I am currently building a new product for developers, bootstrapped, solopreneurs and indie hackers. I am working on reducing the time, pain, complexity and cost of getting a SaaS solution out of the door. And I am looking for some insights here. (will be announcing soon in IH)

I am asking two questions in one here.

Where do you deploy your Saas projects (Backend + Frontend)?

Ex: AWS, Heroku, Azure, Digital Ocean,... Etc.

How do you deploy your saas projects?

Here I am more interested in knowing about the DevOps part.

Do you use CI/CD or do you push manually?

Do you use Docker. Kubernetes, Serverless, AWS Beanstalk, GCP App Engin... Simple server, own load balencers... Etc

Thank you very much in advance for all your feedback.

***Mohamed A Djadoun*** on October 19, 2019

Gitlab is where I host my repository and use CI/CD. I have also used Bitbucket in the past and it has worked well for me.

For hosting, I used to use Google, but switched to Digital Ocean. For indie hackers, I really think Digital Ocean hits a sweet spot by providing the right set of options without an overly complex UI. I've used AWS in the past but I find it overly complex and has way too many choices. Also, you can get started with a $5/mo droplet on Digital Ocean to test your idea and then scale to a more expensive option as needed.

I think you can start your idea simply, but once you start getting some traffic, really think about containerizing it. It will make it much easier to do repeatable deployments. Kubernetes is great if you can get over the initial learning curve.

Lastly, I've had my eye out on this company: https://render.com/. They seems like a nice alternative for indie hackers as well.***xerxes*** 4 years ago

Thanks for the Render mention (I'm the founder). Our cloud is built for indie hackers who don't want to manage servers/VMs/droplets/SSL/CD and all the other cruft that goes into hosting even the simplest of apps.

This site is also running on Render!***anuragg*** 4 years ago

It seems really nice. How much time do you reckon it would take to build a simple multi-tenant SaaS on the platform in terms of managing infrastructure? And is it easy to move my app to another provider without vendor lock-in in case it is not right for me? Another thing, will I be able to run .NET core API in docker as a Linux container? The last thing, can I have multiple environments easily and what does it cost, for example, dev, prod, and so on?

***Caspi*** a year ago

Indeed Do seems to be the most popular solution so far***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

SocialTracker.io runs fully on Digital Ocean. All microservices are containerized using Docker.

For the deployment, I've written a script that does everything for me (fetch the latest code, restart the services, ...) which I manually trigger to deploy. It's nothing fancy, but it does the job well for now and was easy to set up.***Nebulic*** 4 years ago

Thank you very much for your answers. It seems that Digital Ocean is quite popular among the community.

For your project do you use Kubernetes or any other container orchestration tool?***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

I like the fact that DO has straight-forward, predictable pricing. And as @xerxes mentioned, their droplets start at $5/mo which is very reasonable when beginning a new project.

I'm currently not using any orchestration tools. Kubernetes is nice when it's fully set up, but I don't really need the extra features right now (autoscaling, rolling updates, ...). But if SocialTracker continues to grow, it's the next logical step for me to take.***Nebulic*** 4 years ago

Apart from the services already mentioned here, I guess the following can be good choices depending upon an indiehacker's needs. https://render.com

<https://unubo.com> https://backendless.com***joyed*** 4 years ago

Because I "lost" a whole weekend trying figure out how I can containerize my project with Docker, I've decided to stay with the stack I used before.

https://abrocket.io runs on heroku. For the mongoDB database I am using MongoDB Atlas, which is also super easy and fast to setup and manage.

For the website I am using Netlify for the same reasons – super easy to setup, fast and reliable deploying.

Imo its always better to have everything under control and to manage the hosting stuff by yourself, but as a solopreneur your time is the most valuable thing you can spent . I don't want waste it.***RayT*** 4 years ago

Digital Ocean for hosting

Deployed with an ansible script

CircleCI for CI

I trigger the deploy manually rather than using CD - I had Circle setup to use the ansible script before, but switched back to having a human in the loop***monty5811*** 4 years ago

I use Netlify for serverless websites and Firebase for DB and serverless API. Zero server maintenance.***liv*** 4 years ago

Me too! Netlify Auto deploy from github, and firebase Firestore for the backend! (And some firebase cloud functions as needed)***corysmc*** 4 years ago

This comment was deleted 5 months ago.

DeletedUser 4 years ago

2

https://www.bankpayments.net runs on Heroku but thinking of trying out Render - We need some private services (i.e. only visible to our internal services without an internet facing http endpoint) but Heroku only offers that on their enterprise tier. Render offers than on their normal tiers. So we'll try that out the in a few weeks. Database is MongoDb Atlas.***smythe*** 4 years ago

I am mostly using Digital Ocean with Dokku for all my frontend and backend apps.

Just published an article how I deploy my static SPAs: https://medium.com/@jascha.burmeister/build-and-deploy-static-vue-react-spa-on-dokku-bafc3d36301f***anubis*** 4 years ago

thank you very much for the link will look into it:)***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

AWS

I use a Serverless stack; DynamoDB/Lambda/API Gateway backend deployed via AWS CodeBuild/CodePipeline. Auth with Cognito. Static frontend deployed by Amplify Console. All deployed on push to master.

It's the best/easiest (once up and running) stack I've used so far and is cost effective based on current usage.***cabdesigns*** 4 years ago

100% AWS I see. And no servers to manage.

I would have a follow up question regarding your setup and how do you handle some of the SaaS most common functionality if that is ok to ask?***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

Ask away! Do you have an example specifically?***cabdesigns*** 4 years ago

so my questions are:

How do call Cognito for authentication and authorization on every call?

How do you handle tenancy in your serverless setup?***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

We use Cognito as an authorizer for API Gateway: https://docs.aws.amazon.com/apigateway/latest/developerguide/apigateway-integrate-with-cognito.html

We separate the different user roles into user pools, and generally only one user role will access specific APIs.

It's multi-tenant so we make sure data is assigned to a particular user, and we put extra authorisation logic into the Lambdas to ensure the requesting user is authorised to this specific data set. It works well so far.***cabdesigns*** 4 years ago

Netlify for the front end, Digital Ocean droplet for the backend.***ngajhede*** 4 years ago

After the great interest shown by the IH community, I created a proper Typeform to collect all your answers and present them in IH as an article

Please fill out the survey and share it around

https://zakardo.typeform.com/to/Gp82Uz***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

Thnx to everyone who has been active in this post. I see that there is quite some interest in sharing the tech we use to get our products out to the customer. I am currently preparing a survey that I will post in a new post to collect as much info from the IH community as I can and will be sharing my findings ofc***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

GitHub + Gitea private mirror

Digital Ocean $5 droplet

Piku for git push deploys

Postgres & sqlite3 for data.***chr15m*** 4 years ago

These community exchanges are gold and save everyone hours/days of independent research. Thanks all!***vfulco*** 4 years ago

I use Laravel for most, if not all of my projects, so here's what I use.

I have a Digital Ocean droplet (just the $5 one) that I put all my things on. I provision and deploy my code using Laravel Forge.

As I kind of mentioned in my last answer above, I let Laravel Forge manage all of the deployments. Any commit on my master branch on Github automatically gets deployed to production.

I do use Travis CI for testing my code, I run those tests for every commit and for every pull request.***damcclean*** 4 years ago

I use GitLab CI to deploy various Node apps with Docker on Google Kubernetes Engine. I also have a variety of small serverless functions deployed to GCP.

Kubernetes is EXTREMELY overkill though. I use it because Google gave me $20k of credit (and I kinda wanted to learn it). When that expires, I'll almost certainly move to Heroku for most things because of their awesome DX.

I've had an eye on Render.com too. It looks nice. But they don't seem to have a GitLab on-prem integration or CLI deploy.***nprail*** 4 years ago

I'm using the Azure Stack from StaticForms.

Deployment uses several Azure components:

Azure AppService for the main application

Azure Functions for background jobs

SQL Azure for structured data storage

Azure Table Storage for logs

Azure Queues for messaging and inter-process co-ordination

I'm utilising Azure Devops for source code management, build and deployment. Fully automated check in to master triggers the build and deployment process.

Not currently using Docker as I'm using the Windows-based Azure App Service, but I'm looking in to it as it's required to use the Linux-based App Service, which could potentially reduce my costs substantially.***SydneyHacker*** 4 years ago

Nice. I am using Azure stack as well, however, I think it takes a lot of time to develop a SaaS with Azure. How did you implement tenancy isolation and database modeling and which authentication provider did you use?

Caspi a year ago

I used ASP.NET Identity with username/password storage in a Azure SQL database. I'd prefer something more flexible, but it would probably be overkill for my use-case.

I have a shared tenant schema with a tenant id on every table and use EFCore interceptors to inject the tenant id on every query to ensure tenant isolation.

SydneyHacker a year ago

Backend: Firebase (Firestore, Auth, Storage, Hosting). APIs are super simple yet powerful and incredibly well documented. Firebase is fantastic for simplicity.

Front end: React SPA using create-react-app scripts for development and build.

Manual push. Firebase has a great CLI, it’s a simple as “firebase deploy” ... I’m trying to keep things as simple as possible for now.***stevenkkim*** 4 years ago

Google Cloud Platform + Kubernetes. Helm is like a package manager for cluster applications. The first time I saw EventStore installed completely automatically, and my own application deployed and automatically scaled due to usage, I was enthralled.***szicari*** 4 years ago

Love this question. I'm working on 1secret.app, as well as a few other projects.

My stack of choice is Laravel (PHP) + Vue + TailwindCSS. For provisioning and deployment, the best choice for a Laravel app of this size is Laravel Forge. As far as hosting/VPS, I use Linode, but Forge works very well with DigitalOcean, AWS, Vultr, etc.

Forge is amazing for me because, first of all, it takes care of all the complexities of provisioning a server. Just point it to your Linode instance and it does all the rest, including SSL via LetsEncrypt.

My code is hosted on Gitlab or Github. The extent of my CI/CD is simply creating a hook in Forge that watches for new tags. So if I want automatic deployment, I'll just tag a commit and push the tag(s) to the repo. Forge will deploy the code automatically. And there's also the manual option whereby you click Deploy Now in Forge.

Being a solo developer on my own projects precludes the need for complex CI/CD.

For static sites I take a different approach. My philosophy of keeping costs at a bare minimum while I'm not making any money (yet) led me to host all my static sites on Netlify. Those include my blog (chasingcode.dev) which is a Jigsaw site (static-built Laravel), as well as a couple others that are built in Vue. With Netlify, deployment happens on each commit, because that's how I have it set up.

And that's about it.***brbcoding*** 4 years ago

My setup seems to differ from most here, as I am using Microsoft Azure for all my hosting needs. I use the managed services there as much as possible (no VM maintenance), and .NET Core is my main backend programming language (React & Vue for the frontend), so Azure is a great fit for that. The Azure portal is great and easy to use, pricing is transparent and easy to understand.

The website for #calmerge (https://www.calmerge.app/) runs on Azure Storage where it's easy to deploy a static website (one HTML file with some css/js) and use Azure CDN to have it available in datacenters around the world.

Services I am using:

Github for my code (https://github.com/arnigunnar)

Azure Devops for CI/CD

Azure Storage for static website hosting

Azure App Service for application hosting

Azure SQL for database hosting

Azure Functions for simple things***arnigunnar*** 4 years ago

+1 for Azure! I think a lot of people in the IH world ignore it because it's Microsoft. But I've found Azure to be one of the most friendly platforms for startups. I'm not sure if they still do it but BizSpark really helped us out, they gave us $150 worth of credits every month for 3 years. That really helped us out!***shanefromfargo*** 4 years ago

What do you think makes it friendly for startups? I think there are a lot of limitations and complex topics even though I am well versed in them. I wonder if it is faster to use something like render or digital ocean.

***Caspi*** a year ago

BizSpark isn't quite as generous as it used to be, but you still get a $150 credit for the first month and a number of services free for either 12 months or forever.***SydneyHacker*** 4 years ago

Nice. I am using Azure stack as well, however, I think it takes a lot of time to develop a SaaS with Azure. How did you implement tenancy isolation and database modeling and which authentication provider did you use?

Caspi a year ago

I have actually moved to GCP for my application, Itsy. But am using Azure for a whole lot of other stuff. Regarding auth, I am a big fan of Auth0, and try to implement that into all my applications.

arnigunnar a year ago

It sure is indeed. I am actually surprised by the fact that most answers went towards Digital Ocean where you do not have lots of managed services.

Correct me if I am wrong, but in your case the BE technology was quite an influence in your choice of provider?***Zakardo*** 4 years ago

Most of us just want to build a business. DO is simple, the price is right and it gets the job done.

Why waste time and money on Kubernetes and a labyrinth of AWS or competing services that are largely designed to lock you in when you don't even have 100k users and are very far from needing more than a single server?***alchemist*** 4 years ago

Yes, I have been developing on the .NET platform for most of my working life (which spans over 20 years), so Azure is the logical choice for me. I have worked with the Google Cloud Platform a bit, and it has some very compelling services (Firebase being one of them).

When you are working on small projects in a team of one, managed services is a great way of minimizing time spent on infrastructure, therefore getting more time to work on your project. A no-brainer for me ...***arnigunnar*** 4 years ago

I deploy to Digital Ocean, using Gitlab CI/CD. Every time I push code to the server, the tests are run. If the tests pass and it was a push (or merge) to master, it automatically deploys the front and back-end to DO and runs any needed database migrations.

The CI/CD runs in docker, but the server does not.***alchemist*** 4 years ago

I use CircleCI and have it listen to the master branch of my GitHub repo.

As soon as any pull requests are merged in, it'll trigger a build and deploy it to AWS Lambda (Serverless).

Frontend I use Netlify which also listens on t

## What's your indie stack for SaaS?

by wolferber Hey everyone-

Getting back into launching some indie projects (many of which are using AI under the hood) so thought I'd research all the latest tech to help reduce dev time. Here are some of my favorites:

Fastgen

I have been using Fastgen to quickly build scalable APIs and Cron Jobs. It abstracts away a lot of the complexity of the backend and enables me to think about the business logic.

It also has out-of-the-box support for hitting Open AI's chatGPT API.

Subframe

I went from zero to having built out my entire component library and product UI in under an hour. Suuuper useful if you want beautiful looking component library but can't afford to hire a designer.

Also- if you're building any sort of chatbot, there's a great Messaging page template to help you get started.

Rainfall QA

I've never been one to write many tests but Rainfall has a pretty rad no-code interface for spinning up end-to-end tests. It took me just a few minutes to create my first one and then a couple hours to build a whole suite that runs on a weekly basis.

Tailwind UI

If you're using Tailwind, there are a lot of great templates here.

What else is out there that you'd recommend?

***Wolferber*** on June 22, 2023

I know it’s cringe but I do all my development on the Microsoft stack 😬. I use .net for APIs and Blazor for the frontend. I can just use c# everywhere. 🤘***sunil\_rav*** 4 months ago

Same here! It's nice that .NET now runs on pretty much any OS. I host all my apps on Digital Ocean Ubuntu droplets.

I actually created an open source framework on top of Blazor Server. If your interested, check it out - https://blazorspark.com/docs/introduction/***westonwalker*** 4 months ago

Looks great! I will give it whirl for my next project!***sunil\_rav*** 4 months ago

Microsoft tech stack is amazing, people love to hate on early 2000's .NET.

I use .NET and am very, very proud of it.***DMiradakis*** 4 months ago

Can I dm you? I think I got an interesting idea for an AI powered SaaS after a deep market research.***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

valid stack. use what your most comfortable with, even if its microsoft lol***adons69*** 4 months ago

This comment was deleted 4 months ago.

***Tjdowd*** 4 months ago

@wolferber nice list! didn't know about fastgen & subframe.

I am building a SAAS product, for which i am using this tech stack -

NextJS, Tailwind & shadcn/ui - for building frontend

React Query - for client side data fetching

Express, MongoDB & Typescript - for bulding REST API

Everything is open source.***brijeshk*** 4 months ago

I considered shadcn given that I'm using the new app directory but after doing a demo with subframe, I decided to give it a shot. Have been thoroughly impressed so far!***wolferber*** 4 months ago

Can I dm you? I think I got an interesting idea for an AI powered SaaS after a deep market research. My Discord id: Vector#4461***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

Hey Sure, will connect. Here is my user name on discord: brijdi***brijeshk*** 4 months ago

this dudes spamming his "ai powered saas" idea everywhere b careful***adons69*** 4 months ago -1

This comment has been voted down. Click to show.***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

Hey, thanks for the list. I'm new to the community and would consider myself as a Jr dev. Do you have any tips or resources about how to structure my application to allow access to features based on being a free user or subscriber to a paid plan?***CodeNameMoe*** 4 months ago

You could use this template with has support for Stripe billing and subscriptions out of the box!

https://github.com/vercel/nextjs-subscription-payments***wolferber*** 4 months ago

Thank you I will look into this.***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

Hey @wolferber thanks for sharing the above! I've not heard of Fastgen or Rainfall QA before - I'll have to try them out.

For my project TinySurvey I'm using the following stack:

NextJS. This has become my go to dev framework for all of my projects. It handles both the front end and the API. It also works seamlessly with Vercel which is what I'm using to host it.

Supabase. It has Postgres and auth out of the box and a library that works well with NextJS.

Tailwind. An absolute game changer. It's very rare I use standard CSS since I've started using Tailwind.***austerberry*** 4 months ago

+1 on Supabase + next.js -> this is now my go-to starter kit for new SaaS applications. Love that supabase comes out of the box with CRUD APIs.

I also recommend using this template that Vercel put together (using Stripe + Supbase + Next.js + tailwind under the hood):

https://github.com/vercel/nextjs-subscription-payments***wolferber*** 4 months ago

Electron app frontend/single page app UI: VueJS

Product site/landing page: Nuxt (VueJS)

REST API: .NET Web API

Database: SQL Server

Authentication: Auth0

All hosting: Azure

UI styling: Tailwind CSS + DevExtreme components***DMiradakis*** 4 months ago

VueJS with TailwindCSS

Hasura backend

AWS Hosted***im\_max\_sinclair*** 4 months ago

Docker

Ruby on Rails + JavaScript/TypeScript

AWS CDK (infrastructure as code)

AWS for everything else: database, ECS, redis, logs, etc***sheepish\_coder*** 4 months ago

We use the following at Tidyrise.com

UI: Nextjs with Tailwindcss

Backend/APIs: Golang

Hosting: UI on Vercel

Backend on Render

Database: AWS

Authentication: Auth0

Chat: Crisp***tidyrise*** 4 months ago

Maybe I’m behind the times but:

React Native Web w/ Expo (Frontend)

Nest.js w/ Postgres (Backend)

Cognito (Auth)

GPT 3.5 (AI)

Dokku (Deployment)

AWS S3 (Cloud)

All of my apps are on a single Dokku instance, so it’s possible scaling could become a challenge.

I like to develop my apps for Web and Native at the same time, and I prefer code-based config over GUI.***zuluana*** 4 months ago

We use vercel and supabase***arminli*** 4 months ago

I completely rebuilt Turbolink.io with SvelteKit, Supabase, and Vercel. The whole thing works like magic! I can deploy new versions in one click, and the stack took YEARS off development time.***jrberendt*** 4 months ago

The very first product I used from Indie Hackers is named: Logology ( an AI logo generator) I was really impressed.

But for UI Kits or web design templates, I use UIHUT for a long time. And surprisingly, recently they launched their UIHUT B2B Market (this is really cool!!) and I loved it. Now I can resell their 23000+ resources and also I use them myself.

If you sell themes, website builders, and plugins, or you have a company where you sell design templates you can visit their website (https://uihut.com/b2b-design).

As I know right now they just looking for some early users to offer a lifetime deal in a surprising cost.***deluar001*** 4 months ago

Next.js (React), MUI (Component), Postmark (email), AWS (infra), appwrite (backend) for our dev stack. We actually wasted almost a month trying out the "latest tech". Not recommended 😑***bayne*** 4 months ago

I recently started using https://www.airplane.dev/ for automated and scheduled tasks that hit my API endpoints and would recommend, really simple UI and I don't have to worry about building scheduled tasks in Django anymore

For Frontend Chakra UI (https://chakra-ui.com/) is super fast for getting good-looking components up-and-running - in fact, I switched to them after Tailwind (not to say I'll probably switch back when I want more opinionated UI but the gains I get from Chakra coupled with it's speed made it a no-brainer)

Frontend: Next JS / React / TypeScript

Backend: Django / DRF

DB: PostGreSQL***cerwind*** 4 months ago

For my first indie product, I'd used Flask + Bootstrap, with a bit of jQuery, but that was a long time back now.

Then I started getting into fullstack JS dev, so I've used the following:

NextJS for the backend and SSR

React frontend

Firebase for user auth

MongoDB as a database (firestore has limitations you run into pretty quickly, and I've noticed it taking 10-20x longer for even very simple queries. I gained a 10x speedup to an app just by removing firestore. Mongo has a serverless option that charges based on usage). Also I try to avoid SQL databases as they complicate things in my opinion, with the migrations and all, you need to be thoughtful from day one.

TailwindCSS (and now TailwindUI) for the frontend design

DigitalOcean App Platform or Vercel for hosting - Vercel isn't suitable for backends that need to be running 24x7, so I like DO App Platform. It's very simple like Heroku used to be.

I also really love Rails, it's got a lot of simplicity and if you know Rails you can churn out features rapidly. In JS world, you have to figure out so many different things, like auth, DB choice, frameworks, form management libraries, APIs, JWT auth, Rails is a breath of fresh air in comparison, so I would love to use Rails on future projects where it makes sense.

As for no-code platforms, I tried Bubble and it just seemed pretty complicated for me. I think if you're not a dev, it's a great option, but as a dev, I feel like I could get things done way faster with actual code written by me, and Bubble has a pretty hefty fee, you don't own the code.

Bubble apps can only be run on the Bubble platform; there's no way of exporting your application as code. If you decide to move off the Bubble platform, you'll have to rebuild the application logic

This is kind of a dealbreaker for me.***dhamaniasad*** 4 months ago

Great insights. Thanks. Personally I run NGINX, MongoDB, with either Tailwind or Bootstrap (I know, I know, but it gives me the flexibility I need and know my way around) on top I usually run Klein.php Router or another micro-routing framework.***dakl*** 4 months ago

Thanks for sharing your stack. I did not know about Rainfall QA. Trying it out and so far it looks like the thing I was looking for. My Stack is Laravel with Livewire, MariaDB and Nginx. Nothing fancy.***azadshaikh*** 4 months ago

In my opinion in No-Code Stack or Half No-Code Has Development Limitation. After a stage you can't expand it properly. So, For Long term use BEST STACK and for short term use release'able stack***ImMaheKarim*** 4 months ago

I’m I the only one using TALL stack? I just use what I know and what works. I also use Pipedream (Node) to create advanced pipelines with a lot of dependent stept where different APIs (including my own) are called. It’s like Zapier for devs. Waiting patiently for them to add Git versioning for workflows (components can be versioned).***timvanheugten*** 4 months ago

I built a flexible multi-tenant business application platform called PrestoFox. I have built 5+ SaaS Products using it.

I use Symfony (PHP) for backend and make use of GraphQL API. For storage I use MySql and Redis DB. An for Frontend I make use of Quasar Framework ( Vue JS).

One can build PWA, Web App, iOS app, Android app, desktop app, browser plugin using single code base.

To know more about the capabilities here : https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K7AnRgHtX20hRaQh0-27fBxYRm2RPDeY/view?usp=sharing***sachingk*** 4 months ago

Nice! That's a neat list.***mykhanhpham*** 4 months ago

Nextjs

Tailwind css

PostgreSql on railway

Prisma as orm

Backend express js but I moved recently two services to dotnet and I'm general happy about the minimal api approach something to consider in near future.***Coding\_isMyLife*** 4 months ago

2 java spring backends

React fe Js fe

Keycloak Nomad

Patroni with postgres Jenkins for jobs***Tzahi*** 4 months ago

Can I dm you? I think I got an interesting idea for an AI powered SaaS after a deep market research.***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

Golang for backend (including data consumption pipeline + microservices)

VueJS/Quasar (on top of Typescript) for frontend

Postgresql (with a dash of PostGIS)

RabbitMQ for data pipeline messaging

I am also about to utilise Redis for some intermittent caching.

My SaaS isn't deployed yet, but I am building everything with DigitalOcean in mind, hopefully by utilising Docker with droplets.***mustafajnr*** 4 months ago

TailwindUI is awesome, I'm using in my SaaS as well, it has an insane ROI.

For IntelliSyncAI, my project, I'm using:

Supabase for backend. NextJS 13 for frontend.

Tailwind for styling. Stripe for payments.

Turborepo to manage my monorepo.

Github Actions for CI/CD.

It is not on production yet, but I will deploy it on vercel.***jaocfilho*** 4 months ago

Supabase + nextjs + tailwind + stripe is exactly my stack lol. I think this is becoming the standard for many***wolferber*** 4 months ago

Yeah, this is a very powerful stack and I'm already super productive with it. On top of that, I'm using turborepo, so I'm creating all my side projects on the same repo, sharing as many code as possible.***jaocfilho*** 4 months ago

Can I dm you? I think I got an interesting idea for an AI powered SaaS after a deep market research.***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

Sure, would love to discuss.***jaocfilho*** 4 months ago

Send me a request on Discord: Vector#4461***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

I use Ruby on Rails and Javascript!***talha345*** 4 months ago

Can I dm you? I think I got an interesting idea for an AI powered SaaS after a deep market research.***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

Sure, would love to discuss.***talha345*** 4 months ago

SvelteKit, Typescript, Drizzle, PlanetScale, Auth.js, Vercel, shadcn, Tailwind, Stripe, tRPC***GeorgeMarkeshe*** 4 months ago

Building an indie stack allows for flexibility, customization, and the ability to cater to specific needs. From open-source frameworks to cloud services and API integrations, the possibilities are endless. Share your indie stack with us and let's celebrate the creativity and resourcefulness of the indie SaaS community***kathrine*** 4 months ago

Frontend: React and NextJS

Backend: Spring Boot (Java) + Aurora (RDB)

I'm not sure I've ever seen Spring mentioned here on IH but for what we're building a production-grade statically typed framework with a great selection of libraries was key.***rzabel*** 4 months ago

Hey! I recently published a post where I describe the tech stack of Secutils.dev - https://www.indiehackers.com/post/building-secutils-dev-technology-stack-overview-c499eea445 and https://www.indiehackers.com/post/building-secutils-dev-deployment-overview-of-micro-cluster-for-micro-saas-4eb532e4d0***azasypkin*** 4 months ago

Can I dm you? I think I got an interesting idea for an AI powered SaaS after a deep market research. My Discord id: Vector#4461***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

I just launched SilentFlip.com and my stack is what I know best:

Frontend - Astro, TailwindCSS

Backend - NodeJS, SQLite, fly.io

I'd like to learn some other stack, maybe Elixir or Go, but I know Node very well, and Typescript make it less annoying that it is, so I'm happy with it!***skwee357*** 4 months ago

Fly.io looks super neat! I've been using Vercel edge functions for my latest project.

To reduce context switching, I try to stick with typescript for my entire stack. Currently using a Vercel mono repo for FE + backend with edge functions.***wolferber*** 4 months ago

I use vercel for my blog https://www.yieldcode.blog and I really like it! It's a static website, so vercel is nice.

I just feel that fly.io is more geared towards general backend, while vercel is better for their own NextJS. But I like both, just for different purposes.***skwee357*** 4 months ago

Can I dm you? I think I got an interesting idea for an AI powered SaaS after a deep market research.***Vecthor*** 4 months ago

I don’t do AI startups. But I’m willing to connect with other solopreneurs and indie hackers, so feel free to reach out if you want to connect***skwee357*** 4 months ago

## Which SaaS do you pay for as an Indie Hacker?

by cjortuzar

I try to stay as lean as possible, not paying for any SaaS to keep my costs low.

Every dollar counts when we're building and growing our businesses. One strategy to keep costs in check is to minimize or eliminate payments for SaaS tools. However, it's essential to strike a balance between cutting costs and investing in tools that can genuinely boost our productivity and success.

So, I'm curious: How many of you pay for SaaS tools? And if you do, which ones have you found valuable enough to invest in? Conversely, if you're currently holding back due to limited resources, which SaaS tools would you be willing to pay for if you had more financial flexibility?aas? Which ones do you pay for? Which ones would you be willing to pay for if you had more resources?

I'll kick things off by sharing my perspective. Personally, I've taken a bootstrapping approach and avoided paying for most SaaS tools. I'm only momentarily paying for Framer while I build my landing page and I'm paying Vercel's starter plan.

***Cjortuzar*** on June 29, 2023

I totally feel this. I want to pay as little money as possible. My current stack is:

$89/year: cruip for static website design templates

$9.99: Cloudflare purchase per domain name

$0: Cloudflare pages for hosting

$20/month – AWS for everything else

I was able to build my first startup for less than $30/month this way.***lydia\_stepanek*** 4 months ago

can you explain the AWS part, what were you using it for?***jcollins1*** 4 months ago

For sure, I wrote a blog post that goes into more detail of which AWS services I used and how much they each cost: https://www.lydiaoncybersecurity.com/launching-isthisphishy/***lydia\_stepanek*** 4 months ago

similar :)***Kota*** 4 months ago

Love the frugal approach :)***cjortuzar*** 4 months ago

I spend about 500/month on Saas products:

Ahrefs SurferSEO

Canva Freepik

Twitter Blue UberSEO

Google Workplace Zoom***treychong*** 4 months ago

As an agency owner I need subscriptions of tools for making:

client proposals(tried using panda doc)

invoices(tried using Zoho invoices but it does not integrate esign, for which you’ve to use zohosign)

managing projects(tried Trello and jira, currently using jira)

clients, finances of the projects(excel)

my team, and more.

Is there a tool that combines all of these at a single place ?***anuragmd50*** 4 months ago

No idea, but that's a nice SaaS idea - reach out to me, would love to chat and build it***cjortuzar*** 4 months ago

Thought https://kitchen.co/ have solved this problem.

Have you tried it, is there anything missing out?***Vickylove*** 4 months ago

Yeah sure let’s connect. I’m already working on a product, maybe we can discuss.***anuragmd50*** 4 months ago

For Repo Lookout I use..

AWS Lightsail VMs for the scraping ($47.60/m) — I am gradually switching to Leaf Cloud, though, which will be $20 cheaper

Mailgun for programmatic email handling ($75.00/m)

Self-hosted Gitlab on a local NUC for source code/tickets/...

Ko-fi for donations (Gold membership is $72/y)

Static website is hosted on Digital Ocean (runs in a k8s cluster I use for other stuff, so $0/m I guess)

Namecheap for the domains

Stripe and PayPal for handling donations

Plausible for analytics (the little there is)***neathack*** 4 months ago

Good question! It’s interesting to see what others pay for.

I am not a developer, so I no-code my products using Bubble.

So my suite of SaaS is:

G-suite for email service: $5/m

Bubble (visual programming language): $29/m

That’s it! Rest is free for now:

Notion (for managing tasks and to do)

Sendgrid (for transactional emails)

Chat GPT (for AI sparring)***Solohacker*** 4 months ago

Love it, nice and cheap stack :)***cjortuzar*** 4 months ago

Currently paying for a few things that are starting to eat into profits. Intercom being the most expensive and the one I’m actively trying to replace with a self hosted FOSS.

Let me know if anyone has a recommendation. Thinking about multiple service to equal intercom’s***SEHacker*** 4 months ago

Intercom is way too expensive :(

If you only need the chat function, Chatwoot works pretty great. You can self-host it or you can use their free tier which is pretty nice.***cjortuzar*** 4 months ago

That’s exactly what I’m looking at now. I think that paired with posthog and signoz will cover everything I need for about 1/10 the cost of intercom alone.***SEHacker*** 4 months ago

Bro thank you so much 🙏

I'm creating a GPT website chatbot (but built for conversions, not support) and Intercom is a competitor I'm trying to steal customers from.

I'm going to use your comment and run some ads saying something like "Intercom eating into your profits?"

I love how forums are the best place to find great copy.***Christian\_Haskins*** 4 months ago

Hahahah, happy to help!***SEHacker*** 4 months ago

We at www.tidyrise.com spend on only following services that are critical and their free tiers can not be used for prod.

Render Google Workspace Namecheap

Rest all are free tiers***tidyrise*** 4 months ago

I am a Solo entrepreneur and don't pay any of the SaaS tools except the servers and CDN.

Most SaaA tools have a free tire that becomes too limited as soon as there is 2 or more people in the team.

I am developer myself. Hence with my past experience, I am also able to make use of open source projects.

For example I use Mautic for email campaign and use WordPress to build a FAQ support site.

Have built my own ticking form that also sends confirmation email about ticket being raised. It's easy to build.***sachingk*** 4 months ago

That's a great skill to have, or skills all together. Though, older generation of business owners, or people who do not possess time or knowledge on the subject, may want to ask for help from SaaS companies. I am a founder of a SaaS sort of business, I do the whole thing myself, from designing and developing websites to creating small designs. From my experience whilst browsing on the endless web, often I notice established businesses that have a weird website. It's mostly never about the colors or font choice, but way more in depths. The structure - probably the most important variable, without which, the visitor might forget why they even got on that specific website.

There are many possible structure plans for a website, often they are tailored to the market the business operates with, but one thing they all have in common is the very first element when a visitor lands on the home page. Most "do-it-yourself business owners" tend to become poetics and try to reinvent the wheel, overloading the very first element by adding some useless text. If you have a roofing business, per example, you might want to have a big heading which mentions the fact that the visitor has landed on a site of a roof changing company. Then, small text underneath might say something that compliments the big text. If you provide some insane speed roof replacement, then mention that. It should captivate the visitor's attention and intrigue him into viewing the following content.

It's those little things people don't know about that keep the sales low. There's a reason web-dev companies exist. They really do help raise the conversion rates, because often there's a whole team of creative brains behind the whole thing. How much do you think a proper website is worth to your business?***DanielYus*** 4 months ago

It's really worth it. I also believe that the worthy website cannot be done at one shot.

It takes lot many iterations even when done with experts and creative minds.***sachingk*** 4 months ago

Fully indeed!***DanielYus*** 4 months ago

For my startup https://www.withbilly.com/ I'm only paying for Vercel and Firebase. I have built many side projects before and I keep coming back to Firebase all the time. It's reliable and super cheap :-)***nmsdvid*** 4 months ago

I've never been able to use Firebase right :(

But I'm using Pocketbase with free hosting on fly.dev and it has worked great***cjortuzar*** 4 months ago

MongoDB Atlas

Hosting

Stripe (well, not technically a SaaS, but they do take a cut of my income)

Everything else is fully bootstrapped and cost at a minimum.

Was thinking to go paid for Plausible Analytics, but then decided to host myself for free. Will change this as soon as there is more traffic incoming.***dakl*** 4 months ago

Hadn't heard of Plausible Analytics - you've given me a new SaaS to add to my wishlist when I start generating more revenue***cjortuzar*** 4 months ago

Ahrefs cushion useFathom typefully***liltechnomancer*** 4 months ago

Hadn't heard of a couple of these SaaS, will check them out!***cjortuzar*** 4 months ago

I should try and make a complete list of everything. These are just a few of the ones I spend a lot of time in. XD***liltechnomancer*** 4 months ago

Still on the free tiers of those:

MailJet for transactional emails

HubSpot for CRM

MailChimp for marketing emails

I use GCP to run all the infra and that's the main expense :)***dimka*** 4 months ago

Great question! For the development of our macOS Pomodoro timer Lifeline, we pay for the following SaaS tools:

Userlist $75 p/m (for automated product education email sequences)

Notion $10 p/m (company OS and knowledge base for users)

Google $5 p/m (for email)

Webflow $23 p/m (for the website + blog)

I'd say the email one is the most painful (especially since it will go up to $150 p/m by the end of the year when we exit their startup discount program), but we do see much higher retention from people who get the emails during onboarding, trial, etc., and I would have no idea how to build something like that ourselves.***timmetz*** 4 months ago

Perplexity AI: $20/month - Research & content generation

Stealthgpt: $5/month - Making generated content bypass AI detection

Blackmagic (Professional): $22/month - Twitter Analytics

Notion.so (Plus): $8/month - Business OS***bayne*** 4 months ago

Thanks for sharing this list. Would love to hear more about how you use Perplexity AI for content generation.

Do you mean that you use it to find relevant information, which you then use in your content? Or do you actually use it to generate content?***timmetz*** 4 months ago

Happy to share more. I mostly use it to find relevant information AI is great at querying and extracting information. But at times when I have the content headers and a bit of description in mind I use AI to create the original draft.***bayne*** 4 months ago

And how is Perplexity AI different in that regard from ChatGPT (Plus)?***timmetz*** 4 months ago

GitHub Azure CosmosDb Auth0

Stripe Google Analytics sunil\_rav

## Add AI to your existing SaaS product

(and give your customers superpowers)

by Kyle

Unless you've been living under a rock or doing a dopamine detox for the past twelve months, you will likely have witnessed the explosion of AI products and the wave of indie hackers chasing the gold rush and trying to strike it lucky with an AI product.

While AI has been around for years, it's previously been restricted to the realms of machine learning experts and not easily accessible to indie hackers. OpenAI and Stable Diffusion changed the game in 2022 by making text and image generation accessible to everyone.

The opportunity

The most famous example of an indie hacker crushing it with an AI product is Pieter Levels, who is building photoai.com to create synthetic digital photoshoots.

Products like this are fun and sexy, but achieving this kind of success with a product that's a UI for AI is rare. I tried it with aigraphics.io and failed.

The opportunity for indie hackers is to use AI to augment existing products and solutions rather than find these cutting-edge ideas.

Simon Høiberg added AI generative text to his social media scheduling product, Feedhive, to help users generate content ideas for social media.

Randall Kanna, another indie hacker, is building CodeTutor that uses AI to teach people how to code with the power of AI. Randall is one of my customers and CodeTutor is built using my SaaS starter kit. Here's a visual of CodeTutor to show integrating AI into a product can look.

CodeTutor AI

AI might seem technically daunting, but I'll tell you a secret – adding generative AI to your SaaS product is easy. I will show you exactly how I added it to my product in less than 30 minutes, and how you can, too.

Why Add Generative AI To Your Product?

The main reason you should add AI to your SaaS product is to give your customers superpowers. We've already covered two examples, and here are some more superpowers you give your customers using AI:

Increase efficiency by automating repetitive and mundane tasks

Provide personalized experiences and recommendations

Improve the accuracy of data analysis and deliver more profound insights

Predict future trends, patterns, and behaviours

Increase speed of decision making

The possibilities are endless!

How to Add Generative Text With ChatGPT

If you’re unfamiliar with ChatGPT, it's a product from OpenAI for generating text responses with AI. We give it a prompt - this can be a question or instruction – and it returns some text.

The following tutorial is written in Javascript, but the same principles apply to other languages. OpenAI has SDKs for various programming languages, and the API calls will be the same.

Create Your OpenAI account

Grab your OpenAI key

Store your API key somewhere safe; I always put keys into a .env file

Install the OpenAI SDK

npm i openai

Make a request to the ChatGPT API with your prompt using the following code:

const { Configuration, OpenAIApi } = require('openai');

const config = new Configuration({ apiKey: process.env.OPENAI\_API\_KEY });

const openai = new OpenAIApi(config);

async function askChatGPT({ prompt }){

const res = await openai.createChatCompletion({

model: 'gpt-3.5-turbo',

messages: [{ role: 'user', content: prompt }]

});

return res.data?.choices?.[0].message?.content;

}

askChatGPT({ prompt: 'Give me a list of the 10 best cafes in Bangkok, Thailand' });

This chunk of code asks OpenAI to generate a new chat request; we specify the ChatGPT model (gpt-3.5-turbo), which is the most popular and widely used OpenAI model.

Next, we set the role to user and pass in our prompt.

It'll take a few seconds to complete and then ChatGPT will respond, and the output text will be available in res.data.choices[0].messages.content

ChatGPT Output

How to Add Generative Image With Dall-E

Dall-E is another product from OpenAI for generating images based on a prompt. We can use it to create any image we can possibly imagine.

We can use OpenAI and the same API key to do this; we only need to change the code slightly:

async function askDallE({ prompt, size, number }){

const res = await openai.createImage({

prompt: prompt,

size: size,

n: number

});

return res.data?.data;

}

askDallE({ prompt: 'A photo of a kitten drinking coffee', size: '512x512', number: 1 })

Similar to ChatGPT, we pass in a prompt, but this time we need a few more parameters: size and n.

Size is the dimensions for our image; in this example I'm asking Dall-E for an image that is 512x512px

n is the number of images we want to generate, in this case, just one image.

Dall-E Output

That's it! Easy right? You can use these two chunks of code to perform many AI tasks. Writing good prompts is the secret to getting the best results. I've shared some resources below on prompt engineering for further reading.

Further Reading

Prompt Engineering: From Words to Art and Copy

Lexica Art Visual Prompt Builder

Prompt Engineering Template Kyle

posted to Artificial Intelligence on April 20, 2023

Very useful informations, great.***Bishnu*** 6 months ago

Really excited for GPT-4 to publicly release their API!***AIScout*** 6 months ago

This is a very helpful post. I am now very much studying AI and implementing it in the business of clients. How I Successfully Implemented AI at Berkeley University: https://ingestai.io/use-cases/empowering-uc-berkeley-online-course-support***bakhariev*** 6 months ago

@vincanger did a new walk through his SaaS with GPT included https://www.indiehackers.com/post/81ac6d8c19***infomiho*** 6 months ago

thanks for the shout, @infomiho!***vincanger*** 6 months ago

@kylegawley can you share some use cases for Dall-E? I like the idea of using AI-generated images but I'm not sure what I'd do with them! 😅***inmypjs*** 6 months ago

You could generate images for social media posts, online ads for eg***kylegawley*** 6 months ago

Yesss. I've been trying to figure out how to get on the AI bandwagon with my product. I think I'll do GPT. Here we go!***Silvio\_SF*** 6 months ago

Good luck 🙌🏻***kylegawley*** 6 months ago

I've been wondering about how I should go about integrating generative AI into my platform! Thanks so much for sharing this tactical post, it gives me a great place to get started.

Bookmarked! :)***adam\_kershner*** 7 months ago

Wow this is so sick! I'm working on our product ConveyThis. Will def give this a shot.***mykhanhpham*** 4 months ago

I am learning to existing SaaS product and your post is an excellent guide. Loved it. Thanks for writing this.***fernslkara*** 5 months ago

AI is here to stay. Practically every day I use ChatGPT. It became habit.***lukaslemos*** 5 months ago

Identify customer pain points: The first step is to identify customer pain points that can be addressed with AI. Look for areas where AI can help automate or improve existing processes, such as data analysis, customer service, or content recommendation.

Choose the right AI technology: Once you've identified areas where AI can help, choose the right AI technology for your product. Consider factors such as the complexity of the problem you're trying to solve, the amount of data you have, and the level of accuracy required.

Collect and label data: To train your AI model, you'll need to collect and label data. This can be a time-consuming process, but it's essential for building an accurate and effective model.***mrsimon*** 6 months ago

This may be a bit off topic, but the why section got me thinking. And I've been thinking a lot recently about recent AI developments in terms of "how can I make this product more agentive?".

Agent does not equal AI necessarily, but the recent batch of AI tools have certainly made it more popular & feasible to think about agentive tech.

Agentive could mean a lot of things, but I'm specifically thinking about it in terms of "how can this tool do more of what it currently does without user interaction?". If the best UI is no UI, then the best UX is that the tool does what.

Basic travel booking agent example (3 levels of agentive-ness(?))

Agent finds flights, and notifies you about them. You go and book yourself.

Agent finds flights, and notifies you about them. All you have to do is confirm whether it's allowed to purchase the flight on your behalf

Agent finds flights, and notifies you that it purchased the flight on your behalf (maybe you allow it to do so if the deal is "really good")

And you can adjust the dial for how agentive the tech is based on the type of tool you have, or even let users do this on an individual basis (e.g. John trusts the tool to transact up to $400 without any input, but Jill is okay with $1000)***seitzej*** 6 months ago

Wow, Thanks for sharing this article.

It show how things can be done with ease.***digitalabdul*** 6 months ago

This is a fantastic and informative article, Kyle! Your explanation of how indie hackers can add generative AI to their SaaS products is clear and concise, making it easy for readers to follow along and implement the steps themselves. I appreciate how you emphasized the value of giving customers superpowers through the use of AI, and the endless possibilities it provides. Your inclusion of real-life examples and code snippets using ChatGPT and Dall-E make the article even more practical and accessible. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and insights with us!***ritiksingh*** 6 months ago

Thanks for the comprehensive guide. I'm curious if you have experience in passing large amounts of data to AI as a prompt. It's fairly easy to work with AI on small datasets, but when it comes to large massive, there should be a different approach. E.g. when you want to train ChatGPT on the data from a large spreadsheet so it could advise some values or find inconsistencies. Just wondering, if you tried anything like that.***tablum*** 6 months ago

Useful thanks***albertwolf*** 6 months ago

thanks for this well concise and helpful read***SaaSAnalyser*** 6 months ago

To add a generative image with DALL-E, you can follow these steps:

Access OpenAI's DALL-E 2 API, which allows you to generate images based on textual inputs.

Choose a textual prompt that describes the image you want to generate. The prompt can be a sentence or a phrase that includes specific details such as colors, shapes, and objects.

Submit the prompt to DALL-E 2 API, which will generate an image based on the textual input. The API uses a neural network to generate the image, which can take a few seconds or minutes, depending on the complexity of the prompt.

Once the image is generated, you can download it from the API and use it in your project or application.

It's important to note that DALL-E 2 API is currently in beta, and access is limited. You can apply for access on OpenAI's website and wait for an invitation to use the API. Additionally, the API has certain usage restrictions and guidelines, so make sure to read them carefully before using it.***James\_jeffry919*** 6 months ago

I am generally against this idea of absolutely wanting to integrate AI in all our projects. Today, we hear too much about AI and the world is somehow.. saturated. Everyone wants to use it either for good or bad or bad reasons. Of course, if the project itself justifies the use of AI, no problem. But trying to put AI where it is not needed seems (to me) to be a bad idea that will only harm the project in the long run.

Unfortunately, it is also something understandable since a project based on AI has today more chance to work than one without AI. I've experienced this myself with two different projects and the results are clear.***RiadEtm*** 6 months ago

SaaS product can bring significant benefits to your customers by improving the overall user experience and providing more intelligent and personalized solutions. Here are some steps to consider when adding AI to your SaaS product:

Define your use cases: Start by identifying areas where AI can be most effective in improving your product. You may want to consider customer support, predictive analytics, natural language processing, or other relevant areas.

Choose the right AI technology: Determine which AI technology is best suited to your use cases. You can choose from a range of AI tools such as machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, and computer vision.

Gather data: To train your AI models, you'll need to gather data from your existing product, user behavior, and other relevant sources. Ensure that your data is clean, labeled, and sufficient to train your AI models effectively.

Build your models: Use the data you've gathered to develop your AI models. This step involves data preprocessing, feature engineering, model selection, training, and validation.

Integrate AI into your SaaS product: Once your AI models are built, you'll need to integrate them into your SaaS product. This may involve developing APIs, integrating with existing features, or building new ones.

Test and evaluate: Before releasing your AI-enhanced SaaS product to your customers, be sure to test and evaluate the system to ensure that it's performing as expected. Gather feedback from early adopters and use this feedback to refine your product.

Provide ongoing maintenance and support: AI models need ongoing maintenance and support to ensure that they remain accurate and effective. Be prepared to update your models as needed and provide ongoing support to your customers.***della*** 6 months ago

Thanks for exploring this, Kyle! One thing that helped me with my SaaS and integration with ChatGPT was to find something that GPT or any large language models don't do well or better than other state of the art technology; then integrate that into your app or SaaS to layer on top of your product.

For example, I build a powerful SEO and content analysis tool using state of the art embedding and vector search and then integrated it with ChatGPT to build a powerful SEO content and research tool.

I've just opened it up to early users to start testing! I'd love to get anyone's feedback that's looking to boost their SEO and content!

Here is a screenshot of the tool and you can sign up at my site:

<https://ousia.ai> H8VrIMg.jpg***mscyoc*** 6 months ago

Great post @kylegawley and thanks for including the code too - too many 'how tos' are omitting that bit. Nicely done.

FWIW, I've added GPT to a boring business app - crisisdojo - to help give users industry-specific prompts for the kinds of risks and crises they might face. So this is a research and efficiency use-case rather than a creative one but immensely helpful. Not all the results are spot on (but neither are the results from an analyst). I'd estimate that this is a 50x speed increase with very little loss in quality. I'm excited to hook up GPT 4 and web-search apps next.

And I think that the fear that this will wipe out entry level jobs is very real - I've basically replaced the need for an analyst with a dozen lines of code. (To be fair, I am the analyst right now...)

Excellent discussion!***sheves*** 6 months ago

Thanks for the tip. Been evaluating adding generative AI to Supademo (a platform for creating interactive product demos in < 5mins) but it's felt a little gimmicky.

These examples are good inspirations to revisit it though!***supademofounder*** 6 months ago

To add a generative image using Dall-E, you can follow these steps:

Go to the Dall-E website and click on "Generate Images".

Enter a text prompt in the text box. This prompt should describe the image you want Dall-E to generate. For example, you could enter "a red apple sitting on a table".

Click on "Generate" to generate the image.

Wait for the image to load. This can take a few seconds to a few minutes depending on the complexity of the image.

Once the image is generated, you can download it by clicking on the "Download" button.***James\_jeffry919*** 6 months ago

I'm curious why your aigraphics attempt failed? There is a range of opportunity here, from ChatGPT integration to actual in-house AI training. Likely, most everyone here will start with ChatGPT AI integration, which boils down (at this point) to prompt engineering. Did your effort fail because the prompt engineering did not differentiate itself enough from similar attempts? I went to the site and I don't see a reason to it over against the actual engines (Dall-E, stable difussion, midjourney, etc). I think that's the point: how do we leverage AI in an arresting way? Maybe you can still massage your idea to be different enough to become valuable?***zarathustra*** 6 months ago

For this reason – it's just a wrapper on Stable Diffusion. Also generative image is still very hard to get good results, ppl don't wanna spend hours prompt hacking***kylegawley*** 6 months ago

That's very useful!***snehkhatri*** 6 months ago

Thanks for such great tips!!!***smorean*** 6 months ago

The tips were really of great help!***PriceMIT*** 6 months ago

Perfect with necessary details....I recommend this blog for online business owners***appysa*** 6 months ago

This is a great article. We added AI to Userdoc at the start of the year and our customers are loving the time-saving benefits. Requirements management isn't the sexiest thing, but with some AI fun it's getting up there!

https://userdoc.fyi***claireschuby*** 6 months ago

You can also use appgenius.ai to embed ChatGPT into your existing app without writing any code!***garbear*** 6 months ago

Detailed and helpful post. AI definitely going to be part of all the major saas tools available in the market and it will make the whole thing better.***wordmaxai*** 6 months ago

Make sure to specify the token limit!***kd1996*** 6 months ago

Another easy way to add AI to your SAAS without the need for any installing code onto a server is to use one of the latest AI Chatbot plugins for WordPress. You can literally select your existing blog posts to train your own model, then configure the plugin's chatbox interface to answer visitor questions from your model.

Here's a few cool ones' I'm currently looking at (just paste these plugin names into the "Search Plugins" box in your WP Dashboard under the Plugins menu):

AI Engine AI ChatBot

Some of them try to do too much - both AI blog post generation + visitor chat - which seems cool, but for now, I think just implementing visitor chat experience would be a game changer compared to my current chatbot.***ruess*** 6 months ago

Great post! We recently added AI Insights to Zigpoll: https://www.zigpoll.com and I think it's going to be a game changer. Being able to distill down loads of data into a (most of the time) meaningful and actionable insight is an insane new development and, with a touch of creativity, can and should be integrated into a lot of existing products. It's rare that something so hyped actually delivers imo...***Jason1923*** 6 months ago

Good post! particularly liked this 'give your customers superpowers'.. I think it's always been our main job.. to make them superheros, and now is kind of more doable than ever.

I'm experiencing this myself with one AI-based product I'm making and already testing the generated output with some early adopters, based on their surprise when seeing the results.. they really seem like if they may be gaining kind 'of superpowers..'. I also think the ultimate differentiators will be offering a truly great product experience, and being creative with how you concatenate several AI tools that are available for anyone, in a way that's unique and solve your customers problems with just a couple of clicks (and you are fast to put it out there, bc most probably it'll be pretty easy for your competitors to also build/offer them - and most probably they're thinking about it at the same time that you are).

Btw, https://aigraphics.io/ looks cool! we just kicked off the building a product kind of similar to it w our agency. It will be interesting to see how the 'photo-stock' platforms and the likes' industry evolves in this new era..***GVanG*** 6 months ago

maybe even better if there are no couple of clicks in the middle..***GVanG*** 6 months ago

Everyone overestimates the difficulty of implementing AI in their enterprises. It needs just a little time but a lot of data.. thanks for this post.***AkaikeTech*** 6 months ago

Our just use : https://www.chabotix.com. A no code chatbot that you can add it to your website directly. It answers questions from your users by using your document and ChatGPT!***johnsmith42*** 6 months ago

now 21 sign up in 5 days.***johnsmith42*** 6 months ago

Thanks, I had no idea on how to begin with this, you gave me a starting point.***blender\_renaissance*** 6 months ago

great.***tahuruzzoha*** 6 months ago

I have been how to use AI to do something interesting to help their own websites, blogs, landing pages, custom chatbots to help l answer any questions from visitors. GPTBASE\_ai The feedback so far is ok, but there are many shortcomings to keep improving.***James\_Chu*** 6 months ago

Wow, that's amazing that you were able to rank #1 on Google within two weeks with a new domain and without any backlinks! Your process for finding easy-to-rank keywords seems really effective and straightforward. It's great that you focused on addressing weaknesses in the top search results and creating content that meets the searcher's needs. Thanks for sharing your step-by-step guide on finding easy-to-rank keywords - I'm definitely going to give it a try for my own website!***ritiksingh*** 6 months ago

## $15,000 MRR over 3 years AMA!

(I bootstrapped my SaaS to ) by Jon Yongfook

Hi IH! I've been a member here for a number of years. This place has provided me with tons of inspiration, following the stories of other indie hackers!

It's taken me about 3 years of work to get to this point. I told the full story from zero to $10k MRR in this blog post.

As you can see I started by creating several small projects and then focused on one (bannerbear.com), which I have been working on solidly for the last 1+ year.

This $15k MRR milestone is significant to me as it means my SaaS revenue is finally matching the salary at my old job. I'm 41 and knew that when I left my corporate life behind, if my IH adventure failed it would be very difficult to get back in (I would be old, with no up-to-date skills) so I really had to make it work. Getting back to my previous salary level was one of my success metrics.

I'd like to spend a little time today to answer any questions the IH community has - fire away!

***Jon Yongfook*** posted to AMAs on April 20, 2021

Hey Jon. Discovered your startup story and its as inspiring as anything out there to help founders.

On your site, you mentioned a Closing Thought , "Upgrade your customer, not your product." Could you share more on this insight? Thanks***Fx1*** 2 months ago

Is it your photo one can see on the promo materials in the Singapore Zoo? https://imgur.com/a/fBk132D

Sorry for such a weird-ass question, but it was bothering me for weeks.***kossnocorp*** 3 years ago

yes!

I lived in Singapore for about 10 years. During that time, in addition to my day job I did some commercial modeling. I did shoots for Singapore Airlines, Singapore Zoo, a number of condo developments, that type of thing. I was always the "young father figure".

If you have a "commercial" face (which I don't think I particularly have, but hey) and are willing to work hard, you can actually make good money from this. I remember one shoot was a couple of days and I got paid about $3000 USD. There are models doing multiple shoots a month like this, and getting paid a lot more than I was.

The downside of this type of work is that it can be infrequent / unstable, and it's a constant grind - you are always running to castings, and the majority of the time the casting director will look you over for a few minutes and then say thanks, and you know you haven't got the gig. After traveling all across town to be there on a hot day, that can really wear you down after the 3rd... 4th... 5th call like that in a week.

We have this stereotypical view of models as being paid to do nothing, but no-joke, it is bloody hard work. It's a hustle to get the gigs, and then on the day of the shoot you'll usually have some horribly early call time, sit there while wardrobe and makeup has their way with you, and then just as you're getting bored and frustrated you have to smile / act on demand, when the director or photographer needs you to. I have total respect for anyone working in this industry, now that I've experienced it myself!

A very interesting life experience but I don't think I'd do it again :)***yongfook*** 3 years ago

You look so happy to see those monkeys! This is seriously the best thing I've ever read in an AMA. Made my day 😂***stevenkkim*** 3 years ago

Hah this is hilarious! I was just reading your blog post and thought "He kinda reminds me of the musician bonobo" when I saw your face at the bottom - I think it's the hair/side profile haha

https://www.google.com/search?q=bonobo+musician***AndrewV*** 3 years ago

haha :D thats freaking cool :D***Semy*** 3 years ago

How did you get into modeling?***Chumra*** 3 years ago

A friend of a friend of a friend ran a modelling agency and we crossed paths a few times. She figured her clients would like my look, so we gave it a shot and it worked out.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

This is hilarious!***RjYoungling*** 3 years ago

LOOOOOOOL!!!!!!!!!!!***orliesaurus*** 3 years ago

Hey Jon, congrats on this huge milestone! I've seen you work so hard over the last few years to get here :).

My question: what tasks do you typically have to fill up your marketing weeks?

Whenever I try and do marketing time I quickly run out of things to do and end up going back to coding features again 😅. Thanks!***dinkydani*** 3 years ago

I am by no means an expert here, I always end my marketing weeks feeling that I didn't do enough.

At a high level, in my marketing week I'm asking myself "how can I better communicate what I currently have?".

This distills down into tasks like:

adding feature pages to the marketing site

writing blog posts or tutorials

planning the next piece of "hero" content\*

creating more interactive demos

improving the docs

I also make community part of my marketing week. When I'm in a coding week I tend to not tweet as much, or look at IH as much. But in a marketing week I allow myself to tweet more, post on IH more, etc.

\*by hero content I mean longer, more creative pieces of marketing content that will (hopefully) net you a wider distribution. These take longer to write than a regular blog post. An example of this is my $10k MRR timeline which took a couple of days to put together.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Follow up question, how do you schedule your marketing weeks? I'm still well in pre-release, but am starting to think about how I'll schedule feature dev, business tasks and marketing pushes once I've got an MVP in the wild.

Off the cuff, I personally like 6 week cycles, thought maybe I'd fit in a major feature, week of marketing and week of business tasks in that cycle. Thoughts?***owmo*** 3 years ago

6 weeks is way too long.

Timeboxes should be kept short, otherwise Parkinsons Law will kick in.

I personally never try to build a major feature all in one go. It's too risky.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

It really depends. My professional experience working with teams of developers has lead me to believe the 2 week sprint is too short and just a relic of "well that's what everyone does" dogma. At least for the types of softwares we were building and miantaining at visual effects studios, which require a lot of creative experimentation to get the right solution.

I've worked recently with a CEO that forced 2-week deliveries and we fell into a nightmare of perpetual hot garbage getting shipped that left customers dis-satisfied. I eventually found Basecamp's idea of a 6 week cycle, with 2 weeks for refactoring. This works well if you're dilligent about scoping your work clearly.

I'm not sharing to advocate that you (or others) change from short sprints, just to sharing that there are differing ways of working in case someone else is reading this and is finding short cycles aren't working for them.

https://3.basecamp-help.com/article/35-the-six-week-cycle***owmo*** 3 years ago

My professional experience working in a large org with dozens of scrum teams suggests that 2 week sprints worked just fine.

If you want longer timeboxes, more power to you. My preference of shorter timeboxes is not a personal attack. You asked for my opinion and I gave it to you :)

Good luck!***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Yeah thanks for sharing, sorry if my reply came off the wrong way, wasn’t my intent. Congrats on your success! :)***owmo*** 3 years ago

Congrats Jon! I've been following you on Instagram and noticed you live a bachelor life (at least the last time I looked - a year ago). Hopefully this isn't too personal but have you chosen this way of life to make room, time and energy for indie hacking? If yes, do you think being in a serious relationship would stand in your way to success?***jurgen*** 3 years ago

I will be first to admit that I find it very difficult to balance my work life with a relationship.

I've posted this on IG before but I'll repost it here:

I believe as a man you have 3 things to master, your body, your mind and your heart. You’re only truly a man when you have mastered all 3.

I’ve always been good at the first two. At 41 I work out 5 times a week and am in the best health of my life. Over the last few years I’ve built up a business from scratch that now pays me a decent income. Body and mind.

But I’ve always been terrible at relationships. I’ve been called a workaholic. I just find it hard to give people the time they need, when my mind is mostly consumed with work-related problems / opportunities. It must be horrible to be on the other side of a relationship with me.

I greatly admire men who can balance all 3 of these areas of life. But I am not one of them yet.

This is my goal for my 40s.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Thanks for this***ChristopherGS*** 3 years ago

Are there any mental models or guiding philosophies that you find yourself returning to over and over?

Also, any books you've found particularly helpful?***csallen*** 3 years ago

Right before I became an indiehacker I was part of an org that ran a large number of scrum teams.

Living and breathing scrum for a couple of years has definitely influenced the way I work. I basically use scrum methodology but in a team of one person (me).

So I do things like:

timebox everything into 2 week sprints

have a backlog that I routinely re-prioritise

assign points to all my user stories

run everything from a kanban

have a sprint retrospective

If you're subscribed to my bi-weekly newsletter, you're actually part of the sprint retrospective - my newsletter is basically me looking back at the last 2 weeks of work.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

No questions, just wanted to say huge congrats.

...and good luck with the migration to a single PHP file 😉***ChristopherGS*** 3 years ago

How much do you work on average, being a solo founder?

How do you avoid burnout for 3 years and counting?

How do you deal with the sheer weight of shouldering everything on your own?

What turned out to be harder than expected, and how did you overcome it?

Would you hire people from now on?***simplisticallysimple*** 3 years ago

Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm

Burnout happens when you work hard and don't see results. I haven't experienced burnout much because in the first year TBH I didn't really work hard. In the 2nd year I worked a little harder and saw some small results. In the 3rd year I worked much harder and saw good results. I guess if you're not seeing the results you want and you're working really hard, you need to hit pause and ask why.

I've always been a "do it myself" sort of guy so actually I enjoy this!

Churning customers hit me really hard in the beginning. When you only have a few customers it feels like such a personal rejection when you lose one. You feel like your product isn't good enough. Over time, you realise that your product isn't for everyone. People sign up and decide it's not for them, and that's fine. As long as you have long-term customers or even better, customers who upgrade their plans over time, you know that you have some semblance of market fit and the challenge should be finding more customers like them, and not worrying about the ones who cancelled.

Absolutely! I just wish I had the time to really sit down and think who I need to hire and then spend the time to look at candidates etc. That's a full time job by itself. Maybe I need to hire someone to help me hire people.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

"Burnout happens when you work hard and don't see results."

So true!***NickFreiling*** 3 years ago

Congrats on your success, it was definitely very hard work!

I followed you from the start of your journey (found you through @levelsio) and always enjoyed your posts.

I quit my job 5 days ago and "only" have to double my current MRR to earn my average monthly expenses. I love programming and creating products, but do not really like all the marketing that is needed to get users. Probably a marketing week or something similar to your approach could help me the most.

Do you have any recommendations (books, courses, people on twitter, ...) to improve marketing skills and get more people to find your products?

Thank you for all your extra efforts to make everything public and inspire people to create their own products!***Devno*** 3 years ago

I think broadly speaking you have to just pick a problem you're passionate about. Then it doesn't feel like "marketing", it's just "telling people about the cool thing you're building". Authentic enthusiasm is infectious and there's no substitute for it.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congratulations @yongfook. I love the format and layout of your 0 to $10k post, charts and emojis and timelines nicely done!***bhumi*** 3 years ago

Your openness is inspiring, thanks so much Jon!

I have a couple of questions on the fact that you've started several small projects and then focused on one.

How did you know what to focus on? Similarly, when do you know that it's time to give up?

Did you approach those projects in parallel or serially?

How do you define small? By potential market? Competition? Time to MVP?

Thanks again 🙏***Juli*** 3 years ago

totally non-scientific, I just focused on the one I enjoyed the most. none of them had made any money at that point so it was really the only compass bearing I had. That said, I think it's a good indicator.

I built them one after the other, spending 1 month on each

Time to MVP. The whole thing had to be built and launched in a month. I did this about 7 times before getting a bit burned out, then I started to focus on one particular area.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

What do you do after building and launching? For how long do you do it? And when do you decide to give up?***thejakubzelazny*** 3 years ago

What skills/experience did you have when you started trying to develop a commercial project?

What skills did you lack that you absolutely needed?

What kind of projects failed and what kind of projects were being used?

What did you do to reach your first users?***RMo*** 3 years ago

I was already an experienced full stack developer, and had built many, many failed projects in the past :)

Sales. I still don't have this skill, so I don't do any outbound sales.

The ones that failed were trying to solve a big problem. The ones that got used solved small, discrete problems.

I wrote about that in a blog post here***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Hi Jon,

Happy new customer here - spent a lovely Saturday morning writing a script to generate OG cards for my static site generator: absolutely over the moon with bannerbear!

I only have a technical question for you: is the template editor completely custom js, or is it based on some kind of framework? Are there any lessons you can share re: creating an actual in-browser application like that? (Context: I'm about to build a similar interface for something very different, and js is not my best friend.)

Thanks, and good luck!***jpoesen*** 3 years ago

It's pretty much all custom with a few dependencies and I'm about to roll out a version that's 100% custom.

It's actually very simple as an application, basically there is a render() function that puts everything where it is supposed to go, resizes things if needed etc, and that render() function is called every time you edit something.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congratulations for reaching this milestone, you deserve it after all this work! Now what gave you the mental strength to keep trying new things to get better results for Bannerbear? Do you think you would have given up if you had had less savings? What advice would you give to someone in the position you were before May last year, but who is losing hope on their skills and their product?***BibHack*** 3 years ago

Fun fact. In February / March 2020 I started to apply to jobs. I wasn't running out of cash yet, but I was worn down and I thought I was going to fail at being an indiehacker.

I didn't get hired for anything. And then covid happened, tanking the job market - I know many friends who lost their jobs back then. And all the news reports at that time were saying it would last for a year or more (and hey, they were right!).

So I thought to myself, well shit, now I have to make this work.

I think that mental switch was important. Getting a job was no longer an option, it was Bannerbear or bust.

I'm not saying you need some kind of existential threat to motivate you... but I think for me I always work a bit better under pressure :D***yongfook*** 3 years ago

What would change, if you could, about the way you chose projects in the beginning of your journey? Also, thank you for all the transparency and sincere replies :)***pheonix*** 3 years ago

Good question. I think I tried to be way too scientific about it. I even had an excel sheet with a scoring system for ideas and a dozen or so columns like "market size", "defensibility", etc etc.

I think it's a decent thought exercise to run ideas through a filter like this, but it's not how I would pick ideas in the future.

I think it's much more important to pick something you're passionate about, that you think is really cool, and that you can see as a T-shaped challenge - lots of simple useful features to build but some really challenging stuff too that you can imagine working on for years.

The old trope of "find a customer and solve their problem" has had its day I reckon. By the time you've found that customer, 20 other startups are offering them the same solution. Just take a look at ProductHunt, there are literally dozens of new SaaS startups launching every day. It's nuts.

The only way you are going to rise above all that noise is via execution, and the simplest way to do your best work, is to just be really passionate about it.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

That's really thoughtful. Appreciate the answer :)***pheonix*** 3 years ago

Hey Jon! What a 3 years ride, congrats! 👏🏼

I’m just curious about how you handle the dry season, back then at the early stage.

You launched.

Few trials.

No one converted – or some but churned.

You launched another big features.

Little traction.

Repeat.

What did you do to flip the script?***wilbertliu*** 3 years ago

MRR is only useful as a metric once you're more established.

Before that, there are other metrics / indicators you can use:

are you getting signups?

are people looking at the pricing page?

are people making it to step X in your onboarding flow?

are you happy? do you believe in this?

are users giving you feedback?

are users coming back after their first session?

etc

If you look at my MRR chart it looks like I did something suddenly to change things, but that's not the case. I was just using other types of metrics to track my progress, and those were showing positive signs, so that's why I kept going. And then over time, after many improvements, release cycles etc - it starts to reflect in your MRR.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

It’s an eye-opening Jon, thanks!

Just a follow up question – What do you use to record the user session and its interaction in your app? Is that a model in your Rails app to crush it all?***wilbertliu*** 3 years ago

No I don't track any session data like that. I don't even use cookies on my marketing site. I'm generally against that kind of stuff.

All I do is just look at the raw numbers. How many people sign up > how many people create 1 widget > how many people create 10 widgets etc. That's enough to give you a compass bearing.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Got it Jon.

Thanks for taking your time to answer the questions.

Really appreciate it.***wilbertliu*** 3 years ago

are you happy? do you believe in this?

This has made a huge difference for me.

I'm still pre-revenue and I've started to see users trickling in slowly. A few are coming back and using it again. If I didn't really like what I was building I would definitely give up.

Another point for me—I would have to give up if I didn't have a way to sustain myself with contracting. Where I live most contracts are 6-months and full-time. It's great for filling up the money coffers but leaves very little extra time to focus on my product—I prioritise having a life outside of work too.

So really liking my product gives me energy and motivation to sometimes "burn the midnight oil".***marcusstenbeck*** 3 years ago

Hey Jon! Any advice for growing and maintaining traction on a post-launch product that already has validation but hasn't hit critical mass yet? Let's say somewhere in the range of $100-$300 MRR and with a few happy customers. It's a weird stage, because the exponential growth effect of SEO hasn't kicked in, PPC ads are harder to scale, and there aren't enough users for word-of-mouth.***natclark*** 3 years ago

That's a great space to be in.

I would treat the next few big features almost like they are self-contained products and make sure you market the hell out of them with their own launch day etc.

Create separate landing pages on your website, post them to PH, and anywhere else you can think of. Even create "notify me" pages for features that are upcoming.

Basically anything you can do to show you have momentum and a product roadmap - it will show you're not a flash in the pan and also attract more serious customers.

I had people flat out say in the beginning that they wouldn't sign up for my service as I was so new. So some of this traction just takes time to build.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congrats on this milestone, Jon! Hard work pays in the end for sure 🙌

I'm currently trying to figure out how to prioritize some of my tasks based on the impact they would have on the business.

So my question to you: How do you measure the potential impact before starting a task? More of gut feeling or some kind of framework maybe? 😁***razvanilin*** 3 years ago

Good question, really hard to answer.

Essentially we don't know what the impact will be, we can only guess. This is the challenge of product management and there are whole books dedicated to this topic.

If you're too much of a "reactive" product manager, essentially just building things people ask for, you end up with a mish mash of features and not an actual product. This can limit your growth and make it hard to communicate to customers what you actually do well.

If you're too much of a "proactive" product manager, building things you think people want, you might end up with a highly-polished product that nobody actually needs.

I'm not smart enough to parse all this, so I just make sure that I do some of both. I listen to customers, build things they ask for, but at the same time I hold a "big picture" of where I want Bannerbear to go in my head and build other features that support this vision - and hopefully the two should roughly align in the same direction.

This applies to marketing too - I think it's good to do a mix of reactive / proactive e.g.:

tutorials that directly help a specific type of user

bigger-picture more creative stuff that says who you are a business***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Being a solo dev working on bannerbear, how does your day look like? How many hours do you work on bannerbear? Is bannerbear taking your full time or are you also working on some other products?***stackingflow*** 2 years ago

Great post, Jon! I read on your LinkedIn that you previously founded and built a handful of successful products. So I guess that means Bannerbear was fated to succeed? ;-)***Nikoisonfire*** 3 years ago

I've also built a bunch of things that went absolutely nowhere... so no, I don't think it's a pattern :)***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congrats on the milestone. Clickbaity headline seeing you’re using your own product that would usually cost money which you would categorise as marketing. But nice work!***ComicDans*** 3 years ago

?? Are you replying to the right post?

There’s nothing clickbaity in the title. It’s a neutral statement of my current revenue and how long it has taken to get there. MRR means monthly recurring revenue and it is a common measure of business progress used by SaaS companies.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Uhhh I totally apologise! Wrong post. LOL!

I did read this post and actually thought it was great.***ComicDans*** 3 years ago

Congrats dude! Way to take the leap of faith :)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-JIfjNnnMA***achillesheels*** 3 years ago

Wonderful to read, congratulations and thank you for sharing!***chr15m*** 3 years ago

So happy for you Jon! Thank you for sharing behind the scenes. I’ve been following your work for the last 5 years and learned a lot.***tomaslau*** 3 years ago

Seems like this AmA went wonderful! Wanna do one on /r/SaaS as well?***chddaniel*** 3 years ago

I admire the persistence but...

I've been a member of IH for a long time and see this AMA as an organic action as a member of the community. I'm personally invested here, so doing things like this is just part of getting to know each other.

/r/SaaS I have no personal connection to, really. I hope you can understand 👍🏻***yongfook*** 3 years ago

I don't understand it fully, but I don't have to understand it to respect it. Which I do! Keep in touch***chddaniel*** 3 years ago

Congrats on 'breaking even', and thanks for doing this AMA. :)

The thread is a goldmine of indie hacker tips! Wish I can bookmark this for future ref.***jasonleow*** 3 years ago

Currently 21yo,currently serving ns.Bad GPA,can’t enter local unis...No clue what to study for my degree or what to do for the future... any advices?***fatchoy*** 3 years ago

For your branding, have you taken any inspiration from TunnelBear VPN? http://tunnelbear.com/***sarim*** 3 years ago

Nope! I use ExpressVPN.

Didn't know about Tunnelbear until a few months in. They go really heavy on the bear branding, with an entire character that has a personality / humour. I love it.

Not looking to emulate that though.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

@yongfook How do you handle self-doubt/doubts? When you are building this thing and all kind of negative thougths popup like what if does not work and what if it fail. How do you handle these doubts of intial phase of startup and stop them from hindering the progress?***indiedev123*** 3 years ago

Be part of a community where people are achieving what you want to achieve.

That can be on Twitter, on IH or in real life.

When you're around people who are succeeding, you know it's possible to succeed yourself.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Awesome man! Stay strong.***kinga2281*** 3 years ago

Congrats! Truly inspiring. The first time I visited your website for the first time was when you had Beatrix as the main product, I think circa 2014-2015 or so. So I’ve been intermittently watching your journey for some time. Your Bannerbear newsletter is full of gems too. I enjoy it even though I haven’t been the target audience for your product.

As for the question: Would you say your approach of doing marketing/development sprints has been fruitful? Would you start doing it earlier or you think there’s a time and a place for it after a product passed a certain point?***kazrude*** 3 years ago

I think if you look at my growth chart the point where you see consistent growth for the first time is when I'm in a rhythm of 1 week product, 1 week marketing - for an extended period of time (6 months or so).

I think it's something that you should start from the very beginning.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Can’t downplay the effectiveness of that method. I’ll try it out. Thanks and best of luck on your journey!***kazrude*** 3 years ago

@yongfook interesting, would you say 1 week / 1 week is more effective than breaking activities up within the week?***policenauts*** 3 years ago

As mentioned somewhere else on this thread, you can find a rhythm that works for you.

For me, I find that context-switching too often complicates things. I need a stretch where I'm in coding mode and a stretch where I'm in marketing mode.

Also it's convenient to be able to say "it's marketing week this week". Just having that simple mental model is helpful.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Thanks a lot, makes sense. Sorry if you answered this one earlier as well, but at what point did you start shifting from product to 50/50 product and marketing?***policenauts*** 3 years ago

It's in the timeline I posted earlier. Scroll down to "Getting into a Rhythm".

Your question "at what point" is a bit ambiguous - not sure if you mean the date, or the state of the product, or my MRR level etc, but the timeline will give you the full context.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Hi Jon,

Congrats! You have been such an inspiration! I have been following your 12 startups in 12 months with much enthusiasm, so glad you achieved your goal through bannerbear.

I am cursed with having a mind that’s occupied with too many startup ideas only to be crippled by mediocre programming skills. I know basic RoR, but not at the level of proficiency to execute many of the ideas that live in my imagination. I am 40 this year and I’m still holding on to a well paid job. Can you advise what would you have done if you are in the same shoes?***jayelee*** 3 years ago

Hmm there's a few ways to look at this.

Firstly I think the gap between a "basic" Rails developer and an "decent" Rails developer is smaller than you think. If I think back to the apps I built when I was first learning Rails, they really aren't that much different to what I build now. There's just a few things I've learned along the way that makes them more efficient, faster, able to do more etc. Probably for me the biggest leap forward from basic to decent is learning about background jobs - that will take your Rails app from something that does everything inline (slow) to something that will handle everything asynchronously and can pretty much handle anything you can throw at it.

Secondly, everyone has exciting ideas that they can't execute - I have them all the time! The challenge then is defining a version of your idea that you can execute. Remove features, make make it less flashy, but solve the core problem. You can always expand on it once you have learned how to add the extra stuff.

Thirdly, I left my job because I had no future there. If I could have stayed in a well paid job that I enjoyed, but be allowed to scratch my entrepreneur itch by launching side projects (in a way that is contractually allowed / agreed upon) I would have! Best of both worlds. I'm glad things worked out the way they did, and that I'm now fully independent, but I took a gamble to get here. There are probably safer ways to do what I did.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Thanks for the thoughtful reply! Do you think you would have achieved the same level of progress if you are still holding on to a full time job?

And one last question, are you open to being a mentor for other hackers?***jayelee*** 3 years ago

Maybe in the beginning it would be possible to juggle both, but I think after you get a certain amount of customers, running a SaaS becomes a full time job. It would be difficult to do both well, one side would suffer.

Unfortunately no. I want to help others, but I think the best use of my time is sharing content like this AMA or thoughts on twitter. In that way, it's a one-to-many relationship so it's an efficient use of time. In a mentor setup it's just 1-to-1 and I just don't think it sounds like an efficient use of time.

Also to be blunt, 90% of the DMs I get asking for personal advice are on issues that I have extensively commented on either in blog posts or on twitter. It's not everyone, but I do get the feeling that a lot of people who ask for advice or mentorship have not done any basic research and are looking to be spoon-fed information. These are not people I want to associate with or indulge.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Hey Jon! How much has knowing how to code helped you out in your journey?***sudharshan*** 3 years ago

My product is an API, so without knowing how to code I think it would be difficult or impossible to build otherwise.

If I was starting out today from scratch with no coding skills I would probably try to learn no-code tools as a starter to grok some fundamental concepts but would try to quickly migrate to a programming language like Node / Ruby / etc***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Awesome, that's exactly what I'm doing. By node/ruby/python you mean for building the backend right?***sudharshan*** 3 years ago

Hi Jon,

I pretty much watched the whole journey. Incredible. I have perhaps a personal question, so you don't have to answer if you don't want to.

Do you own your own property (home or investment)? And were you investing in financial markets at the same time? Basically, whether you tried to prolong your runway with other investments or simply focused on work keeping everything liquid as cash.

Thanks.***strzibnyj*** 3 years ago

When I was working in a job I had a bunch of my net worth tied up in index funds.

Liquidated most of it to provide me with runway.

Probably not super smart, definitely wouldn't recommend it if you have a family. But for me, it's just me, so I was willing to take on the risk. Worked out in the end. (thankfully)***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Thanks a lot for your answer. It makes perfect sense to me and as you say it worked out :)***strzibnyj*** 3 years ago

Have loved following the journey so far.

One of the few indie hackers out there who have consistently continued to be so transparent while scaling past the initial validation period.

No questions, but would love for you to keep this up!***LachlanKirkwood*** 3 years ago

Thank you 🙏***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congrats!***BraydenTW*** 3 years ago

Why did you choose to be a solo founder vs. finding a co-founder?***MarkusPint*** 3 years ago

It never really occurred to me TBH.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Question :

do you use proxies to do the requests?

As the requested site can block you. right?***umen242*** 3 years ago

Yup Bannerbear has a built in proxy feature.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Thanks for the quick replay, can you share that?

how did you find a reliable proxy provider to work with?

do you have more than 1 provider?***umen242*** 3 years ago

Hey great story, can you share how much of it is profit?

also, how much of this going on in your hosting bill?

what tech stack do you use?

Thanks!***umen242*** 3 years ago

Ruby on Rails

My Heroku bill is about $400 per month

My AWS bill is about $200 per month

There's maybe another $200 or so in monthly SaaS products that I use***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Thanks

why to split the hosting providers?***umen242*** 3 years ago

AWS is my CDN***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Hello Jon,

I know about Bannerbear for over a month. Amazing work. I took few minutes to feature your product on Product Startups Community -

https://my.productstartups.com/c/saas/bannerbear-api-automated-image-video-generation

I will be featuring it on Linkedin in a while.

I wanted to learn how you reach out to prospects? Do you reach out through Linkedin or Cold email?

Venkat***venkatworks*** 3 years ago

Right at the very beginning of Bannerbear's life, in like January 2020, I reached out to some "dream" companies who I thought were a perfect fit for Bannerbear.

None of them replied.

That made me feel a bit crappy, so I decided that type of customer acquisition channel is not for me.

Since then it has been all "inbound" marketing: creating tools, creating blog posts etc.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Hey Jon! Congrats and thanks for the AMAs!

Just wondered how did you choose one of the projects while trying a few, how much time did you give each to make this decision and how did you go about validating each (did you test first or build straight away)?***jalvesalves*** 3 years ago

I just went straight into building - not saying I recommend that, but part of the reason I did a rapid-fire MVP approach was because I wanted to exercise my coding muscle again. At that point I had not touched any code for years.

It's hard to remember specifics, but I launched about 7 projects one after the other over the course of 7 months - launching at the end of each month. I would track the metrics loosely over the course of all this. Some showed a bit more promise than others.

In the end, I think the biggest lesson from this was to unveil my areas of interest. Image generation / automated design was definitely something that interested me, whereas the areas of some of the other products I made (e.g. team productivity) I found I had low interest in.

So a year later I thought "hmmm what could I do in the image generation space that would be really cool... what would be my dream product". And I got thinking about APIs.

That's really how it all came about! Very unscientific.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congrats on your milestone Jon! What are the areas that you look for outside help as a solo founder? I would assume accounting/legal to be obvious ones, but are there any others such as tedious manual tasks, design, writing or any obscure tech?***onurozer*** 3 years ago

I had an obscure Rails question once (google/SO did not help) and I reached out to https://twitter.com/nateberkopec on Twitter as I've been following him for a while. He was very kind enough to answer my questions.

Had I not known him, I'm not sure where I would have turned to. Once you're past all the usual problems that are easily searchable on Stackoverflow, you're left with the niche stuff that only the veterans can answer after looking at your code or getting more context. Difficult to find those folks.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congrats Jon!!!

I wanted to ask as to how you decide as to how much you will take out of your MRR for yourself and how much would you plow back into the company?

Say after costs.***gskalra*** 3 years ago

Up until now it's been manageable by myself so I haven't re-invested.

But it would be nice to take some of the load off my plate, so I'll be looking into this next by making some contract hires. Haven't really thought of how much I'd spent on this though, TBH.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

I’ve been watching your progress on Twitter. It’s pretty amazing to see. Congrats on the new milestone!

With your current growth, do you have any plans of raising $$? Or are you planning on continue bootstrapping?***presh*** 3 years ago

no plans to raise at this time!

I could definitely do things with the money, but at this stage I am fiercely protective over my time / productivity / independence.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Congrats on the milestone Jon! Very inspiring.

Like you, I left my corporate job and I'm looking to monetize one (or more) projects. When you started building, how much tech knowledge did you have (my sense is a lot)?? It's my weakest link at the moment, but I'm learning every day. Thanks!***buckwheatone*** 3 years ago

I was already quite an experienced developer (20+ years of coding) so that wasn't an obstacle for me.

That said, these days I think it's getting easier and easier to build and deploy an MVP! I even know entrepreneurs in my social circles who have built entire SaaS apps with no-code tools.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

What were your top marketing strategies early on? SEO, cold outreach, twitter, etc?

Even as a non-customer, I love being on your mailing list!***AndrewV*** 3 years ago

Hmmm difficult to say, I just tried anything and everything, really.

I made a list here of the things I can remember doing.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

That's a great list, thanks for the link :)***AndrewV*** 3 years ago

What was a small change that had a huge impact on growth?***eh\_tk*** 3 years ago

Pricing. Takes seconds to change it, but it can massively affect your trajectory.***yongfook*** 3 years ago

Initially too low or too high?***eh\_tk*** 3 years ago

too low.

You are far more likely to run into problems by pricing too low, than you are too high. You can go as high as you want as long as you have a solution to a problem, and you know how to reach and service high end customers.

yongfook 3 years ago

RE

## Best No-Code tool to try in 2024

by Rafał Kozłowski

We’re all familiar with popular No-Code tools like Webflow, Bubble, and Zapier — they’re fantastic! But chances are, you already know them… MEDIUM.COM

What is the best No-Code tool to try next year in your opinion?

Rafał Kozłowski submitted this link to No-Code on November 2, 2023

Plugging in Flezr NoCode Builder that works on top of Google Sheets and Supabase. Hope to see Flezr as well on such lists :)

upenv a day ago

I will be happy to try! I see that you have template option on the site. Hit me up if you would like to add these to my No-Code template marketplace 🙌

RafalKozlowski a day ago

Thankyou. Will check your Template marketplace but Flezr Templates are part of the App for now and are not paid ones independently.***upenv*** 14 hours ago

Nice article at medium.

Have you guys aware of any nocode tool for designing custom low level APIs?

I'm working on such a tool in my free time, planning to release beta version soon. please take a look at www.nexusrun.com and let me know your comments.***nexusrun*** 7 hours ago

## from $10k to $60k MRR with no employees

(The SaaS Growth lever than took me)

by Mac Martine - The SaaS Bootstrapper

Recap: Customers 1-50

Previously, we talked about how to easily get our first five customers.

Then we moved on to how to get our first 50 customers.

Up to this point, we’ve focused on things that don’t scale.

What we’ve learned thus far

Along the way, we’ve gotten some customers, our first revenue, and we’ve gathered a ton of information.

Through these conversations, we should know our customer profile pretty well and the words they use, which has driven our messaging.

Our product market fit is coming along, and if we did things right, we’ve spotted the friction along the way, and optimized, with little micro-pivots along the way, as we learn who are customers are and what is and isn’t important to them. We’ve learned the difference between what they think is “cool”, versus what motivates them to put their money where their mouth is.

Your unique marketing approach

While we’re going to continue having a lot of conversations, we’re ready to start thinking about scaling.

The reality is that every app and market is different, as are the strengths of the founder. There’s no predefined path to execute here, rather, if we’ve paid attention along the way, it should be pretty clear what marketing paths make sense to experiment with.

I’m going to leave that conversation for another time.

The most powerful SaaS growth levers

For now, I want to point out the most powerful growth levers at your disposal: affiliates and resellers.

The reason these are so powerful is you can have an army of people selling on your behalf with little to no cost out of your pocket.

You can think of it as having a sales team that gets paid purely on commission, because that’s essentially how it works. For every customer they bring in, they get a cut.

Instead of working for individual customers, we’re looking for individual people to go and get them for us.

We’re transitioning from one-to-one, to one-to-many.

This is scaling at its finest, and by far has the most potential of any marketing effort to be the most cost-effective customer acquisition channel.

In my case, I never actively recruited any affiliates or resellers, but I had more than a dozen people ask to be a reseller and more than that to be an affiliate.

Don’t try to grow up too fast

While outsourcing customer acquisition for your SaaS can be highly effective, and can drive exponential growth for your SaaS, don’t think you can skip the critical step of finding product/market fit.

In the early stages, the most important job of the founder is to be there to navigate those early conversations and find that fit. This can’t be outsourced, so be careful not to get ahead of yourself.

In my case, I grew to ~$8k+ MRR on my own before bringing on resellers.

By the time I sold, my $61k MRR was made up of:

24% direct customers

76% sales via resellers

Summary

With a little upfront work, your business has the potential to scale exponentially with just a few good resellers and/or affiliates.

You can then choose to continue to do sales and marketing yourself or rely on the resellers so you can focus on product and other parts of the business, which is a beautiful thing, for any lean startup, especially a solo founder.

Mac Martine - The SaaS Bootstrapper

posted to the SaaS bootstrapper on November 3, 2023

Great Post. I just launched a Partner Program for CheckAnyVIN.com but was curious if you had tips on where to find Affiliates quickly.***JakeOcean*** 3 hours ago

thank you,is a good idea t

## Free tools for marketing with no budget

by jayavery

(from the latest issue of the Indie Hackers newsletter)

Building a marketing strategy with little to no budget?

Use this list of free and low-cost tools to put together a plan. Just make sure to keep your specific marketing goals at the forefront.

Brand collaborations can give you access to new audiences and resources. Find the right partners, outline expectations, and track goals.

$27K in revenue in two months. Donald Ng used the power of AppSumo and subscriptions to land paying customers quickly.

Want to grow your business? Try running a promo in the Indie Hackers newsletter to get in front of nearly 70,000 founders. Use code NEW500 for $500 off an intro section ad.

Free Tools to Market Your Business 🛠

COVER IMAGE

by Jas

As a one-person marketing team for a B2B SaaS with a very limited budget, I've had to get creative when it comes to marketing my startup products.

Here are the free and low-cost tools I've used to reach customers!

General

Google Analytics: Free.

Sheets for marketers for templates: Free.

Smartsheet for reporting templates (more business): Free.

Typeform for customer feedback: Free.

SEO

Google Search Console: Free.

Keyword Insights for content planning: $58 per month.

SimilarWeb for analysis: Free.

AlsoAsked for keyword research: Three free searches per day.

ContentKing: Free trial, affordable subscription.

A tool that's free, but often forgotten, is Google itself!

Use incognito mode to search your terms and competitors. Gather a list of top-ranking content and additional queries from the "Also Searched" section. This strategy can be used for finding keywords and getting inspiration.

Website

Visily for page design: Free plan.

Figma for design: Free plan.

Google PageSpeed Insights: Free.

XML sitemap for sitemaps: Free.

Please note that these tools are helpful for marketing-related website tasks, not necessarily creating the website itself.

Content creation

Spectacle for video: Product demos and tutorials, free plan.

Buffer for social media content: Free plan.

Google Optimize for A/B testing: Free.

Deepl for translating: Free(ish).

TinyWow for image sizing: Free.

Bitly for URL shortening: Free plan.

I won’t go into the obvious mentions of AI tools, like ChatGPT and Bard, but I will caution against relying on these if you want high-quality, original content.

Branding

Figma for design: Free plan.

Canva for social: Free plan.

MySignature for email branding: Free plan.

Social media accounts are tricky. Yes, they are free, but stick to the ones where you know your audience hangs out. Reddit is great for finding your audience, but should mostly be used for community building, not advertising.

Promotion, referrals, and reviews Google: Free.

Gartner, Capterra, and Software Advice: Free(ish).

G2: Free(ish).

Indie Hackers. Product Hunt.

Most review sites require a subscription to get promoted. However, even without a subscription, they can be useful for showing credibility, search visibility, and getting reviews.

My favorites right now

Right now, my favorite tools have been Spectacle and Visily.

I spent a lot of time at my last startup trying to make video content for our knowledge base, and Spectacle has been amazing for that.

Visily has awesome templates that I’ve been able to mix and match to create sections on my websites.

You don't necessarily need a big budget. Use this list of tools to piece together a strategy. The most important thing, especially when it comes to free tools, is to make them fit within your own marketing goals!

Discuss this story.

Unlock New Revenue With This Membership 💰

COVER IMAGE

This issue is sponsored by Memberful

Boost your business with paid newsletters, gated content, and more!

Memberful seamlessly integrates with popular tools like WordPress, Mailchimp, and Discord. Plus, you get full control and ownership of all things related to your audience, finances, and business.

Try Memberful for free today!

How to Plan a Brand Collaboration 🤝

COVER IMAGE

by Thomas Griffin

Planning a brand collaboration may be daunting, especially for founders who are just starting out with them.

Here are a few easy steps to get you started!

Know what you want

Define and set your goals clearly. You should have a clear idea of what you want from a collaboration, to minimize potential conflicts down the line.

Find the right partners

The next step is identifying the best partners for the collaboration. This requires extensive research, and leveraging your network to find the right partners.

The goal here is to find brands whose values and goals align with yours.

Reach out

It's best to send an email or make a call to discuss the proposal first.

This will help you shortlist potential partners based on what they have to offer, and their level of interest.

Make it official

Draft an agreement that clearly states the terms and conditions of the collaboration, and outlines the expectations of the parties involved.

Devise a plan

Your goal here is to stand out from the competition in your respective industry, and get more eyeballs on your product.

Define key deliverables, a timeline, and expected outcomes. Create a to-do list, splitting objectives into tasks that are to be performed by each party.

Whether you announce new products, plan marketing campaigns, create content together, promote your solutions, or host events, all tasks supporting the collaboration should be clearly listed.

This step also covers the allocation of resources. When you collaborate with a brand, you get to leverage the resources of your partner, and vice versa.

Track progress

It's important to keep tracking your progress throughout.

When you track your progress, it becomes easier to identify what's working and what isn't. Gather the data, and assess it against your KPIs.

Also, make it a priority to maintain a good relationship with your partner(s) in the long run! This can help open the door to future successful collaborations.

Discuss this story.

In the News 📰

Photo: In the News

from the Growth Trends newsletter

🧐 Understanding the TikTok era.

💲 Get $100 off an In the News section ad with code MINUS100.

🏄‍♀️ Following the surfer mindset to find success.

💻 Google Ads best practices.

🚀 Launching a UGC strategy for SEO.

🍽 Restaurant reservations: Diners vs. bots.

Check out Growth Trends for more curated news items focused on user acquisition and new product ideas.

$27K in Two Months With a Second Startup 💪

COVER IMAGE

by Donald Ng

As a solo tech founder, I worked on Howuku, my side project, back in 2019. I later turned it into a full-time startup in 2020.

I didn't really know what I was doing. I was too shy to talk to customers, and I really believed in "build it and they will come." Here's what changed my mind.

First startup

For the first 24 months, I kept building one feature after another. I now realize that was a form of procrastination. I was feeling good about myself every time I posted the product on Indie Hackers and got praised for it.

I got my first paying customer after 12 months of building the product. It was my first sweet internet dollar, and the customer was paying for our highest tier. Then, it took us about another 12 months to break the $1K MRR mark.

Now, Howuku is growing on its own organically, and most signups come from SEO and word-of-mouth, with pretty decent conversion rates.

Second startup

About three months ago, I started Mida.so, an A/B testing tool. I decided to build it after Google Optimize announced that it was sunsetting in September.

First month: Built the MVP, and tried to get as many new users to test it out as possible. Pretty rough product, but it worked. I reused a lot of components from Howuku.

Second month: Launched on AppSumo, mainly for product feedback and actual users. The campaign ran for a month, and we made $17K in revenue.

Third month: Closed our first few customers and reached $10K ARR within 30 days after the AppSumo campaign (you can't really sell subscriptions during the campaign).

The product is nowhere near perfect, but we are making progress! My advice is to just launch and make sales. You can improve the product later on.

What I learned

Get to the market faster. Make sales. Don't add another new feature.

You don't have a business without sales and marketing, no matter how good your product is.

Learn SEO, learn SEM, learn to build in public, or whatever works for you. Just be consistent!

No customers? It is not because you don't have feature X, Y, or Z. It is because you are not reaching out and selling to the right person.

Selling to everyone equals selling to no one. Who is your target audience? Be very specific about it!

Jayavery on Nov 2, 2023

Really appreciate this. Thanks for sharing!***FootprintCalculator*** 5 hours ago

Phenomenal list. I'd also recommend EverMail AI, they're in waitlist but they'll generate emails for you for free right now when you work with them. Great team.***jj\_pm1*** 18 hours ago

Great list of tools! I always tell people marketing is way more difficult than developing the product. Curious why you chose Bitly over T.LY 😁

***timleland*** a day ago

Sheets for marketers sounds like an absolute goldmine. I'm always hesitant to add new tools to the stack in order to avoid accruing complexity

***zachsents*** a day ago

This is cool!

***premsaini*** a day ago

Thanks for sharing!

***OnlineConverter*** a day ago

Thanks for sharing my post, so cool!

***jrangsmarketing*** a day ago

thanks for sharing that great info!

***jayavery*** a day ago

More important information. Thanks for sharing

***graphtrade*** a day ago

@jayavery Thank for this great list! Definitely need to check them.

One addition I suggest:

Mautic for Marketing Automation. Really great for email squences and campaigns. It is for free, open source, but needs to be setup on a server.

***Palpert*** a day ago

## Validating Your App

I validated my app and reached $500 MRR in 2 months. Here is how anyone can do the same by Nico

My app had slow beginnings.

I wasn't the first to market, so my focus was on minimizing friction to validate the concept and see if it was viable for me to work on it.

(for the context, the app is Talknotes)

Here is what I focused on, and what you can do too to validate your idea:

Validating the idea

💸 Using one-Time Payments

Instead of adding monthly subscriptions, I started with only a one-time payment to get one year of access

I priced it as low as I possibly could.

No sign-ups, just a one-click purchase from the landing page that is sent to Stripe checkout. This remove lots of objections from potential customers

💡 "Do things that don't scale" doesn't only apply to your product, it works for your pricing too

📋 Spamming Directories

I spent a couple of hours looking for startup repertories online.

The best is to search on Google, use ahref backlink checker to find where your competitors rank, and on Twitter.

Prepare some media for your app (screenshots, demo video, description), and just fill out the survey on every website. ProductHunt counts as a repertory too!

💡Some repertories are paid. Check their domain authority using this. If it's under 50 authority, don't pay

💰 Adding friction gradually:

After getting a consistent 2-3 sales/day, I made the shift from one-time payments to a subscription model.

I also increased the prices.

Sales plummeted from $150/day to $0 initially, but it laid the foundation for growth.

The goal here is to start with as simple as possible and gradually add more friction (price) to see until where you can push it.

⚗️ Landing page iterations:

I got traffic, but my conversion rate was around 0.5% at first, so I had to fix it 💀

I changed the copy multiple times, based on customer research

I added a live demo on the landing page so users could directly try the app.

I removed the dark mode.

Added testimonials

Improved the loading speed

💡I made a massive Tweet with tips to make great copy here

👌 Banger Customer Experience:

I paid extra attention to customers. Like, really.

I once jumped on a live support session with a customer to help him fix his microphone to record.

Three users asked for a light mode, I completely overhauled the app with a light mode. Someone asked Zapier, I added zapier.

Someone asked me where was the "upload" button, I re-designed it to make it more visible.

Again, do things that don't scale. If people ask you for something, do it.

💡 Use Crisp & Canny to get in touch with your users & get feedback easily!

💪 Persistence

I'm someone who like to move fast, so I had constant doubts about the app.

You can't know if a product will work. But you can get some hints: If users are happy about the product, it's a good sign. If they complain when the product crashes, it's also a good sign.

It's like navigating in the ocean without a compass. You can't be 100% sure if you're in the right direction, but you can get an idea by observing the stars ✨

HOWEVER: If you get absolutely 0 positive feedback, 0 user, 0 sales after working on the product for a whole month, maybe 1) It's not a product for you 2) People don't care. In both case, it's time to move in.

Behind the Scenes:

This journey was far from easy. After the initial success, it got stale.

Then, I got depressed by the lack of progress after removing one-time payments.

There were days I didn't even want to get out of bed because it felt like crap 🥲

The #1 thing that helps me go through it is to do at least ONE little thing per day:

Write one post

Add one tiny feature

Fix one bug

I couldn't focus more than that, so the rest of the time I played video games with indie hacker podcasts in the background.

It's okay to slow down, but it's not ok to stop. Do the bare minimum, but do something.

Next steps:

Now, I need to figure out a way to grow my traffic and see if I can scale it!

The first step is to launch on ProductHunt (I'm live todayif you want to support me!)

Then, I'll focus on growing the app with SEO and Ads. I will also release a mobile app version for the first time in my life! I heard the App Store was a huge traffic opportunity

***Nico*** posted to Building in Public on October 8, 2023

This is awesome history, the begining don't need to be hard. Congrats. What are the tools used?

NathanNariai a month ago

Apple notes & Milanote to take notes mainly haha, I don't have specific tools

Jeannen a month ago

If you wanna find a tool that can take notes and save your stuff, try out https://www.save.day/?utm\_source=ih&utm\_medium=cmt&utm\_campaign=octspecific***tradao004*** 18 days ago

Thanks for this writeup! Quick question for ya - In the "Using one-Time Payments" Could you elaborate on the flow here? Sorry for the super simple question, I've not yet dived into setting up Stripe but it's next on my list.

The user clicks Buy Now"

They get redirected to Stripe and make the purchase

??

I'm guessing maybe you send them a Download link? Did you put up any protections to make sure folks weren't just sharing the download link and/or installer?

sillysideprojects a month ago

Stripe then creates an account on the back-end with the email they used and the user is redirected to a login page :)

Jeannen a month ago

Achieving $500 Monthly Recurring Revenue (MRR) in just two months is impressive. Here's how you can do the same:

Market Research: Identify a niche or problem that needs solving, ensuring there's a demand for your app.

Product-Market Fit: Develop a valuable, user-centric solution and gather feedback to refine it.

Effective Marketing: Utilize digital marketing, content, and social media to reach your target audience.

Customer Engagement: Provide exceptional customer support and engage with users for loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing.

Scalability: Plan for growth, continually improve your product, and explore new revenue streams to boost your MRR over time.***SammpradaCancerCare*** 17 days ago

Thank you for sharing your progress :) I definitely feel the same 'behind the scenes' sometimes. It's hard to navigate compared to working a traditional job where you know you'll have income at the end of the month provided you don't do a major f\*ckup, or follow managements guidelines. Good luck for the rest!***julienp17*** 25 days ago

Just get started. That one thing that I learnt here. Anything you want to do just start it first and then adjust accordingly. It much better than trying to figure out the best way to do something which never was.

The idea is to finish the race not to figure out what is the best way to run.

Check out this great article talking about the power of starting small and moving quickly to aim for big goals : Be patient to start small while thinking big

aquidor223 a month ago

Love the story, great work! How long did you take to build the first iteration of the product before you started validation through one-time payments?

jaredtyler a month ago

Thanks a lot! Took me 5 days to make the whole thing! I took extra time to make the landing page

Jeannen a month ago

That is awesome nico ! What’s ur future plans for this app

***Anaas21*** a month ago

Thanks a lot! Mobile app is the #1 :)

***Jeannen*** a month ago

one time payment for one year of access is a very interesting idea. haven't heard it before

***linttim*** a month ago

annual subscriptions no?***digitalcortex*** 20 days ago

Hey Nico, congrats on your launch and perseverance! Have you thought about adding "actionables" like "send this to <recipient> at 13:00" Something like that could take your product to the net level.

***ThomasW81*** a month ago

Yes, I thought of adding shortcuts for things like this (ex: post on Twitter) but got tons of things to add first haha

***Jeannen*** a month ago

Oh, it was you! I noticed that the app was launched on PH yesterday, and I upvoted it. There are always new thoughts and things I want to record, but I can only write them down in a messy notebook. Your app is really helpful! Is it built on ChatGPT?

***Saihhold*** a month ago

Thanks for the support 😄

And yes, it uses GPT API :)

***Jeannen*** a month ago

Great looking website and great product!!

What tech stack did you use?

***Panther55*** a month ago

Node for the back-end, pure HTML/CSS/JS for the front-end!

***Jeannen*** a month ago

Wow really awesome story. How did your customer discovery process look like?

***mertdeveci*** a month ago

No particular process other than sending an email asking them how they'd use the app, then trying to start a conversation from there whenever possible!

***Jeannen*** a month ago

Awesome! We're about to go through this process too :)

***ArtisanAI*** a month ago

Good luck!!

***Jeannen*** a month ago

Congrats on a very cool product. I think launching an app would be huge. Thinking from a consumer's perspective that's exactly how I would want to use this product.

NikValdez a month ago

Thanks a lot! Always think user-first 😄

Jeannen a month ago

Thank you for sharing. There is lots of good information and advice to remember. 👍🏽***Marko\_Helloo*** 17 days ago

Great post, thanks for sharing. I think the most common issue is with reason number 1 - but with a different catch, I would reformulate number 1 as: "You don’t have targeted traffic".***alexmano*** 18 days ago

Great Nico, you do a good work and I learn from your words

Thanks***IsmailAbualmagd*** 18 days ago

Great Nico! Thanks for sharing it and already left my comment on ProductHunt***estebangonzalez*** 18 days ago

Thank you for sharing your status***graphtrade*** 18 days ago

Very interesseting.***PBD*** 19 days ago

Great for guidance. May I know your customer acquisition planning? I mean was it organic or cold emailing or product launching?***Shamima*** 19 days ago

Useful blog for readers, Thank you***123\_tws\_coimbatore*** 19 days ago

one payment sounds nice idea, maybe i can consider it for my new app***mohamm6d*** 20 days ago

Love this***Stanlyya*** 23 days ago

We built some applications (eg: Chrome Browser Extension ChatWork, ChatPDF),

Some apps have 3k~5k users.

Unfortunately, we don’t know how to make money.

We are recruiting a partner to help increase product sales.

If you think it is an acceptable idea to get your income from a share of sales revenue, please contact us.***CiceroSword*** 25 days ago

3k~5k users is no easy feat, congrats! You should look into gating some of the features into a paid pricing tier, and keep the rest as a freemium.***igotoschoolbytaxi*** 20 days ago

Did you need something like a mail sequence that you would send your customers to onboard them? Or is it pretty self-explanatory?

We are struggling with onboarding, hard :D

pscheit a month ago

Self-explainatory! Best onboarding is to make the product as simple as possible to use imo haha

## Hit $20k MRR in 6 mo no marketing

by James Fleischmann

Non-technical solo founder, Dustin Stout, built an all-in-one AI content creation suite in 2 months using no code. Then he grew it from $0 to $20k MRR in 6 months without marketing. And now he's at $23k MRR.

I caught up with him to find out how he did it. 👇

Building hope (and a season of darkness)

James: You hit the $20k MRR milestone within 6 months, which is quite an achievement. But it sounds like this success is about a whole lot more than money.

Dustin: Yeah, and it feels indescribable. Since 2019, I've been in what feels like a season of darkness.

James: What happened?

Dustin: My first SaaS disintegrated, two more products failed, my wife was dealing with some massive (nearly life-threatening) health issues, I had a friend commit suicide, and our personal finances were drying up. All while trying to "keep it together" and be a good dad and husband.

James: That's a lot.

Dustin: Some days I found myself waking up wishing I hadn't. I couldn't take it anymore. If it weren't for my faith in God and my wife's constant support, I probably wouldn't have made it through.

James: Sounds like you did make it through, though... and then some.

Dustin: It was really hard. But when you have a family depending on you to put food on the table, you find the energy to put one foot in front of the other.

I told myself, "If God hasn't taken me home yet, there's still something left for me to do here."

James: So what happened?

Dustin: I built Magai. The first month that it opened for public signup was when a light of hope broke through the darkness. My wife's health issues had mostly dissipated, we were entering back into a somewhat normal life (post-pandemic), and people were actually paying for and praising my product.

James: Wow, what a relief that must have been.

Dustin: Yeah, just to hit $1k MRR, it felt as if a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders. Then, when it kept going up, I almost couldn't believe it.

There were many challenges that came along with the growth — as all businesses face — but I knew this was clearly a new season of life. I had hope again.

Magai revenue graph

Exiting a toxic startup environment

James: Before we dive into how you grew Magai to $20k/mo, tell me about your first SaaS.

Dustin: I started a Wordpress plugin company in 2014 with two friends who were developers. While I could design and customize WordPress themes myself, I wasn't a developer in any sense, so partnering with two developers made sense.

We all saw a huge gap in the marketplace for social sharing plugins, and all had ideas about how we could create something that would be revolutionary. Turns out, it was.

James: So it was successful?

Dustin: We had a moderate rise to success, netting our first 1,000 paying customers in the first year. At some point, the revenue got to the point where we were (a) making enough that we didn't necessarily need to take on much side work, and (b) could afford to hire staff to run most of the day-to-day.

James: So why did you leave?

Dustin: Ultimately, my partners and I grew apart. We had several offers for acquisition which they blocked, despite my many attempts to reason with them.

The number of disagreements and toxicity of the relationships got out of control. So I left.

James: How did that work — did they buy you out?

Dustin: Yes, I sold my 33% and was paid out in 18 monthly installments.

James: Did you invest that into building new products?

Dustin: I used the money mostly to just survive — it wasn't much. At the beginning, my wife still wasn't working, and we've got 3 kids to feed, so all the financial burden was on me.

I took up consulting again, but found it hard to go back to client work after running a digital product for a few years. So while most of the money was going towards just providing for a family, I did use the little extra left over to help get the other products off the ground.

How to get funded

James: What happened next?

Dustin: When I left the plugin company, I had two ideas that had been stirring in my mind for a few years.

One of them was a long-form content repurposing app. The idea was that you would paste a link to a piece of content (ie. blog post) and the app would instantly create 30+ highly effective social media posts to promote the content across all the major platforms.

The other idea was a way to produce social media graphics by just typing in your text — zero design skill needed. The end goal was AI-powered design at scale.

James: Did you seek funding?

Dustin: Since I wasn't a developer and these ideas were much bigger than what WordPress was capable of, I knew they needed to be custom-built apps. So I needed to hire a development company to spec out the MVPs and see what it would cost.

Well, my initial plans would have required 6 figures. And I definitely didn't have that kind of cash.

James: So what did you do?

Dustin: I had to go through a painful process of pairing down the MVPs to be even leaner than before. When I finally got it within a fair range that I felt like I could raise money for, I started sharing the mockups and ideas in some trusted private groups to get feedback.

James: And that's where you found your investors?

Dustin: Kenny was part of the private Facebook group of entrepreneurs.

I met Casey while speaking at a conference in Atlanta. He and I immediately connected and stayed in touch. He very much became a mentor and counselor to me in the difficult times I mentioned.

James: Why did Kenny trust you enough to give you money before you built the product?

Dustin: He mostly just trusted the recommendation of the other folks in the group when they vouched for me. After meeting with him once to share the combined vision of the two apps, he wanted to invest in me.

Both investors told me that it wasn't the products they were buying into, but me. They trusted me because they saw my vision, my determination, and most of all my integrity.

James: How much were you asking for?

Dustin: A small $15k was all that was needed to get the first product built. In exchange, I gave up 7% of the new entity, SoVisual.co LLC.

It didn't take long to get the first project funded. Soon after, I got another $15k in exchange for another 7%. I now had $30k and would be able to build both MVPs simultaneously.

Try, try again (and fail, fail again)

James: Bold decision.

Dustin: Yeah, and as many products go, they ended up costing more and taking longer to build than originally anticipated.

James: Been there. So what happened?

Dustin: The MVPs never really had enough of a value proposition to drive adoption. The market just didn't buy at the scale I needed it in order to continue funding development.

Despite exhausting every angle I could, these products failed to recoup even half of the initial investments.

James: Did you ever take anything over the $30k?

Dustin: I never asked them for more than their initial buy-in. And although they did offer help in more than a few ways, I never required them to give any more.

James: So what happened when the products failed?

Dustin: When the two products failed and I began exploring the next step, I had every intention of (a) building a product without the need to hire help, and (b) making sure that my early investors were a part of it by default.

I wanted to honor their trust in me, and that's what I did. I built Magai by myself in 8 weeks. No investment. And I built it as a product of SoVisual.co LLC — which meant that both Casey and Kenny were already silent partners.

James: Classy move.

Dustin: Loyalty is very important to me. If you can't do right by the people who supported you at your lowest, you don't deserve to have good people around you.

Integrity is the most important virtue, and if I would have just abandoned the partners who took a risk on me, I wouldn't have been able to sleep at night.

James: And it sounds like that attitude is exactly why they invested in you in the first place.

Build in public before marketing

James: Let's talk about how you grew Magai.

Dustin: Coming off the heels of such weighty and exhausting failures, I wanted to be cautious and build smart. Since I was building this product by myself, I had to wear all the hats.

James: That must've been a big adjustment.

Dustin: It was a stiff learning curve for me.

James: You're a designer, but you have a lot of experience marketing experience. What did you do to grow Magai?

Dustin: After following many founders building in public, I decided to take that approach.

James: Why not try your more traditional marketing appraoches?

Dustin: Focusing on building in public instead of doing traditional marketing was mostly a matter of staying focused on making the product as great as possible before blitzing the market.

I knew that I had enough of an audience who would follow the build-in-public journey thanks to 10+ years of growing an online presence. So I trusted that would be enough while I focused on the product.

I suppose I was also somewhat insecure about my building ability and knew it would be much harder to "fix" things at scale if I grew too quickly. So the slow growth was a means of lowering my risk in a few ways. The goal was always to hit a few specific product development milestones, and then shift focus to marketing. That time is almost here.

James: Did you just call $20k MRR in 6 months "slow growth"?

Dustin: Haha, well, I guess it's all relative, right? Compared to my last products, the growth is neck-breaking. Compared to the growth of ChatGPT, it's insignificant.

I've seen a lot of startups with more exciting stories than mine, so I guess that's what I tend to compare myself to. Having been in the marketing space, I know that I could have grown much faster if I would have applied my marketing experience. So that's why I refer to the growth as "slow" I suppose.

Affiliate program + marketing audience = 🚀

James: Fair enough. So BIP alone was resopnsible for $20k MRR?

Dustin: Well, to be fair, there were a few things I had going for me that gave me a bit of a marketing boost without much effort.

James: Do tell.

Dustin: For one, I've built an audience around my personal brand for the last 10 years.

Secondly, I created an affiliate program out of the gate.

Combine those two things — especially considering many of my online friends are marketers — and I didn't have to do much more than build in public.

James: Interesting. So you didn't use your marketing experience as much as you used your marketing network.

Dustin: 10+ years of grinding as a blogger and social media expert definitely worked in my favor.

James: What is your BIP process?

Dustin: It's not very sophisticated... any time I have a new feature I'm working on, I share a screenshot (if appropriate) and talk about the WHY or HOW behind it.

James: That's it?

Dustin: I also have been trying to share at least one revenue update per month. And any time I come up with a fun or interesting use for the product, I try to share that as well.

It's not very structured, but I'm highly intentional about bringing people into the process as much as I can. The only platforms I use with consistency are Twitter (X), and Facebook. Between these two, I had all the audience I needed.

Explore new uses for your product (skip the niches)

James: You mentioned sharing about new uses for you Magai. Are those all within a small niche?

Dustin: I voraciously ignore the advice that "riches are in the niches." While I don't deny the power of creating something that is created specifically for a small, well-defined demographic, I could never bring myself or my ideas to fit into one specific niche.

Now, I've definitely created marketing campaigns and landing pages aimed at specific target audiences, but when it comes to building a product, I have never been able to come up with a product that is limited to a single niche.

James: You've never been able to? Or you've never wanted to?

Dustin: It's a choice, for sure. But it's a choice based on how I'm built. It is in my nature to think through a wide range of applications for a given solution/product. And I don't like being confined to a single label.

No code (and how to teach yourself any skill)

James: Ok I want to circle back on one thing before we close out. Your first product had two developer co-founders. Development of your second and third products was outsourced. But you built Magai on your own. How?

Dustin: I built Magai using a combination of nocode tools (mostly Bubble) and the limited amount of HTML/CSS/JS I know. Learning to work with APIs inside of Bubble is really the biggest part of it.

Not having high-level coding skills always made me think my ideas were going to require heavy capital to execute. But nocode allowed me to unleash those ideas without the capital-intensive barrier.

James: And you taught yourself this skill?

Dustin: Yeah, every skill that makes me money is something that was self-taught. In this case, a few dozen YouTube videos and a course called NocodeMBA were all it took.

James: Do you have a process?

Dustin: I can't really say I have a process for learning. For me, when my curiosity is engaged, I just fully immerse myself in the subject. Googling articles, YouTube videos, or online courses — I seek out everything I need to know.

And while learning, I try to actively put things into practice. This is why a 10-minute Bubble tutorial would usually take me an hour—because I like to build while I learn. And then I like to explore various opinions and approaches to the same topic to get a broader perspective.

You can figure out anything if you search hard enough.

James: True enough. Where can people find you?

Dustin: Best place to find me is dustinstout.com, magai.co or @dustinwstout on all the social things.

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James Fleischmann

posted to

The Boot's Trap 🪤

on October 19, 2023

47

25

Say something nice to IndieJames…

POST COMMENT

3

Your persistence is inspiring.***mayanky*** 16 days ago

Thanks! I was once told, "it is impossible to stop a person who refuses to quit." I have held onto that.***dustinwstout*** 16 days ago

Hi James, wonderful story! I see myself a lot in your life story. I'm wondering if you could share me in private the Investors Facebook groop that you are reffering to, where you've found your first 2 investors. I'm right at this point right now, to pitch my project and surrround myself with people who believe in me. Thanks and congrats for your product! It is in my favourite now. :)***WayneGretzky*** 15 days ago

The groups I mentioned were not specific to investors. They are private groups for entrepreneurs and aren't open to anyone.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

This is a timely article, as I am currently learning nocode and believe in its ability to help someone like me launch new businesses. I love the recommendation of the NoCodeMBA. I'm learning Bubble from the course "The Startup Founder's Guide to Bubble Programming" and finding the instruction high-quality. What other courses would all of you recommend to help people like me efficiently spool up on nocode?***CleverInsights*** 15 days ago

Honestly, Seth's tutorials (NoCodeMBA) are all I think anyone needs. He's fantastic and easy to follow.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

The first piece I read after joining Indie Hackers. I know for sure I'm in the right place. Dustin has a new follower on twitter :)***Xolile322*** 15 days ago

Thanks, @Xolile322.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Welcome to IH! :)***IndieJames*** 15 days ago

Wow, just checked out Magai and signed up for free trial! As a no-code solopreneur, I am once again amazed by how neat a site can be built with Bubble! Love the UI btw.

Justin, I appreciate you sharing your ups and downs with the community. Stay committed and integral, such an inspiration!***D4Destination*** 15 days ago

Thanks for the compliments @D4Destination!***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

"Some days I found myself waking up wishing I hadn't. " - Dang this hits hard. I literally had to force myself out of bed today to start work while my wife has already got both our kids on the bus for school.

Seems like I've been in a "season of darkness" for a while now. This story is really timely and inpirational to me.

And it's very funny, but I literally have the same inner conversations about my faith and situation: If God/the Universe/Fate won't take be, then there is clearly a reason for me to still be here and I need to stay focused on the things I can control and accomplish.

I've been struggling on and off for FAR TOO LONG on a project and really struggle to stay motivated on even it, let alone 9-5 work and even family/life responsibilities. Admittedly I don't have as much negative things going on as Dustin did, but some days it really is hard to do this tuff plus all the other things we are 'supposed' to be doing.

Thanks for sharing your journey, Dustin.***Scotalia*** 15 days ago

One day at a time, friend. It always takes longer than expected, so patience—especially with yourself—is important.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Really sorry to hear that, Craig. And I appreciate you sharing — I think it's important for folks to know they aren't alone in their struggles, with indie hacking and with life in general. I'm rooting for ya :)***IndieJames*** 15 days ago

This is inspiring for a young founder like me who gets stuck at certain revenue & stories like this keeps us going & teaches us to never ever give up. Dustin you're a beast!***obessionaboveall*** 15 days ago

Thanks @obessionaboveall. Just a simple guy with laser focus.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Inspiring - start Lean!***nibaranowski*** 15 days ago

100%.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

That's a cool story!***zeeekay*** 15 days ago

Thanks @zeeekay.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Very Impressive, Great story man!🚀***premsaini*** 15 days ago

Thanks @premsaini.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Great story, thank you!

I'm a bit unclear on how you achieved these numbers without marketing but solely through the affiliate program and the marketers you know. You have more than 500 paying users (based on the prices on your site), which is a substantial number. It's hard to believe they all came from recommendations alone. Is there something else at play here? :)***ILFAT*** 16 days ago

Magai actually has 1,010 paying subscribers and about 1,500 total paid users—some users were grandfathered into lifetime deals in my previous products.

And it really is that simple. 10+ years of grinding as a blogger has earned me a great deal of industry authority. So people who have influence follow me and are subscribed to my blog/email newsletter. My personal email newsletter has over 20,000 subscribers and my blog gets >30,000 visitors per month. So building an audience over time cannot be understated.

And it's not always about how many followers or subscribers you have... if you have 5 followers who love what you do, and between the 5 of them they reach 100,000 people per month, you have a great deal of leverage. So spend the time to build quality relationships with people who are moving in the right direction.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Good question for @dustinwstout. My understanding is that he had a decent number of engaged followers, many of whom happened to have marketing chops and interest in making money as affiliates.

There are lots of stories of folks building in public with huge returns... not usually this quickly, though.***IndieJames*** 15 days ago

Very good***db\_cxy*** 16 days ago

Hitting 20K MRR in 6 months is superfast in my opinion. It seems to me that time is flying much faster for many people.

BTW, the growth of ChatGPT is not that fast (it was exponential over the last year, though) as often reported, because ChatGPT 3.5 only became viable after many years of iteration(GPT).***lernerzhang*** 16 days ago

Very true.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Fair point!***IndieJames*** 15 days ago

Nice work man, very impressive 👏🏿***iSWATxJOKERi*** 16 days ago

Thanks @iSWATxJOKERi.***dustinwstout*** 15 days ago

Great story man!***KingRomstar*** 16 days ago

Thank you! 🙌***dustinwstout*** 16 days ago

You look too good for all the pain you endured:), good genes I surmise.

Thanks, great story.

I like 10y of blogging that finally paid off big time helping you with the last project.***ArkSzklar*** 5 days ago

I must be missing this but I can't find how long did it take to develop the product, and how many people were working on it? Thanks.***NorNorsu*** 9 days ago

Very big Blog, I like your sayings If God hasn't taken me home yet, there's still something left for me to do here. thanks @IndieJames***jagadeesh27*** 9 days ago

Dustin's remarkable journey from personal adversity to creating Magai and achieving significant MRR is a powerful reminder of how resilience and determination can lead to newfound hope and success. It's a testament to the strength of the human spirit in the face of life's toughest challenges.***filmbuff*** 10 days ago

Fantastic story! Way to go! Love this interview chat format. I feel I was sitting right next to him lol. 2 months no code to 20K, inspirational. Is it too late to jump on to the AI bandwagon? haha***mr9sky*** 11 days ago

Impressive feat, way to go. All the very best.***toolsoncloud*** 11 days ago

The real success that Dustin have achieved is being part of an awesome community and become somewhat significant on that community. With all the failure he mentioned, the only thing that he successfully build is his reputation in the community.

The community alone have helped moved his product.

That's is why sharing your story success or failure is like having insurance for your project. In case the project failed, you at least gain some audience for you next project or gain something from it that you can utilize.

Here is an article that related to this : Building Audience From My Failure***aquidor223*** 12 days ago

Very inspirational, thanks for sharing!!***briankwizera*** 12 days ago

Inspiring story James, thanks for sharing it. Definitely lots to learn from this.***BoudydeGeer*** 12 days ago

Awesome stuff James, thank you for the interview Dustin, as always the trick it to just keep going!!!***flightfoot*** 12 days ago

A lot of learnings***SusanDeng0321*** 12 days ago

This is really inspiring Dustin.

I'm in the process of validating my idea and it's so tiring and stressful.

Your post was just what I need to keep me going.

Thanks.***Shakable2527*** 13 days ago

Inspiring sotry Dustin, thanks for the interview. Especially the last part about james not having deep knowledge in code, yet launching his product. That's something that has been worrying me, but reading this defo gives hope!***ben\_grippon*** 13 days ago

cool! 1000 times stronger than us!***CiceroSword*** 13 days ago

I think without marketing, it is just good luck to see who can help you win. Marketing isn't about, "Hey, I'm selling this good product; buy this." Whatever we talk about, discuss, and post related to our projects, products, and upcoming launches is also considered marketing.***CyberEspial*** 13 days ago

Building a credible brand through character and (quickly!) creating what will serve others. Bravo, Dustin. What's next?***LMLAbrige*** 14 days ago

Thanks for sharing your story, Dustin. I noted down some ideas for the launch of my startup, that's also an AI-powered writer (in Spanish).

You helped me re-orient my BIP strategy.***iarsuaga*** 14 days ago

Awesome story. Keeping the investors on the third project was such a cool move***lucasrantzau*** 14 days ago

Inspirational. Thanks for sharing.***ShahmirFaisal*** 14 days ago

inspiring.***jiteshghanchi*** 14 days ago

I have been skeptical of no-code tools but this here is a perfect example of how to utilize one to its full potential. You nailed all the aspects of product design & launch.

Wishing you more success and a happy life!***HumzaKhan*** 15 days ago

very inspiring, hard time build strong men. Kepp going ma bro

anwarst 15 days ago

## Rookie coder built a $74k MRR product

by James Fleischmann

Tim Bennetto started Pallyy four years ago. In that time, he plateaued for over two years, pivoted twice, rebranded, got serious about marketing, acquired products for SEO, found hockey-stick growth, expanded his team, and hit $74k MRR.

And he didn't even know how to code when he got started.

I caught up with him to learn how he did it. 👇

A slow start

James: Pallyy is making $74k MRR now, but it had a slow start.

Tim: The product was stalled for the first 2 years. I was just so focused on building that I wasn't doing much marketing at all. It was a big mistake.

James: So just building alone doesn't cut it?

Tim: Building the product and adding all the features is vital, but you should also be marketing at the same time, which I wasn't.

Pallyy only started to grow after 2 years when I realized that its days were numbered and I needed to do SOME marketing — I could only live off of $2K MRR for so long.

Revenue graph

You don't need an audience

James: How did you grow it?

Tim: I had zero audience, but I was looking at Indie Hackers and Twitter getting ideas for marketing, SEO, etc. Seeing what other people were doing.

So I started an affiliate program and did some SEO.

James: Do you think indie hackers should build an audience before they build a product?

Tim: It helps if you do have one - but it's absolutely not required to get started. Probably the majority of successful companies start without an audience.

It's also much easier to build an audience once you've actually started doing things to talk about.

Affiliate programs are about more than new users

James: How did the affiliate program work out?

Tim: It started off pretty slow but now contributes about 20% of Pallyy's MRR.

James: How did you find affiliates?

Tim: Once the program was added, I started to compile a list of people to contact by searching Google for blogs related to social media marketing.

For example, I'd search for "Top Instagram analytics tools", then go through the first few pages, opening up every single post. I'd check the articles to see if they had any affiliate links, and then the ones that did I'd add to my list and email the owner directly.

James: What was the response rate?

Tim: Very low, but it got me the top affiliates that I have today.

Tim: I also added a link directly to the program from Pallyy's dashboard so that my users could join easily. This works pretty well, although the affiliates will usually be smaller.

James: What's the affiliate setup?

Tim: Currently, we give 40% lifetime commissions to our affiliates, which is more than most programs I've seen. The reason is just simply to attract the best.

James: Why does the quality of the affiliate matter so much?

Tim: Affiliates add to your platform in many ways other than just MRR. They also publish blog posts, which drive targeted traffic and help with your SEO too.

Blowing up SEO by acquiring tools

James: Makes sense. Speaking of SEO, has that been a big driver for you?

Tim: SEO drives about 95% of Pallyy's traffic and conversions these days, so it's been the most effective marketing I've done.

James: It tends to be a long game — when did you start?

Tim: I started to double down on SEO two years ago. These things take time to rank and drive traffic, so it's best to do them as early as you can.

James: That's pretty quick to be getting so much traffic. How did you pull that off?

Tim: My process is simply to put out a lot of free, high-quality resources. And of course, I target a keyword for each one.

That said, I don't let SEO overshadow the fact that they are useful. You have to make sure everything you do provides some value to the target user that you're trying to attract.

James: That's it?

Tim: More or less. The things I've done for SEO are:

SEO optimization: Making the site fast, optimizing images, titles, descriptions, etc.

Posting lots of blog posts (around 80+ so far)

Building free tools like image editors, caption generators, etc.

Acquiring free tools (same as above)

Creating "compare" or "alternative" pages to get people who are looking to switch from a competitor

Building a page for each main feature of the product

James: Tell me more about these free tools.

Tim: So far I've acquired about 7 free tools. They've been really good for driving traffic and boosting our SEO.

Basically, when I buy a tool, I'll build the exact same tool onto Pallyy's website, then 301 redirect the original product there. Doing this gives me almost the same SEO benefits. I get their keyword rankings and also their backlinks, if they have any. Some of the tools I've acquired have had amazing backlinks that the owners probably had no idea about.

James: That's super interesting. What's an example of a tool you've acquired?

Tim: Recently, I acquired a free tool called image-to-caption.io. I'd been searching AHREFS for keywords of tools in my niche and came across "image caption generator" which was a low-difficulty keyword with decent traffic.

Image-to-caption.io was in 1st place, so I reached out to them and asked to buy it. There was no response for months. In the end, I decided to build one anyway and it actually ranked up in 1st/2nd position quite quickly, getting about 2K clicks/day.

After another month or so, the owner of image-to-caption replied and ended up selling it to me for $2K USD. It was getting about 4-5K clicks per day!

As with the others, I redirected it to Pallyy and now my tool is firmly placed in #1 position.

Maybe charge more

James: Another thing that helped you grow was increasing your pricing by $3/mo. That alone increased your MRR by over $10k/mo. Fair to say that you agree with the "charge more" maxim?

Tim: No, I don't agree with that entirely, I think it really depends on your market and positioning.

In the social media management niche, there are a lot of players, so being more affordable is a good option for someone new to the game. And that's what I did.

Now, three years down the track from when I set the initial price, it seemed like the right time to increase it. But I didn't take this lightly.

James: So what did you do?

Tim: Before increasing it, I compared Pallyy's pricing to 10 others in our niche. We were very close to the bottom. I found that increasing the price by $3 wouldn't change where we sat in that comparison, so it seemed like we could do it without any issues.

James: Smart. What then?

Tim: Then, I sent out an email to 10-20 of my paying users (of all sizes) to see what they would think if I increased it. The response was that I should do it. Nobody said I shouldn't. Some even said it wasn't enough of an increase.

James: So you went ahead and did it. Did a lot of users churn?

Tim: We've had no increase in churn or lower conversion rates, which is amazing.

Crowded markets are good

James: You mentioned that the market was crowded. Why didn't you choose a less crowded market?

Tim: You don't need to come up with a unique idea to build a successful business.

Just find an existing niche you have even a tiny interest in, join it, and build something. Make sure it works really well and it's affordable. And then provide great support.

Diversify your platform risk

James: Fair enough. Platform risk has been a big topic ever since X increased its API pricing to $42k/mo. Has it been a worry for you?

Tim: Yes, platform risk is always an issue. However, Pallyy isn't just an Instagram scheduler, we support 7 social platforms now - so the risk is less although still not ideal.

James: Is X one of those platforms?

Tim: Yes, we support X; however, after the price increase we had to change how we use it.

Prior to the change, we had Twitter scheduling, analytics, and inbox. After the price change, we had to remove the analytics and inbox. We simply don't have enough API calls to make it work.

So we pay $100/mo which is enough to support the scheduling side of things.

James: Heck of a lot cheaper than $42k/mo.

Accept (almost) every feature request

James: Tell me about some advice that you ignore.

Tim: A common thing that I've seen is people saying you shouldn't listen to every customer in the early days. They say to stick to your vision.

In my case, in the early days, I listened to almost every single feature request and 99% of the time built it. Listening to those early users helped me gain direction and build a platform that's useful.

James: What about your own vision?

Tim: If I stuck to my own vision, it would have gone out of business quickly.

James: How so?

Tim: My initial MVP main "feature" was that you could share your Instagram analytics. This was something I thought, "Yeah, everyone wants this!"

But I was very wrong. No one wanted it, and they let me know. I quickly pivoted and started building the features people were talking about.

James: You mentioned that you were building too much in the beginning, which created a slow start. Was it wise to implement every feature request?

Tim: The reason I plateaued wasn't that I was building too many features, but because I did it for 2 years while doing almost zero marketing. If I were to start over again I'd be at least doing 75% building, 25% marketing even in those early days.

Learning to code in 6 months

James: Speaking of the early days, you didn't know how to code. How did you learn so fast?

Tim: I spent six months or so learning HTML, CSS, JavaScript, and Nuxt. I started by just doing a few hours learning on codecademy each night until I got to the point that I could build something very very basic. Then I started building websites or random little tools - anything to get experience.

Once I'd built a few little things, I learned about auth and how dashboards work, so put that into practice too and started building simple login systems.

James: Then you got to work on Pallyy – how did it turn out initially?

Tim: The first version of Pallyy was extremely simple. It didn't have much functionality. It had a ton of bugs. And it looked bad.

James: So what did you do?

Tim: During the next couple of years, I worked on it every single day. I changed it so many times that people started to say, "If you change it again I'm leaving." But every time I changed it, it got better — even if just by a small amount.

Over 4 years, this really adds up, and you learn a lot about coding by being put in the deep end.

James: Do you feel like a pro now?

Tim: I'm still a beginner and this is becoming even more obvious now that I've hired a developer with much more experience than me.

Hiring as a solo founder

James: Has it been a big adjustment working with someone else after four years of flying solo?

Tim: One of the issues of being self-taught is that you never learn how to build in a team environment. You're just adding features as quick as you can think about them, not thinking into the future.

James: How did that affect the product?

Tim: After a few hours of my new dev starting, he said, "This isn't scalable past one person."

James: How so?

Tim: Essentially, the way I was building the project was fine when it was just me, but hiring anyone else was going to be very risky.

For example, I don't use things like dev environments (yes I push straight to production, haha).

This was fine for a while. I was able to ship faster than most of the big players. But I did stack up that tech debt which has to be repaid sometime later down the track.

James: So you don't regret the technical debt?

Tim: No. In my mind, this is the best way to do it. It means you don't waste time on things that aren't 100% needed in case the project doesn't work out. If it does work out, and you start to grow - you can hire someone to take care of it.

James: Which is what you're doing now.

Tim: Yeah, building it by myself for the last 4 years has been good, but I haven't been thinking about how the code side of things would scale.

Hiring someone far more experienced than me will help us get to a point where we can hire other people if we need, without having any big issues.

James: So what's your initial feeling on having a (2-person) team?

Tim: It's amazing. I'm only just over a week into the process and I'm already learning an incredible amount.

They're focusing on rebuilding the whole backend into a single monolith, using a separation of concerns concept.

They are also going to build out a whole user role system so that if I'm hiring in the future we can just give the developer access to the things they need access to, with minimal to no security issues.

James: Sounds like you're really gearing up for some big changes and growth! Where can folks watch your journey?

Tim: Check out X or pallyy

James Fleischmann posted to The Boot's Trap on October 12, 2023

One of the better interviews I've read here!

The affiliate angle is interesting and possibly underused by most early stage SaaSs. I suspect the affiliate program has resulted in even more than the 20% cited here, since it results in extra links which then helps SEO.***DCudmore*** 23 days ago

Happy to hear it!

Yes, you're right about the affiliates.

Just the fact they bring in good backlinks helps my other pages rank, so the actual value it brings is pretty hard to tell - but it's been amazing so far.

Some people say 40% is too much to giveaway, but I'd rather 60% of a sale that I'd never of seen, so it works for me.***tim103*** 23 days ago

Great story, big fan of Tim's ideas on how to grow Pallyy!

Keep it up, man!***DanielStuski*** 23 days ago

Thanks for the support Daniel 🙏

Hopefully you've been able to use some of my ideas!***tim103*** 23 days ago

The affiliate angle stuck out here, genius approach. Will be recommending to others :)

Curious what tool you use for it? (Reflio/GetRewardful/Trackdesk?)

Building out https://affiliate.tools in the near future and trying to get good examples :)***Esus*** 20 days ago

Tim, your storing is inspiring.

Your insights are helpful.

I'm the founder of ShoppingBotAI. I will start building free tools to bring traffic into my product.

I'm just doing SEO. Basically, blogs for the bottom of funnel. People that are almost ready to buy.

Let's see !!!

Thanks.***juancolamendy*** 21 days ago

Good luck with it all Juan, happy my insights help.***tim103*** 21 days ago

what tool are you using for affiliates program?***Naime*** 21 days ago

I'm using a platform called Rewardful. Integrates with Stripe easily.***tim103*** 21 days ago

The insights about crowded markets are very inspiring.***imomoray*** 21 days ago

Yeah, going into a crowded market can be a good thing!***tim103*** 21 days ago

Hi Tim, that's an amazing story! Quick question: In the early stage of product development, as you mentioned, allocating 25% to marketing is a great idea. Do you have any specific tools or actions you'd recommend for this?***dmitriis*** 22 days ago

Thanks. Not really, you just have to do that manually 🤣***tim103*** 22 days ago

This guy is a Giga Chad***AnGuRuSO*** 22 days ago

Thanks for sharing, Tim! You really communicate your experience as your's and not necessarily proscriptive for how it should/would work for everyone else. Think there's a lot of fluff the get through when people talk about their process, but you seem to do it in a way that talks about what you tried and the outcome of that.

Appreciate that and thanks for sharing all this. SEO's a daunting one, but what you shared helps lower the stakes a bit.***carlosginn*** 22 days ago

Exactly right, in addition I've been lucky too which plays a big part.

I'm just putting out what I've done so maybe it can help others on their path too, even if it's not the exact same one.***tim103*** 22 days ago

Inspiring story, Tim. Thanks for sharing your journey so far. What kind of impact on your life has achieving the 75k MRR had?***KevinArcher*** 22 days ago

Thanks Kevin.

It's just allowed me to start to expand the team, other than that nothing really.***tim103*** 22 days ago

I suppose I'm maybe looking at it in a fairly naive way - I can only dream of having those kinds of numbers flashing up in my bank account! All the best, hope you continue to find success!***KevinArcher*** 21 days ago

Yes but also these numbers are before expenses, wages, tax etc.***tim103*** 21 days ago

Love the idea of buying a company for $2k to get 2k reoccurring visits p/m. That is an awesome growth hack.***DaleHurley*** 22 days ago

It was actually more than 2K visits per day, however it's not easy to find tools that cheap.***tim103*** 22 days ago

You say you pay affiliates 40% commission, is that on the first month, first year or continuous trail?***DaleHurley*** 22 days ago

It's for the lifetime of the affiliate, so it's a pretty good deal haha.***tim103*** 22 days ago

wow, a good share!***anamorgan*** 22 days ago

Thanks Ana!***tim103*** 22 days ago

Best article I’ve read on here***mikessolosaas*** 22 days ago

Means a lot Mike, thanks for reading!***tim103*** 22 days ago

wow , what a good share, i'm inpired and encouraged by this atricle. thanks you very much. i'm now a zero audience indie hacker.wish me luck.***waynelu*** 22 days ago

Good luck Wayne, you can do it!***tim103*** 22 days ago

Thank you for sharing this inspiring story! I was writing about @tim103's indie hacker journey in the 4th issue of SideHustlerStory newsletter (it is for the Korean audience but you can read it by translating to English). The only source for content was just Tim's tweets and BOOM! I came across this incredible interview. @tim103, you're the 4th guest following Damon Chen, Tony Dinh, and Danny Postma :)***Jobless*** 23 days ago

Nice, keen to see it when you're done :)***tim103*** 23 days ago

For sure! I'll share it with you :)***Jobless*** 22 days ago

Thanks for sharing Tim. Inspiring and shows what’s possible. Had a question - when you started marketing - how did you split your time between code and writing? Was it like one week coding - one week marketing, or something else?***arjunrajkumar*** 23 days ago

After 2 years, I went all in with marketing so it was like 80% marketing, 20% coding.

Ideally if you could do 50/50 from day one that would be best.***tim103*** 23 days ago

Inspiring story @tim103 I've one question- What is the average cost /m of running the SEO and maintaining these free tools in the last 2 years especially when things were not the same as now?***TheAnkurTyagi*** 23 days ago

The cost is minimal, the only real cost at the moment is for openAI, which is maybe $100-200 per month.

When it comes to writing blog posts, was paying $50-$100 per post.***tim103*** 23 days ago

I think that you have a unique skill that many of us here can learn from and that is patience. Many would have just given up or thought of an excuse to "throw in the towel" if they were in your shoes. So for that I applaude you for doing what so many others would not.

I am happy that success through patience, hard work, and tons of learning has finally paid off.***BlakeRunyon*** 23 days ago

Thanks Blake, it takes time and you need a bit of luck, but if you don't keep going you're not giving yourself that opportunity.***tim103*** 23 days ago

SEO is a long game and need consistency. Writing 80+ blog on similar topic will increase your chance to rank higher on those keywords. But you need to pick a topic and keywords that have high chance of success for your particular business and something that your target customer might search and click on.

I created a tool that will analyze every possibility of keywords for your business and target customer and rank them according to their difficulty, traffic, trend and intention. Then from the current ranking website and blog, it will suggest the type of article that can attract clicks.

All this automated and you just need to specify niche and target customer.

If you interested checkout creativeblogotopic.com.

***aquidor223*** 23 days ago

## Sold 2 micro startups in 2023

—here's what I learned by Marc Lou

I used to believe a $300 MRR startup was worth nothing. I was so wrong….

In March 2023, I sold my first startup GameWidget: $80 MRR for $4,300.

3 weeks ago, I sold my second startup Habits Garden: $450 MRR for $10,000.

Your weekend project can change your life. Let’s talk about what it’s worth and how to sell it.

Valuation 🤑

Startup valuation can be very complicated. I’m going to assume we’re alike:

You’re a solopreneur or have a co-founder

Building software, AI tools, or mobile apps (no info products)

Shooting for 5/6/7 figures valuation (no unicorn)

Low operating cost (hosting, OpenAI credits, etc.)

Here’s the over-simplified formula to calculate your project worth:

Valuation = Annualised Revenue x 3

Let’s take a few examples:

A habits tracker with $300 MRR could be sold for $10,800 (300x12x3)

A logo maker with AI launched 3 months ago and made $4,000 so far could be sold for $12,000 (4,000x3)

Note that Monthly Recurring Revenue (MRR) can be extrapolated to a year for the habit tracker but the one-time payments for the logo maker with AI can’t.

You can dive deeper into startup valuation. I don’t. It gets overwhelming and gaining 5% here or there isn’t worth the hustle. I’d rather build more apps.

Imagine you grow a weekend project to $1,000 MRR… You have a 2-year pass to quit your job, move to Bali, and build apps full-time. Congrats!

Is it time to sell? ⏰

It’s a tough question. For me, it comes down to 3 criteria:

Can I 10x the revenue in a year?

Do I care about the market?

Do I need money right now?

It’s tempting to enjoy a juicy $500 recurring revenue. But keep in mind that every abandoned business goes to 0 quickly.

When you sell a startup, you get temporary financial freedom (and less stress) along with more time to focus on a new project.

The acquisition process 🤝

You made up your mind, listed your startup, and got interested buyers. What’s going to happen if someone decides to buy?

1. Paperwork

First, you’ll do boring paperwork like signing a Letter Of Intent (LOI) and an Asset Purchase Agreement (APA). The latter is a summary of what’s going to be bought, like your Intellectual Property (IP), marketing assets (like a Facebook page), etc. You might also sign a non-compete agreement. Just make sure it’s not too broad and allows you to build apps you care about.

Platforms like Acquire will do the paperwork for you. You don’t have to read 20 pages of boredness, ask ChatGPT to explain like I’m 5 to make sure you know what you’re signing. If you don’t use Acquire, ChatGPT is also really good at making the paperwork for you.

2. Payment

Second, the buyer will secure a payment through a third party like Escrow. Once the money is secured, you have to send the assets to the buyer.

3. Transfer

Lastly, transfer the domain name, database, credentials, etc (more on that below). The buyer will inspect everything and tell Escrow to move forward with payment. Congrats, you got acquired!

How to transfer the assets 🔀

Some platforms don’t allow you to transfer assets. For instance, you can’t transfer an AWS S3 bucket, a Mailgun email-sending domain, or a Google Cloud Console project.

Should you give your credentials and move on? I wouldn’t.Chances are you use these platforms for other projects and sending your credentials isn’t an option. In that case, explain it to the buyer and ask him/her to create his own account/API keys.

Tips to sell faster ⚡️

Ditch buyers asking a million questions. If they’re highly skeptical, they won’t buy and you’re losing your time

It all comes down to trust so build your startups in public: you don’t know it yet but potential buyers are following you and can wire the money to your bank account without asking much (that was the case when I sold Habits Garden). You also save the platforms’ listing fee (4% on Acquire, for instance)

Don’t be afraid to follow up and tell buyers you need an answer within 3 days.

If you’re selling on Acquire, ensure your listing is 100% ready before publishing. All buyers on the platform will be notified within 24 hours when most opportunities land.

If you’re selling on Acquire and no one is interested after a month, lower your price a bit. Acquire tends to lift your listing up when significant edits are made.

Selling your side project can give you the mental clarity to work harder on your solopreneurship journey.

Happy indie hacking!

***Marc Lou*** on October 30, 2023

This is cool to see.

I've spent the last 8 months building my app in the martech saas space.

No recurring revenue yet as we haven't even started beta testing.***Viralapp\_io*** 16 hours ago

100/100 Marcs for This!***jiteshghanchi*** 4 days ago

This is really interesting! I recently started dabbling in building some side projects as a hobby, and didn't know about Acquire or that marketplaces like that exist. Thank you for sharing your story!***dounan*** 4 days ago

Nice sharing!***SamdyChen*** 5 days ago

Good article***lcqingtian*** 5 days ago

Damn this is super helpful, always wondered how those platforms worked (in terms of what paperwork needs to be done to sell or buy a SaaS tool) but never researched about the topic. Now i know what i need to googleto learn more, thank you!***frandisco*** 5 days ago

Good to hear! I share all my learning in my newsletter: https://marclou.beehiiv.com/***marclou*** 5 days ago

That's a valuable article.***SpecterSpy*** 5 days ago

Good information, congratulations***mirac*** 5 days ago

thanks for sharing .***stevediaz*** 2 days ago

Great advice man!***arjunrajjain*** 4 days ago

Congrats, and thanks for the advice. The tips section at the bottom is awesome!***PeerLoop*** 4 days ago

Excellent sharing, thank you!

Does the $0 revenue from a product mean it has no sale value? If it does have value, how should its price be estimated?***BonVisions*** 4 days ago

Congrats and thanks for sharing!***OnlineConverter*** 4 days ago

@marclou Marc, congrats on your success and thanks for sharing these valuable insights with us.

I need to know how did you find buyers for your micro SaaS business?***DSarkar*** 4 days ago

Thanks for sharing!***LiaSherko*** 4 days ago

"Ditch buyers asking a million questions. If they’re highly skeptical, they won’t buy and you’re losing your time"

I would agree on this one. Sometimes you need to be patient. I was buying a boat, I was sending 2 emails per day for a almost a month. The seller was patient enough, and send me everything I asked for. I bought the boat in the end.

It's not always the case, and sometimes we need to cut it off before we start wasting too much time, but sometimes it's worth answering all those questions.***sasha\_fishter*** 4 days ago

This is a great information, Thanks for sharing.***radiant*** 4 days ago

Thanks for sharing, super useful information!***nmsdvid*** 4 days ago

Great Article!***raviprakashkr2*** 4 days ago

Thanks for the article. I think it’s also important to spread the idea. That you can buy a micro business instead of building one from scratch. And just scale it further with your resources. Somehow, the idea of building instead of building is still barely considered among entrepreneurs.***SeniHurtavtsov*** 4 days ago

Hey Marc, thanks for writing this! I have two iOS apps that make around <$1k a month and I thought nothing of it. Super inspiring and gives me more hope when working on more than one at a time :,)***kuala*** 5 days ago

You've got a nice car with this :)***marclou*** 5 days ago

@marclou Everyone is rich on paper 🤪

kuala 4 days ago

## Solopreneur: 0 to $45K/mo in 2 yrs

by Tony Dinh

Hello indie hackers! My name is Tony Dinh

On this day 2 years ago, I quit my job to be a full-time indie hacker.

Today, my average monthly revenue is ~$45k/month.

It’s the best decision I’ve ever made. Working for myself gives me a freedom I’ve never experienced before.

I want to take this special day to share a recap of my journey so far. I hope this will be helpful for people who are looking to become their own boss one day.

This is going to be a long post (~15 mins read), so get yourself a coffee! ☕

Over the past two years, I have:

created four small but successful products (all will be mentioned later in this post)

built an audience of 97K followers on Twitter

created this newsletter with 6,000+ subscribers

jumped on the AI hype train and successfully created a product with it

and survived a drama that almost killed my business

A bit of background

Before quitting my job, I was a software engineer with 7 years of experience (in 2021).

I love building software. My first software product was built with Visual Basic 6 in high school. Throughout my career, I have always had some side projects along with my full-time job.

Below is a summary of my full career history:

Thanks to 7 years working in the industry, I picked up a lot of useful skills: frontend, backend, DevOps, mobile apps, game dev, and a bit of UX/UI design.

These skills became my biggest advantage and have helped me tremendously later in my journey.

Learned about Indie Hackers

Early 2020, COVID happened. I was forced to work remotely alone at home (in a foreign country).

It was incredibly boring.

I discovered IndieHackers.com and started listening to their podcast every day. I got really inspired by the stories of successful indie hackers like Pieter Levels, Kyle Gawley, Jon Yongfook (and many more).

The inspiration, the boredom of COVID, and the extra time I got from not having to commute to work led me back to my passion: building software products.

So I gave it a try. I started working on a new side project with the hope of generating some revenue.

First failure

My first attempt was to build a log viewer macOS app.

As a good software engineer, I wanted the app to have a beautiful UI, tons of features, a comprehensive architecture, and a unit test suite with >95% test coverage.

This is the failed app, I still have it in my Xcode

I worked on it for ~6 months. I felt like the project would never finish. Then, I got bored and abandoned the project.

It failed spectacularly.

But at least I got something from it: I gained a lot of experience working with Swift, which means I can build macOS and iOS apps much faster now.

First successful app: DevUtils

It took me a while to recover from my first failure.

About a month later, I decided to give it another try (and this time, you can be certain that I wrote zero test cases 😂).

I built the first version of DevUtils in about 2 weeks. It’s an app that bundles all the frequently used developer tools into one unified interface that works offline on your macOS.

I sent the app to friends, family, and co-workers to use (for free) and received some good feedback. People love the app!

That was the sign I was looking for. I was excited and decided to add payment to the app: $9 - a one-time purchase to use the app forever.

Then, I posted the app on Hacker News. I think I got lucky, the post received some positive comments, and I got to the top of Hacker News for a few hours.

And that’s how I got my first ever internet dollar. I jumped like crazy in my bedroom in Singapore (I was still working full-time at the time).

I discovered Twitter

Things started to slow down after the initial traffic spike from the Hacker News front page. I posted the app on Product Hunt and got another traffic spike, and that was it.

A week after that, I rarely get any visitors to the website. No more sales.

I knew that posting the app to websites and forums on the internet and hoping for a traffic spike wouldn’t work in the long term. I can’t get lucky forever.

So, I started to look for a long-term distribution channel.

I tried Google paid ads, wrote SEO articles, looked for sponsorships on newsletter/YouTube channels, and tons of other things.

There were some small results, but in the end, I didn’t see a way that could give me traffic for the long-term without continuous effort. (Except for SEO, but SEO is extremely slow to see the results)

This is when I think about Twitter and the #buildinpublic community.

I decided to give it a try to become a Twitter influencer.

The plan was that if I could get a lot of followers, I would have a consistent flow of traffic to DevUtils without doing much.

And so, I reactivated my old Twitter account and started building my personal brand. Most of my tweets were about DevUtils and it was quite boring.

Building an audience

I quickly learned that tweeting about DevUtils alone wasn’t going to help me gain followers. People just don’t care.

Sure, I engaged with other people in the community, replied to their tweets, made jokes, and was just hanging around. But in the end, if I don’t have something interesting on my own timeline, people have no reason to follow me. Just tweeting about DevUtils wasn’t going to cut it.

I needed to do something interesting to get the attention.

So I started doing a lot of fun stuff, using my skills and advantages: coding.

For example, this experiment is my first ever “viral” tweet with 100+ likes:

In summary, my Twitter strategy was:

Build interesting stuff and share it in public

Engage with other people

Write threads

A lot of memes and jokes

Overall, be an interesting person and be nice

After 6 months of consistently doing this, from 100 followers in November 2021, I grew my account to 700 followers in May 2021.

First “real” business: Black Magic

I considered Black Magic to be my first ever “real” business because it has a subscription pricing model with recurring revenue.

This is how it started.

Around May 2021, when I was approaching 1,000 followers on Twitter, I decided to do something special to celebrate it (and also to get more engagements!).

By looking around the Twitter API document, I learned that I can update the profile picture via API. So, I built a small script that shows a progress bar around my profile picture.

The progress bar would get closer and closer to 100% as I get to 1,000 followers.

People loved the idea so much! So, I turned the script into a web app and added a $4/month subscription fee for the “Pro” version, where people can customize the progress bar color.

And that was how I got my first ever recurring revenue dollar!

At this time, I was still working at full-time job.

Embraced the traction, I worked on Black Magic with all the free time I had.

I added many other features to Black Magic, mostly Twitter tools that help users create more engagements.

By building and tweeting at the same time, both my MRR (monthly recurring revenue) and my followers were increasing fast.

Quit job

By August 2021, I have:

~$300 MRR from Black Magic

~$200/mo from DevUtils

~8,000 followers

~1,500 active users (most are free users)

Overall, there is great momentum. I felt confident that I might actually have a shot at making a living out of Black Magic and DevUtils.

That was when I handed in my notice, officially quitting my job. 20 September 2021 was my last working day and my first day as a full-time indie hacker.

I remember I went outside for a walk, took a fresh breath of air, and felt the freedom I never experienced before.

The park near my place when I was working in Singapore.

Around the same time, I started writing a newsletter. If you are a long-time reader, you may remember I wrote about it in detail. Here is the post:

Quitting my job to pursue full-time indie hacking

I have a saving of 2 years in the bank. If I lived in Vietnam (my hometown), I could easily go as far as 4 years without revenue. My backup plan was to just get back to a full-time job if things didn’t work out.

At the time, I didn’t have a family yet, no wife, and no kid. It was the best time for me to make the biggest bet of my life. So I did.

My goal was to get to $1K MRR in the first year, which would be enough for me to live comfortably in Vietnam forever.

Ramen profitability in year one

Since quitting my job, I spent all of my time working on Black Magic/DevUtils, and still keep tweeting to build an audience.

The growth started to pick up. I added many new features to Black Magic, most noticeably the Magic Sidebar – a Chrome extension for Twitter that provides Analytics & CRM features.

This feature single-handedly changed Black Magic as a product forever. From being a fun engagement tool to becoming a true painkiller and solving big problems that many big Twitter accounts had at the time.

Later, I pivoted the whole product around this feature. I changed the landing page to exclusively talk about this feature instead of the profile progress bar and other fun features. You can see it at BlackMagic.so.

Within a few months, by building, tweeting, and launching the product on Product Hunt, my monthly revenue grew to $4K MRR.

There’s a lot going on during this period. Luckily, I’ve written about everything in this newsletter once a month like a machine.

You can read the related posts in this period here:

$322 → $2K MRR in 60 days by building in public

Jan 2022 updates: 4K MRR, new release, new features, new learnings

By February 2022, I have reached $4K MRR and 28K followers on Twitter, far beyond my goal.

Travel, Work, and Play

In the first few months after quitting my job, I worked a lot. Probably 12 hours a day, or even 16 hours/day if you also count Twitter as “work”.

So when I reached $4K MRR, a decent amount considering my living cost in Vietnam, I started to slow down.

I still want to get more revenue, but I realized that this is a moving goalpost, and it will never stop. $10K, then $20K, then $50K. I knew I would never satisfied.

It’s much better to work and play at the same time.

So I traveled. I went for a trip around Vietnam.

My average working hours during this period was about 4 hours/day. I still tweet a lot.

Around September 2022, something magical happened: I was invited to the Indie Hacker podcast! The very podcast that I listened to every day when I started out. It was like a dream come true!

The podcast was released on 22nd September 2022, almost exactly one year after I quit my job.

Fast forward to October 2022, Black Magic grew to $13K MRR steadily.

My 3rd product: Xnapper

Besides working on my existing products, I experimented and tried new things all the time.

I built several small products, some of which failed (EmojiAI, AskCommand).

One of them, Xnapper - a screenshot app, picked up my audience's interest and became my 3rd successful product. It’s now making $6K/month.

I’ve written more about how Xnapper started in this post:

Jun 2022 updates, $100K ARR, reflections, and a screenshot app!

Working on multiple products allowed me to switch between them when I feel bored with one product, reducing my stress.

It’s also a good way to have a fresh new content for the Twitter audience. I was embracing “build in public” and I shared about everything when I was building the app.

For example, this tweet showing the mobile app demo got 1,700 likes! It’s almost like free marketing.

Twitter drama, and my 4th product

Around February 2023, shortly after Elon Musk bought Twitter, they announced that Twitter API (which Black Magic is using) will no longer be free.

I didn’t think this would be a big deal. I was making good money from Black Magic and would be happy to pay.

Little did I know that, the price was announced $42K/month (per month, not per year). There was a smaller plan at $100/month, but the restrictions and limits are so low that you can’t even run a weather bot with it.

Black Magic was at $14K MRR at the time. That means there’s no way I could afford the API price.

I was “forced” to either shut down or sell.

Long story short, I sold Black Magic for $128K. You can read about the whole story here:

May 2023: I sold my 2 years old business for only $128K

As of now, I no longer own Black Magic, but I still love the product and use it every day.

The funny thing is, a few months later, Twitter changed their mind about the pricing. They introduced a new plan at $5,000/month.

This plan comes with some restrictions and API limits, it may or may not work for Black Magic, but I didn’t even bothered to check, because it was no longer matter.

So that was my first product exit. Not the way I wanted, but there was nothing I could do.

Around the same time, I started working on a new product: Typing Mind.

Typing Mind: my 4th product

OpenAI announced the ChatGPT API on March 1, 2023. I’ve been using ChatGPT via the web interface for a while at that point.

The web interface was very limited and I get annoyed by it for a long time. For example, you can’t search your previous chats, the text output was slow, etc. Most annoyingly, the app logged you out and you had to login again every day, which was extremely frustrating.

At some point I was thinking of writing a Chrome extension to scratch my own itch.

OpenAI releasing the API was exactly what I was waiting for. I immediately think of writing a better UI for ChatGPT using the API.

The next day, I registered the domain name typingmind.com and started working on the prototype for a few hours.

The Twitter drama kept me busy for the rest of the week, but I managed to get the first version of Typing Mind finished on the weekend.

On Monday, 6th March 2023, I released the first version to the public, and announced it on Twitter.

The app immediately received a lot of traction.

I added a paid plan at $9, then slowly increased the price as I add more features to the app in the next few days (it’s now priced at $39)

Within the first day of releasing the app, I made $1K of revenue, then $2K the next day, then $4K the next day.

In 7 days, I made a total of $22K of license revenue.

Making $22K in 7 days: the story

Typing Mind has become my primary focus since April. I’ve been adding features, improving the product, and building a B2B version for companies to create their own ChatGPT UI. The app is currently making ~$30K/month revenue on average.

And this is where I am at right now.

Building a team

One thing significantly changed in my 2nd year is that I have started to build a team.

I’ve always prefer to go solo. Working alone mean I don’t have to spend time on discussions, meeting, and more time for building.

However, it get boring quickly to do the same thing over and over again. Things like customer support and some coding task that I know how to do but don’t find it interesting to do anymore.

So over the last year, I’ve hired 1 full-time employee (for content, marketing, support) and 3 freelancers (developers).

Jun 2023: How I work with employees

With the help from the team, I got back a lot of my free time without sacrificing customers’ happiness. The products also keep moving forward (new features and bug fixes) without me having to actively working.

I still work 4 hours/day on average, but now I only work on things I’m interested in, whether it’s a new feature, or experimenting with a new product.

What do I do with the rest 20 hours in the day?

Let’s talk a bit about lifestyle change.

Lifestyle changes, the good & bad

I absolutely love working for myself and not having a 9-5 job. However, there are pros and cons to everything. After 2 years on this journey, I can understand why this is not the way for everyone.

The good

The first and most important benefit to me is the freedom.

When I have reached the ramen profitability level, I can choose to change my “work-life-balance” level as how I want it.

I have so much free time that allowed me to pursue other interests I have in life, like learning hardware, surfing, traveling, playing games, etc.

I surf almost every day now 🏄‍♂️

I can choose to work on any day as I feel like it, or I can spend the whole day watching Netflix without asking anyone for permission.

The money is also great, I make much more than my last drawn salary (which was ~$9k/month). To make $45K/month as an employee is not an easy task, I would have to be extremely good at coding (and also office politics!).

The learnings are also one of the benefits.

Running a company requires a wide range of skills that I learned along the way: marketing, legal, finance, partnership, sales, etc.

Even thought I’m at a very small scale, I feel much more confident talking about business now compared to when I was just an employee doing what being told.

The bad

The cold start

Nothing comes for free. It could be very challenging and stressful to find a product and make it work, especially in the beginning.

I always tell people not to quit their job without a stable revenue each month, a lot of savings, and backup plans.

Working on side projects while having a full-time job can be stressful too. I was lucky because I haven’t yet have a family and only need to take care of myself. For people who have a full-time job, wife, and kids, there isn’t much time and energy left to work on side projects. The risk factor is also much larger in case of failure.

The risks

Even when you have a successful product, the risks still remain.

Revenue may fluctuate, the market may change, new competitors showing up, or maybe you do something stupid. It could affect the business and so affects you.

Look at what happened to Black Magic, if I couldn’t managed to get the new product (Typing Mind) generating a new revenue stream for me at the time, I would be extremely stressed, which can cause a spiral downturn, who knows.

This is also the reason why I prefer to have multiple products, to reduce the risk of one dying.

The social life

I had to sacrifice my professional network and social life. It gets very lonely.

When I quit my job, I didn’t think this would be a big problem, so I didn’t really paying attention to keeping my connections with people around me.

Now I’m starting to build the back connections, but it’s difficult to keep in touch with people when you no longer work in the same office and have the same topics to talk about.

My friends all have a full-time jobs, not a lot of indie hacker friends around me and they all have different favorite country/city to live. My best option if I want to fix this is to move to some popular indie hubs around the world like Bali or Lisbon, but I still think this isn’t going to work long-term.

It’s just the trade off I have to make going on this path. Lucky for me at least I still have the online Twitter community to hang out with.

Today and the future. Takeaways.

So that’s my entire story from the very beginning.

What’s next? I don’t really know.

Right now, I don’t have a long-term plan. I only have a general guideline that I live to: stay healthy, make more money by doing things that I’m interested in, all of that while not sacrificing my freedom.

Work and enjoy life at the same time.

As for short-term plan, I’ll keep working on my products: Typing Mind (current focus), DevUtils, Xnapper. Maybe even a new product in the near future!

I hope this post will be helpful for anyone want to pursue the same path.

If you are looking to do the same thing as I did, here are some of my key takeaways:

First and foremost, keep in mind that all of this is my story, “my way”. It’s definitely not the “only way”, and probably not “the best way”. All you can do is to cherry pick what I shared here and see if it works for you. There is no formula to guarantee success.

If you plan to work alone like me, try to become a generalist: know a bit of everything. For example, if you are a developer, don’t restrict yourself to only work as a frontend dev, try to develop in backend too, and mobile apps, and design, then also learn marketing, etc. Make use of the 80/20 rule: use 20% of your effort to capture 80% of the value.

Build unfair advantages for yourself. I considered my coding skills as an unfair advantage. I can build apps very fast because I’ve been doing it for years. If you don’t have any unfair advantages, find it or build it today.

Build an audience. This is not for everyone, but if you can, give it a try. Build an audience or a community of your own on Twitter/Reddit/internet forums. Anything you do later will be much more easier. The benefit is compounded. I built an audience of 97K followers on Twitter over the past 2 years and now that’s one of my unfair advantages too.

Ship early, ship small, ship frequently. Don’t stuck on one idea for too long if it doesn’t work. Practice shipping products more frequently to build “muscle memory”.

When building product: focus on the core value it brings to the customer. Practice viewing the product from customer point-of-view to avoid over-engineering. Talk to your customers and involve them to your building process.

Be patient and be prepared for luck. It’s a long term game.

That’s all I have to share for now. If you like what you’ve just read, make sure to subscribe to my newsletter. I write once a month with updates on my journey and share things I know.

Finally, thank you for all the support!

I’m grateful to have received a lot of support from the community (that includes you), whether it’s on Twitter, on Indie Hackers forum, or from this newsletter. Especially on the early days. The community is a big factor in my success.

I hope this post will contribute my small part back to the community, and I hope to see more indie hackers in the future.

Thank you so much and see you soon!

***Tony Dinh*** on September 22, 2023

I've been following Tony's journey for nearly a year, and have become a client of his most successful product. There are so many precious lessons shared from him and it is gradually changing my mindset that is to focus more on working for myself.

arisng a month ago

Thanks for sharing. I recently lost my job and rented a place to start a similar program.

Based on your example, I believe that becoming an independent developer requires knowledge of a full range of technology, willingness to learn and explore, and enough finances to support oneself for 1 to 2 years (at least enough to cover living expenses for over a year).

Thank you!

luz33c a month ago

Awesome story , its crazy how you got so succesful from micro-saas. Even small plugin products are used by many. wow.

JoeMontana123 a month ago

Many thanks tony for sharing this. I'm just at that moment of consuming many of these stories and it's useful to find people from different places achieving some success on their efforts.

I liked the concept of the unfair advantage. Not being a coder myself but a motion designer I'm putting a thought around that and how that advantage could be.

Thanks again and all the best!***estebangonzalez*** 19 days ago

thank you for sharing your financial data. This is incredibly helpful for other solopreneurs trying to gauge their progress and set realistic goals.***BadassVic*** 23 days ago

Thank you for sharing your journey with us Tony!

DoodaIsBack a month ago

Awesome and great story, like how you're not just good at coding, but also have a nose for marketing and building that following on Twitter. Great combination of skills. Wish you all the best!

hussler a month ago

Thanks for sharing your post! I am a senior developer, feeling inspired now ✨

unitom a month ago

Very shocking story, thanks for sharing

hacksman a month ago

Quite an inspiring story, keep up the good work man

mixpeal a month ago

What an amazing story! Thanks for Sharing.

jbraich a month ago

This is very inspiring! Also impressive!

yomwolde a month ago

Great story, thanks for sharing.

DavideWietlisbach a month ago

Awesome! A fan from Vietnam

hoanganhlam a month ago

Thanks Tony, great job, your story inspired me start Twitter...

farid\_alt a month ago

Man, this is truly inspiring.

Thanks for sharing your journey...

sandeshjangam a month ago

Lovely & inspiring. I love how you added the lifestyle changes that came with it like feeling alone as most of the friend group is still in job culture. No one talks about it when they talk about being indie dev.

5paceb0i a month ago

Happy to see so many positive comments here. This post got much negative reactions across some part of Twitter and Hacker News. This reminds me that apps are not only technological applications but also communities that have different types of people.

nounderline a month ago

Inspiring. Thanks for sharing

codeshifu a month ago

Thanks for sharing your interesting journey.

I think every decision you make in life involves a certain amount of risk. But deciding nothing is not a solution either. I've been in software development as a freelancer for 30 years and I still love writing code.

Building your own products is very tempting, but I think there is also a dependency on someone buying them. You have to compete for attention for that.

The alternative is to build solutions for others. It's probably not possible without stress and compromise.

ricofritzsche a month ago

an amazing journey. thanks for sharing

laxx a month ago

Congratulations on your journey so far, and sharing the informative write up. Good on your picking up surfing. I am from the Gold Coast in Australia, you would love surfing here, that's what I do few mornings a week!

timc a month ago

Thanks for sharing your journey. There are a tonne of valuable insights in this post that anyone could apply to their own situation. Keep up the good work!

jazibobs a month ago

After the failure of my venture-funded company earlier this year, I spent six months learning to code and am now launching my first independently developed app. With a background of 8 years of experience as a Product Manager and as a skilled UI and UX designer, I believe that my entrepreneurial, product, and design experience will help me become a successful independent developer. I'm working hard, and thank you for your article.

darrenlopez a month ago

I'm starting out my indie hacker journey, and this is the first story I read here. Thanks for sharing it, Tony. It's very inspiring.

carloprez a month ago

Thank you for sharing , inspired

Ismailox a month ago

Wow what a great story. Rolemodel Material.

I am currently doing my masters in Information systems engineering and want to create also my own products. I think maybe I have to get experience First in a full time job

lkmnch a month ago

Thanks for sharing the story, Tony. You convinced me to work on building a community on Twitter.

iarsuaga a month ago

Super inspiring! Keep up the great work Tony!

wannabelon a month ago

Congrats Tony! What an incredible journey! And to discover that you created one of my favorite tools (Xnapper) is wild! Here's to $90K a month next!

ralphq a month ago

Thanks for sharing. It is a really cool and valuable experience.

Jessicann a month ago

As someone who just started his indie hacker journey, I highly appreciate the effort you put in to share this post. I can already see many valuable lessons which will be useful in the future 🙇‍♂️

0xcgn a month ago

Thank you for sharing this, nice to see success stories

rafaelvaliev a month ago

Great story Tony, thanks for sharing.

sdscode00 a month ago

Great story, thanks for sharing ✨

lylo a month ago

Thanks Tonny, your story inspired me to create my own newsletter dailyproduct.press

sudoanand a month ago

I learnt a lot from your story, thank you for sharing! So inspiring

lenashakurova a month ago

Your story is really inspiring....It's proof you can make it as an indie hacker and thrive! Keep going champ!

Ian\_Macharia a month ago

Hell ya! This story rules; thanks for sharing @tonydinh

elliottzelinskas a month ago

I'm very impressed, you're the one who finds good problems and solve with good product. You developed good looking and profitable micro saas apps.

But i have a question, why didn't you make apps running on cross platform? (except browser based apps)

denizakyayla a month ago

Thank you for the kind words! Those cross-platform apps are always so slow and I hate them 😂

Maybe I'll give it a try in the future.

tonydinh a month ago

Thanks for sharing! I follow you since a while now and reading your story is very inspiring! How did you come up with these ideas? It seems like you had one great idea after the other

josh\_the\_tech\_guy a month ago

All of my ideas are from scratching my own itch.

I definitely don't have one greater idea after another tho 😂, I mention the failed products in the post.

tonydinh a month ago

This is so much value, especially for me cause I'm just starting out my indie hacker journey 😃

Thanks for inspiration Tony!

heygal a month ago

thanks for sharing, Inspiring.

booper a month ago

This is just super amazing.

I have been working as Full stack developer for 1.5 years.

I have been passionate about both software engineering and cyberSecurity and I am

currently building a community of developers and cybersecurity engineers content sharing.

thanks a lot for sharing this story

gabriel\_fono a month ago

@tonydinh Super Inspiring story. Its a lot of motivation when things are looking challenging. :) Thanks for sharing it out here. Good Luck with your journey ahead!

pracas a month ago

Great story, I'm just starting down this road and I'm learning a lot of things I had no idea about. How do you know when it is time to give up on an idea? or what is the time limit to test an idea to see if it has traction?

Bersekmoon a month ago

Inspired!!

Atsushi a month ago

Thank you so much.

lemonyth a month ago

Thanks for sharing your journey!

Jobless a month ago

Ah this is really. I just bought xnapper yesterday and didn't realize you were the dev until halfway through this article. Very inspiring!

rydercalmdown a month ago

Thank you very much! Glad to know you use Xnapper 😄

tonydinh a month ago

Nicely done buddy.

elarsen a month ago

Thanks !

tonydinh a month ago

Curious - how did you find your employee and freelancers?

JamesB a month ago

All from my connections with friends 😄

tonydinh a month ago

Thanks for sharing your story. It's really helpful, especially when you share not only the good and nice, but also the other side.

JRausell a month ago

Thanks for sharing your journey!

jasons a month ago

Extremely inspiring with lots of value. I'm more hungry than ever 🙌🏼

lucasrantzau a month ago

A very nice story. For indie hackers, trading their all-around abilities for rewards and freedom is something to aspire to. At the same time, it's important to communicate and interact more within online communities, stay active and familiar, and not let oneself feel lonely.

haha\_likegame a month ago -1

This comment has been voted down. Click to show.

raystep a month ago -1

This comment has been voted down. Click to show.

Marvic a month ago

Hello ChatGPT 😆

tonydinh

a month ago

## From $0 to $30k/mo, then back to $0

by Jay from Zylvie

In 2020, I was laid off from my bartender job during the Covid lockdown.

Suddenly I had a lot of time on my hands, and so I decided to code up a SaaS.

My product was Zlappo, a Twitter growth tool offering a suite of tools for power users, including advanced analytics, viral tweet repository, thread previews, auto-retweets, auto-plugs, etc.

I didn't have an email list or a Twitter following when I launched, so I had to get creative with how I got the initial word out and signed up my first 10 users.

It was a grind starting from absolute scratch.

Chart showing the growth of Zlappo

What worked for me ($0-$1k/mo a.k.a. initial traction)

A. Twitter Guerrilla Marketing

Since my product was a Twitter-specific tool, it was only natural that I started marketing on Twitter.

I employed 3 successful tactics that worked to get my first 10 paying customers:

Sending DMs - I searched creator/marketing Lists and just directly sent DMs to users, telling them about how my product can help them to up their Twitter game. In order to make them feel special, I created a personalized link with a personalized promo code for them to get a discount upon signing up. This boosted my response rate. I did this for hours every day until I got rate-limited for spamming, then rinse and repeat for the next day.

Using Twitter search - One of the defining features of my product was the ability to schedule threads, which back in 2020 was a feature gap in most leading competitors. So I bookmarked a Twitter search link for the keywords "schedule threads," and every morning I responded to these tweets and plugged my product. This got visits to my site immediately, as I was helping them out directly with a problem that they had.

Tweet source label - Every tweet posted by my app borne my app name (it said "Zlappo.com") on the bottom-right of every tweet. If you're a Twitter user, you're probably familiar with the "Twitter for iPhone" source label that tweets used to have -- until Elon ruined it (more on this guy later...).

And just like that, I've seeded my app with its initial users who are using my app, paying me monthly, and offering their feedback freely and enthusiastically.

Notice how I never did any content creation, wrote threads, did profile optimization, etc.

B. Really Fine-Tuning the Product

Once I got my first few initial users, I think the most important thing that really accelerated my path to $1k MRR, as a solo founder, was to focus 80-90% of my time/effort on getting the product right, transforming a wonky MVP to a passable/good-enough product that can compete in the marketplace.

Here are some specific things I did:

I filled in feature gaps so that my product is state-of-the-art for my product category, using customer feedback as my guide -- I worked on the most-requested features first.

I fixed every bug reported, even if I considered it edge-case (nothing is "edge-case" if a customer encountered it).

I sped up the site as much as I could, rewriting/refactoring tons of my code to utilize more efficient database queries for instance, adding more RAM/processing power to my server, caching generously, enabling gzip, minification, etc. etc.

I continually updated the UI/UX if I had a customer emailing me about something that was unintuitive or confusing.

In my opinion, having the product on point was my #1 way of user retention and also to encourage users to proudly share my app with their friends.

What worked for me ($1k-$30k/mo a.k.a. scaling)

C. Affiliate Program

Once I had a small base of die-hard users, I created a generous affiliate program:

I paid a fat 50% recurring monthly commission to incentivize my users to share and promote my product.

I also provided double-sided incentive, in that every referred user gets 60-day free trial right off the bat (instead of the usual 30 days).

Soon enough there were users who tweeted constantly, wrote blog reviews, created YouTube reviews, and even ran paid ads to drive traffic to my site.

I assisted them by providing graphics, screenshots, copy, and also creating a simple affiliate dashboard where they can view their affiliate stats and redeem their commissions at any time using a one-click interface.

D. Appsumo Lifetime Deals

I also ran an AppSumo Marketplace deal which eventually accounted for 50%-80% of my monthly revenue, depending on the month.

I could obviously sell lifetime deals on my own (which I did), but selling on AppSumo had several advantages:

It legitimized my nascent app.

It helped me garner 5-star reviews/testimonials.

It got affiliates to link back to my site and thus drive traffic.

It also increased the visibility for my brand by running paid ads on my behalf.

It jumpstarted word of mouth like crazy, as I later discovered "Zlappo" was mentioned so often within these lifetime deal groups on Facebook.

Don't forget... the revenue! I would have never hit $30k/mo without the boost that AppSumo gave my deal during times like AppSumo week and Black Friday sales.

Absolutely worth it, 10/10.

E. Email Marketing

As my user base grew into the thousands, email marketing turned out to be massively valuable.

I now had thousands of email addresses to leverage on, to whom I could blast offers or update emails.

I wrote a custom script to send emails to my user base who have trialed but not upgraded, or churned, and I periodically send out offers, discounts, product updates, etc. to get them to re-engage with my product.

And I regained many customers this way.

My downfall ($30k/mo to $0)

My business had been humming along fine for ~3 years... until late-March this year, when Elon Musk announced that Twitter API access would no longer be free but will cost $42,000/mo.

Well shit, my entire business was built on top of Twitter, and there was no way I could pay $42k/mo.

That's a brand-new Tesla every single month!

So with a heavy heart, and after many sleepless nights, I decided that I had to shut down Zlappo, or at least deprecate like 80% of my features, which angered a lot of users and led to massive churn (the churn is still going on as we speak).

My 3-year entrepreneurship journey had ended in failure, and to say I was sad was a massive understatement.

But god damn what a ride it was.

Lessons learned

The most important lesson I learned was to never hitch my star on another company's wagon.

Never have all your eggs in one basket, never have a single point of failure.

If I had diversified early (and integrated Facebook, Instagram, Google My Business, LinkedIn, TikTok, etc. into my product), I might have been able to attract a broad-enough customer base who wouldn't care too much if Twitter was deprecated.

Platform risk is very real, and, although it was a risk I undertook, it was quite unexpected that Elon Musk would buy Twitter, let alone cut off API access.

But it happened, and it can't unhappen, so I saw only 3 ways forward for me:

Build my next business

Give up and get a job for life

Just pack it in, call it a good life, and take a long walk off a short pier

I'm very far from 3, I'd rather die than to settle for 2, so realistically 1 is my only option.

If you want to follow my journey as a 3rd-time founder, I'm currently building Zylvie.

If you're a creator of any sort who sells stuff online, I invite you to please come along for the ride. 😎

Otherwise, I'm open for questions if anyone wants to know anything in particular!

***Jay from Zylvie*** posted to SaaS Journeys on Sept 30, 2023

bro, is it typical for so many comments to sound like bots??? Your story was an interesting read, but I don’t know if it warrants all these people eating it up like this. These comments feels somewhat fake; do you feel that?

keemkorn a month ago

I didn't want to call them out, but I agree, these days it's hard to tell a genuine human response from a GPT response. 👀

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Truly a rollercoaster journey. Good luck going forward!

myman a month ago

Thanks, my man.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

What a rollercoaster, indeed! But, you achieved something with Zlappo that many will be unable to say they've achieved, in $30K/mo. Be proud of that, and take those learnings and lessons into Zylvie and you'll eclipse $50K/mo in no time! 💪 Thanks for sharing your story!

BuildWithJustin a month ago

and you'll eclipse $50K/mo in no time!

Hahaha, you really have a sweet way with words.

Thanks man, I'll try my best.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Sounds like a resounding success to me. I particularly like the tenacious, "do this every day" parts of the story. Inspiring.

hitechluddite a month ago

The tech stack is python+django, I like it.

rukeypei a month ago

How do you know?

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Jay, thank you for this article, I wish you success with your next business!

dataresponder a month ago

Wow, Jay! Your journey from $0 to $30k/month and back is a rollercoaster indeed, filled with valuable insights and experiences. Your resilience and creativity in marketing Zlappo, especially during those initial stages, is truly admirable. The guerrilla marketing tactics on Twitter and the relentless focus on refining your product were key elements of your success story.

It's inspiring to see how you adapted and scaled, incorporating an affiliate program and leveraging platforms like AppSumo. Your use of email marketing to re-engage users showcased your business acumen. The lessons you've shared about diversifying and mitigating platform risks are invaluable for aspiring entrepreneurs.

The setback with Twitter's API changes was a tough pill to swallow, but your determination to build something new, like Zylvie, shows your entrepreneurial spirit remains unbroken. Wishing you all the best on this exciting new venture! Can't wait to follow your journey and see what amazing things you'll accomplish with Zylvie.

Thank you for sharing your story and the lessons you've learned. Looking forward to more updates and insights from you!

feedbacksync a month ago

Thanks for sharing your journey!

Good luck with the next business!

LiaSherko a month ago

Thank you, Lia.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

“This is not a failure, it is just a course correction.” I just have a question: Were you a programmer or did you learn programming after you were laid off from work? 👍

mohamedx49 a month ago

I was a programmer who hadn't programmed for 6 years at that point.

So yes and no. 😅

simplisticallysimple a month ago

This is interesting 🤔😁

mohamedx49 a month ago

Wow, your journey from bartender to SaaS founder to facing the harsh reality of platform risk is both inspiring and cautionary. It's incredible how you bootstrapped your way to $30k/mo, especially focusing on product improvement based on real user feedback. The twist was unforeseen, but it perfectly illustrates why you can't afford to depend entirely on a single platform. Looking forward to hearing about your next venture, Zylvie! 🚀

kshitizkr a month ago

Man, that's quite the rollercoaster with Zlappo. It's rough how things turned with the Twitter API pricing. But kudos to you for the hustle and getting it to where it was.

Your lessons on platform risk hit home. It's a tough reminder for all of us .

Looking forward to seeing what you do with Zylvie. Keep at it!

HypeHustle a month ago

Wow, Jay! Your story with Zlappo had me hooked from start to finish. It's incredible how quickly fortunes can change in the world of startups. That jump from bartending to building a SaaS tool is gutsy, and hitting $30k/mo is no small feat. Best of luck, mate! 🍻

thecamelceo a month ago

Great stuff

FloydLeatham a month ago

Thanks for sharing your thoughts!

rylepham a month ago

I don't think you should be calling it a failure. You have not only got a lot of learnings but you also have an email list of active people, you can sell them a lot of other stuff.

Good luck with all your future endeavors!

Can I ask what tech stack you used to build both of the products?

iamahsan a month ago

It seems this time your product is dependent on Stripe. As a starting point, it's great to outsource extra things. But you should be considering having some alternative if things go wrong with Stripe. Just a suggestion...

iamahsan a month ago

I'm already integrating PayPal as we speak!

simplisticallysimple a month ago

My tech stack:

Django

JQuery

Bootstrap

Postgres

Gunicorn

Nginx

Ubuntu server

Stripe for payments

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Loved your story man!

From 0 to $30k/m is a really tough task but you did it. Congrats for the success and good luck for your next venture.

vatss\_jain a month ago

Wow, Jay, your journey is both inspiring and humbling.

The lessons learned from this experience will undoubtedly be invaluable in shaping the success of your future projects. Best of luck in the future!

Edvin1811 a month ago

Thanks for Sharing. What an incredible journey. Sorry that it ended like this, but I'm very confident that you'll build something again. Builders like you will rise again.

hschutte a month ago

Thanks for sharing! Really inspiring yet heartbreaking but I'm glad you're embarking on another project and I'm sure to check it out :)

I was wondering did you do any sort of market validation before building your product and doing "Twitter Guerrilla Marketing"? Thanks!

SilasTSL a month ago

did you do any sort of market validation before building your product

Hah, yes I did.

In fact, let me dig out this post on Indie Hackers all the way back from 2019:

https://www.indiehackers.com/post/is-there-a-market-for-my-idea-bad347b3b6

simplisticallysimple a month ago

unbelievable, from a bartender to the founder of a SaaS company , did you complete all the coding work by yourself , How did you learn ?

darrenlopez a month ago

impressive~thanks for sharing your story.

Best wishes for Zylvie.

leeduckgo a month ago

Incredible story! Thanks so much for sharing and best of luck with Zylvie, as you start your next adventure.

Curious to know, did you learn to code as part of your first product? Or did you build skills prior to starting your indie journey? Thanks!

ashpatx a month ago

I learned to code before my first product, actually.

Zlappo was my 2nd, my first was all the way back in 2011 (which was also profitable).

So yeah, it's been a long journey.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Thats why building in public and leveraging your current success for social media followers or emails is very important.

Its like insurance in case your product suddenly failed, you still have the audience who know you and trust your product, so your next ventures will be much easier to market and test out.

So feel free to follow me on twitter @AzharJow and if you are a blogger checkout my automated seo tool creativeblogtopic.com

aquidor223 a month ago

Thanks for sharing.

Totally with you on how risky it is to put all your eggs in one big platform's basket. I'm pretty dependent on Amazon and it's a constant concern.

The same thing applies to customer acquisition channels. Relying too much on a single channel is a high-risk game.

Dunia a month ago

I'm pretty dependent on Amazon and it's a constant concern.

Well on the bright side, it's nothing if nothing happens.

But it's everything if something happens.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Lots of lessons here. Thanks for sharing and all the best with Zylvie

codeshifu a month ago

My 3-year entrepreneurship journey had ended in failure

It's absolutely not a failure! You did everything right and any lessons learned will make your next project even stronger

srbushy a month ago

Nah, it is a failure, and I take full responsibility for it.

It's important to call a spade a spade.

I appreciate your kind words though. 😀

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Thanks for sharing, jay.

jiteshghanchi a month ago

Thanks for sharing. With $30k/mo you probably accumulated good savings to go at it again, so nothing is lost. Good luck.

strzibnyj a month ago

I did save a lot, so yes.

It's a privilege to be able to bootstrap a startup with proceeds from another startup, which I am doing now.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Super awesome journey! Thanks for sharing Jay. It’s really valuable insight.

Also, I vouch for you on building Zylvie. Keep going man!

nonthakon a month ago

Also, I vouch for you on building Zylvie. Keep going man!

Thank you so much!

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Thanks for sharing your story!

How are you planning on getting your initial users for your new venture? The same way as before?

sunwooz a month ago

My initial soft launch was launching Zylvie to 8,000+ Zlappo users via email marketing.

I had 100+ sign-ups in the first 24 hours doing that, and many users uploaded their products and connected their Stripe accounts.

But soon I discovered my MVP was far from sufficient (in terms of feature set) to convince users to switch over from other platforms like Gumroad.

So now my #1 priority is to build a short-term roadmap for Zylvie based on user feedback, fulfill it, and then do another marketing push to see if it moves the needle.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

I also created a twitter growth tool after Elon, I tried to market it but I failed, the price hikes ruined the competition and my project.

aydemiromer a month ago

Awesome to hear how well you did, but also so sorry to hear how everything ended.

Yes, platform risk is huge and I don’t think enough people understand it until it happens to them. It’s happened to me and it sucks. Pls diversify.

Best of luck in any future endeavors

johnwritescode\_ a month ago

I'm really sorry this happened to you, taking an indie project from $0 to $30k is a huge achievement! Congrats, you're a success in my book. Curious to see what you do next.

dagorenouf a month ago

Thanks man, I wouldn't call it a success, more like quick flame-out + crash and burn.

Definitely aiming to build something more sustainable next time!

simplisticallysimple a month ago

I guess that's the downside of relying too much on 1 company 's services, nice share great story.

Keep pushing

PedroCristovao a month ago

Did you ever consider trying to pay the 42k? It's not to far away from 30k, with some of the competition probably gone with the new pricing as well.

Thomas\_Bootify a month ago

Did you ever consider trying to pay the 42k?

Not really.

The trust has been completely lost.

Who's to say that Elon won't hike the price again tomorrow, or completely change the rate limits, or even just cut off API access completely?

It's all equally likely!

I'd much rather not hitch my future and livelihood to the capricious and unpredictable whims of an eccentric billionaire.

I prefer to sleep soundly at night.

Plus I should not double-down on a flawed business model.

I should just move on and build a more sustainable business, armed with my lessons and knowledge from this one, instead of being overly-attached to my last one.

simplisticallysimple a month ago

Really good read thanks. Best of luck with Zylvie

Dangow a month ago

Wow just checked it out. Stunning landing page. One of the best I’ve seen on IH. The product might actually be useful for me in the near future too.

edit: I’ve just noticed the menu is transparent on Safari iOS so the text is on top of more text and it’s hard to read. Hope this helps.

Dangow a month ago

Will fix this very soon!

simplisticallysimple a month ago

That was hard to read :(

In that sense I am building my product that relies totally on Notion.

Anyway, best for the next one!

parul0\_0 a month ago

Damn... What a journey.

Thanks for sharing!

And all the best with your new endeavor. 💪

hmongbong168 a month ago

Thank you!

simplisticallysimple a month ago

A journey as an entrepreneur brings many ups and downs. Definitely more than anyone would need. :D Great that you managed to restart after the shock. When we founded our first startup, we didn't understand why there were so many serial entrepreneurs. We wanted our first startup to remain the only one and become really big. It has grown, but not become huge. But we've learned so much and we have so many ideas for new products that I understand why many founders start multiple companies. It is work and passion at the same time. You have to learn to appreciate shocks as a new opportunity... Good luck with your new product! #elonfree ;)

***Imme\_Scheit*** 24 days ago

## "Build first, find a market later"

…mindset will kill your business by Dan Kulkov

The biggest mistake aspiring Indie Entrepreneurs make:

Build first — find a market later 🤦‍♂️

Avoid this trap at all costs.

Here are 3 reasons why & what to do instead

1. Your product is not that new

It doesn't have to be, either.

It's 100% okay to launch the same thing others already built.

Just don't expect the world to go crazy after your launch tweet.

It might be the first AI product for you. But it's not the first AI product for everyone else.

2. Business is not about coding; it's about solving problems

It's good that you can turn an idea into a real product.

But your audience doesn't care about it. Sorry.

They care about removing an irritating struggle from their lives. So they can experience desired benefits.

If a Notion template can do it, they will buy it.

If a weekly newsletter can do it, they will crave it.

If you build a product around your vision and not customers' needs, no one will pay attention to it.

Marketing doesn't start after the product is built. It begins on Day 0.

3. Good chances only you experienced this problem

Okay, maybe you are scratching your own itch.

That's a good thing, right?

Yes and no.

It's easier to sell to the community if you are part of it.

But very often, you are an outlier. Only you experienced this problem. Only you need this type of product.

And if you don't check it before the launch, you will end up the only customer of your product.

Your biggest superpower will turn into a harmful bias.

Alright-alright.

What to do instead?

Think about monetizing your product from the very beginning.

Not about building it. Not about using some fancy framework. But about getting paying customers.

Here's a list of helpful marketing tasks:

Idea stage

Talk to 15 people from your target audience segment to validate that they have this problem (don't ask them if they will buy your product; focus on the problem and their experience with current solutions)

Find and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of 5 direct competitors that were active in the last 3 years

Pitch your product idea to 5 seasoned Entrepreneurs to get some raw feedback

Write down in 2 sentences your product's value and how it is different from existing solutions

Describe your future marketing funnel. How will you acquire users and nudge them to buy from you?

MVP stage

Build a simple version of your future product. Don't think about automation; do things manually

Show it to 20 people from your target audience segment and collect their honest feedback

Create an early bird deal (one-time payment or annual pass) with a heavy discount ($19-$79)

Aim to get at least 10 early bird customers that paid you real money for a tool that doesn't exist yet

Building stage

Create a waitlist page when the early bird deal is over

Show new features to early bird customers to get instant feedback and validation

Share educational, inspirational, or thought-provoking content about the problem you are solving. Your goal is to understand what resonates with your audience

Run usability tests of your landing page (people share their screens and comment on everything they see on your landing page)

Get feedback from Entrepreneurs on your pricing to handle objections better

There's a chance you will find out that your product isn't that promising.

That's completely okay.

Pivot to a different but connected niche. Start again.

It might take you a few times. It might feel frustrating.

But it's x10 better than just building a thing without anyone looking, only to find out nobody needs it.

Don't build to build.

Build to sell.

[Read more tips on getting ramen profitability fast in our free guide.]

***Dan Kulkov*** posted to Growth on August 23, 2023

Marketing people have no soul.

Marketing should not define your product. While it’s true that you need validation early on and build with users’ needs in mind - nothing is more annoying than marketing people talking about “great” stuff coming up “soon”. Sometimes it’s better to make your own mistakes and learn from them than to believe blindly some “experts”. You need sometimes to do something regardless of what other people might say because you believe in something and want to change a status quo. Also talking to other (wrong) people too early might discourage you from building a great visionary product. It’s never a bad idea to build an MVP first before you tell others how great your product is.***TechNomad*** 2 months ago

In my experience, it depends.

Spending a year building something nobody wants is for sure a bad idea.

Spending a weekend building a prototype can help to have the right conversations.

Of course, it also depends on how difficult it is to get to MVP.

I've done both and I don't regret it.

The key as you said is "marketing" begins on day 0. Of course it depends how you define marketing. Telling people what you're working on regularly, getting a feel for how people respond. Finding the right channels to your customers. These are all very important.

But at some point you just might not be able to find the market you're looking for. You need to know when to stop, pivot or go in a completely different direction.

My current project, Summarise YouTube was a weekend prototype and so far it's meeting all my expectations. Conversations are starting to happen. I don't think I'd be able to have them without the prototype.***DylanWilson80*** 2 months ago

Spending a year building a stealth is never a good option.

Signed by everyone who tried and failed.

There are 0 exceptions.***kronop*** 2 months ago

That's not what I said. I actually agree with you. Building a stealth is never a good option.

My point is that it's not one or the other. It's not black and white. Many successful products do building and marketing together. At the same time.

No marketing = no customers

No building = no product***DylanWilson80*** 2 months ago

@kronop - I've always struggled with the idea "market first, build later". Could you help me understand this a bit in more detail? Here's how I think about it -

Let's say I'm building an MVP in a proven market. I know my product isn't incredibly different. But I just want a share of the market. In this case; how should I go about marketing my product? Do I need to revalidate the market? I know people are willing to pay for the solution. My differentiator could be - better UI/UX, better pricing, great support etc.

I'd rather build the minimum lovable product and then enter the market to see if there are buyers.

Please let me know your thoughts on this.***thebigk*** 2 months ago

Why not codify your differentiators into a landing page and then at the bottom encourage people to give their email to be the first to use it if/when it's ready? This gets you their feedback right away, and isn't hiding the fact that you haven't built it yet.***switchback*** 2 months ago

Great post and I couldn’t agree more. The LEAN canvas is a great help to get your concept ready, then aim to find a profitable business model as quickly as you can through an MVP and user feedback.

I would go as far as saying, Don’t Build to Build, Build to Solve a Problem.

When you solve a problem where the 3 lenses of innovation overlap (Viability, Feasibility, Desirability), success is more likely.***thirionjwf*** 2 months ago

Talk to 15 people from your target audience segment to validate that they have this problem (don't ask them if they will buy your product; focus on the problem and their experience with current solutions)

---- it is really important***carterpeng*** 2 months ago

Absolutely!!!

\***will\_hhhh*** 2 months ago

I used to play Jupiter Hell, but lately my free time for video games is getting less and less. I don't know, maybe it has to do with the fact that I'm trying to start my own business now and I'm constantly and constantly ordering best tennessee llc services since I don't understand anything about it yet. Or maybe I'm just not ready to spend my free time yet. But I hope that soon I can get back to video games and spend more time doing this wonderful thing.***bedolaga*** 2 months ago

This is quite hard-hitting, We made the tough call to discontinue our side project not long ago, a venture that consumed numerous weekends and personal resources. While we were actively presenting our product, we maintained secrecy around it. Our inclination to evade the spotlight and bypass marketing persisted. It's not that the issues didn't exist; it's just that we held onto the aspiration of a grand launch or a flood of eager sign-ups. Unfortunately, reality fell short of those expectations, leading to feelings of disappointment and a gradual loss of motivation as we progressed.***swapcy*** 2 months ago

This message truly resonates with the challenges many ventures face. Making the difficult decision to discontinue a side project that you've invested significant time and personal resources into is never easy. The commitment to maintain secrecy and the desire to bypass marketing reveal the dedication you had towards perfecting the product before its unveiling.

It's clear that the journey was filled with high hopes and aspirations for a successful launch, complete with enthusiastic sign-ups and a grand reception. However, the path to reality can often be different from what we envision, and it's understandable how the gap between expectations and reality can lead to disappointment and a waning sense of motivation.

Remember that acknowledging these feelings is an important step in moving forward. Lessons learned from this experience, no matter how challenging, will undoubtedly contribute to your growth and resilience in future endeavors. Making tough decisions and confronting setbacks are integral parts of any journey towards success. Your willingness to share this experience serves as a valuable reminder that setbacks are not failures but stepping stones on the path to achieving something remarkable.***mrswepson*** 2 months ago

This is awesome. I love how you outlined these points: creating a marketing funnel first, getting early bird sign ups and then creating a waitlist after it is over. These are some of the things I had to learn when starting a new product page***pphphilp*** 2 months ago

This is so true - as everyone else - learnt these the hard way. Thanks for writing the piece.***farluhan*** 2 months ago

glad to help first-time founders!***kronop*** 2 months ago

Learnt not just some of these... all of it, the hard way. I'm glad to see it articulated like this.***childoftext*** 2 months ago

same here, thank you!***kronop*** 2 months ago

Well you have to build something first to show someone. The idea must jump from your head and come out to the real world. Goal of it is relative. It's the prototype, the MVP or whatever you want to call it. You could make a project that does not need sales. So if you want to build something just build it. Don't put a price tag on it. Money is just one of many goals. :)

Pedro***PedroMartins*** 2 months ago

I am not arguing about this :)

Always come to your audience with something, even a simple Figma mockup.***kronop*** 2 months ago

Amazing insight***theterminalguy*** 2 months ago

thanks!***kronop*** 2 months ago

Damn right, marketing is so important.***levene*** 2 months ago

Totally agree. This is exactly one of my takeaways from the past many years of building products. Marketing is as important as building the product itself. I think it's more like building to solve problems rather than building to sell. Sometimes if you only focus on selling your vision is short-sighted. Solve an immediate problem in the short term and focus on a bigger vision in the long term.***coxz*** 2 months ago

"Marketing starts on day 0" is my big takeaway. I'd add "and it never ends until you exit." There's a lot of discussion of whether to market or build first. But why not focus on solving the problem right away, in whatever capacity you can?

This'll initially be clarifying it online so more people understand it. Then you can ship a lightweight solution like a newsletter or Notion template, like you suggested. Then perhaps a service. Then a no-code solution. Then, finally, a MVP.

This way, you can market and build simultaneously while you make your way to a full-fledged product. The whole time you'll expose yourself to the reality of whether you're solving the problem or not.***switchback*** 2 months ago

The "Build first, find a market later" mindset can indeed be detrimental to a business. It's crucial to understand and address the needs of your target audience before investing heavily in product development. Building a product without a clear market in mind can lead to wasted resources, missed opportunities, and a lack of product-market fit. Successful businesses prioritize market research and validation, ensuring that their offerings align with customer demands. In today's competitive landscape, understanding your market from the outset is essential for sustainable growth and long-term success.***EvaLyra3*** 2 months ago

Starting with a specific problem in mind is the core skill for all people here.

This is not marketing per se. It is something much harder.

Problem design, framing, isolating, spotting, and understanding. The market is a system. The problem is a messy or missing code within that system.

If you do it right you do not need to shmooze with potential customers early on. You are supposed to work under the hood whereas their perception is often superficial.

Finding and good problem and sticking to it is my ideal.

You can throw all you have at it and hopefully one of the solutions and angles will work.***ArkSzklar*** 2 months ago

some features have been validated, just build it?***nbboy*** 2 months ago

Couldn't agree more!

before: learn learn learn learn learn learn learn work

now: learn work learn work learn work learn work learn work***Luke\_Pioneero*** 2 months ago

Btw, is it common for founders here to launch their landing page w/ waiting list on Product hunt?***pphphilp*** 2 months ago

What ever you are doing the most important thing is to get to product market fit as fast as possible. Only product market fit can make money, a sustainable flow of money because people need your product.

So, whatever you do that can achieve product market fit fast is the best option. If you are so good at building and can build within days and confirm that the market for your product exists, then building can help your customer understand what you are doing.

Else most of the time going around checking the existence of demand in the market is better. Most of the time building takes more time than doing research so essentially figuring out product market fit will take longer.

Thats all. No rules, no steps, no tips or tricks.

Have product that people want aka product market fit = good product.

Whatever your strategy is as long as it help to reach or figure out product market fit faster, it is the best strategy.

If you guys want to understand more about product market fit checkout this blog post: Key to Business Success: Finding Product-Market Fit***aquidor223*** 2 months ago

I think it's wrong to discard "build, then market" completely if you have a lot of runway and are starting a side-hustle alongside your job. If your 3-month project doesn't take off immediately, who cares? Just go back to a job and market it until it takes off. It's very hard to market a product that doesn't exist yet esp. if you don't know how long it will take to build. The only valid point is to verify that a market exists if you embark on larger multi-year projects. For smaller ones I would just build it, if it fails, chalk it up as "work experience" and get a higher paid job later on.***fschutt*** 2 months ago

I wouldn't write off the "build for yourself" trap so quickly. If you're the target customer, you'll also have the best mental model for what the solution should look like. Parker Conrad at Rippling talks about this – he admits that he's not the best PM, so to better understand the needs of the end user, he's the only full admin at Rippling (obviously doing the job of admin using Rippling). He becomes to target customer so he can prioritize more effectively. Plenty of other companies started out using this approach.

However, I do think you ultimately emphasize the right thing – which is that if you're building for yourself, it's very easy to develop some harmful biases. While there can be advantages to starting up by building for yourself (you know the problem space intimately), you need to go out and find design partners early and continuously iterate and validate.

It's also going to be very difficult if you don't have that initial network of peers/potential customers to lean on. You have to go out and find them. Easier said than done.***jam598*** 2 months ago

Quick questions, what channels do you use?

Do you cold email with Apollo, join reddit communites, attend conferences,etc?

It's been difficult to get people to talk to.***sumants*** 2 months ago

A struggle I am having is quickly finding people in my target audience to speak with. Does anyone have any hacks for this?***AdamCL*** 2 months ago

Without knowing much about your product or target audience, the advice I'd give is to think about what channels they hang out at.

Ben Silbermann (Pinterest) found his target audience when a blogger he met at a conference made a post about Pinterest and it reached her blogging audience.

Nikita Bier (Gas + TBH apps) created instagram accounts for specific high schools and reached HS students to build user interest + sign ups.

Where do your users gather and how can you reach out to them appropriately?

You can also look at Reddit too. When I wanted to just learn about nurses and their habits, I went to the nursing subreddits and read posts + comments that were related to what I wanted to learn. It's not the same as talking to them, but I did get some valuable insight about habits, grievances, etc.***cassia*** 2 months ago

Thanks @cassia. We are targeting consumers with a credit card selection tool so I will look to get creative by possibly trying to look for credit card churners to start. Thanks again.***AdamCL*** 2 months ago

As simple as that.***Es\_OFarrill*** 2 months ago

Kinda agree.

What if I really want to walk through the whole launch journey (setting up monitoring, newsletter subscription, domain, etc.), just for the sake of learning?

I've never done that. Used to stop at the coding phase.***adasq*** 2 months ago

Absolutely on point, Dan! Your insight here is a much-needed reality check for all aspiring entrepreneurs. The "build first, find a market later" mindset might seem tempting, but it's a one-way ticket to disappointment. Your breakdown of the three major pitfalls is spot on. It's easy to get wrapped up in the excitement of coding, but in the end, it's all about solving problems for your audience. Without understanding their needs and struggles, you're just floating in the void.***saeedhasani*** 2 months ago

made my shares of mistakes on this and only taking niches and categorizing customer groups first before even a single line of PRD***lpbern*** 2 months ago

The best approach is to always develop an MVP with minimum resources required, and then test the reception on real users. If you see potential, develop your MVP into something more robust.***robak333*** 2 months ago

It is really helpful for new owners...***edwardflora*** 2 months ago

I think it is 50/50. The correct way is always to build the MVP first, and then test it.***uy\_hacker01*** 2 months ago

How do you know your building something people want and will pay for?***sharemywin*** 2 months ago

build fast, release faster. Then iterate...

Even you ask 1000 target audience and get 1000 positive feedback. It is something different than releasing a real platform...***uy\_hacker01*** 2 months ago

Remember, understanding your target audience's needs and validating your product early on are key. By following your suggested marketing tasks, entrepreneurs can increase their chances of success and avoid wasting time on non-viable ideas. Grateful for these actionable steps! 🚀***RahmanKhan*** 2 months ago

I like it***workweartb*** 2 months ago

good idea i like it .lol***HarrisCloud*** 2 months ago

"If you build a product around your vision and not customers' needs" This sentence is very thoughtproving.***Luke\_Pioneero*** 2 months ago

That's why speed is very important in business especially if you are bootstrapping or solopreneur. Even thought you have do all the validation there is a chance that it cannot be scale or other weird issue that you miss during validation.

So what you need to do is quickly validate and quickly built and test it out. And then if not working well move to next.

If you guys remember pieter levels and many others did similar stuff. Build fast break fast and move on. Else you will stuck with unworking startup.

If you are thinking what if it takes time to pickup ?

Well if during you launch nobody cares then it tells something about the product.

Here some reading regrading how to build mvp fast. When Building MVP, Speed is the Focus

Remember failure will comes and the only way to achieve success is to go through the failures quickly***aquidor223*** 2 months ago

How do people usually find customers and people to validate their ideas? This is the hard part for me. Thanks***HeimerdingerBrain*** 2 months ago

This is helpful! Thank you.***wfeaster*** 2 months ago

Best Wishes From Inat TV APK Ios***Inattvapkios*** 2 months ago

Thanks for this article, very insightful. I needed to read something like this.***NizarB*** 2 months ago

Is hard to be absolute in this matter. Eventual success reduces (in hindsight) the weight of false or painful starts).

For me the maker/sales dilemma gets resolved with two ideas:

Rather than "being good at business”… an entrepreneur task is to discover a good business (than anyone can run). Being good at business is really about understanding this.

You don’t want to miss, but you don’t want to stay away from opportunities to miss since they are the same opportunities to hit.

Just like life, starting a business can only be experienced.***horacionunez*** 2 months ago

Dealing with this right now. The if you build it, they will come approach. Thankfully it's not too expensive to keep my site running so I'm focusing on audience building now***SYSJordan*** 2 months ago

Focus on Problem Solving!***SamHackers*** 2 months ago

I couldn’t agree more.***Luke\_Pioneero*** 2 months ago

I totally agree with your points. "Solving the Problem" It is main for all products.***appysa*** 2 months ago

I couldn't agree more.***jordan\_ostrikoff*** 2 months ago

Dan, Firstly, thank you for laying this out. I definitely need to hear this post. I've been grappling with some doubts about calmmind.ai. Truthfully, I'm not completely sure about my target audience and whether they'd buy into my app. Given everything you've mentioned, should I consider a pivot? Also, I value your perspective - what's your honest take on the core idea behind my app? Do you think it stands a chance?***naveen\_indie*** 2 months ago

If you don't want to hang out with your audience for 12 months — pivot

I haven't seen a single example of successful indie product where Founder doesn't understand its audience***kronop*** 2 months ago

Thanks for your valuable input Dan!

If I plan to build/sell a data list on a monthly subscription basis to you recommend creating an early bird deal that gives the first 10 customers a lifetime heavy discounted monthly subscription rate or rather a heavily discounted one-time 6 month/annual pass? Much love***DiegoJaggi*** 2 months ago

Heavily discounted annual pass is a cool alternative if you are afraid of recurring costs.***kronop*** 2 months ago

Cheers for your input Dan!***DiegoJaggi*** 2 months ago

The one thing I find exciting is, that if your product is like from 2056 then it's going to break the moon fr...***AkshayRaveendran*** 2 months ago

This comment was deleted 2 months ago.

DeletedUser 2 months ago

2

build a following then

I started 15 months ago with 0 followers. As everyone else.

kronop 2 months ago

## Bootstrapping Tally to $70K MRR

by Marie Martens

3 years ago we started building the MVP of Tally (https://tally.so). Today we are a team of 4 (soon 5), with 140.000 users worldwide and a revenue of $70K MRR

We documented every step of our journey:

1/ Year 1: Getting our first users and launching on Product Hunt

https://blog.tally.so/year-1-how-we-bootstrapped-tally-to-11k-users-and-5k-mrr/

2/ Bootstrapping to $10K MRR through product-led growth.

https://blog.tally.so/how-we-bootstrapped-tally-to-10k-mrr/

3/ How we grew to $20K and the challenge of scaling customer support.

https://blog.tally.so/bootstrapping-our-saas-from-10k-to-20k-mrr/

4/ Reaching $30KMRR and the challenges we’re facing:

👬 Scaling the team

⛔️ Keeping abusers at bay

🛳️ Keep on improving our product at a high pace

https://blog.tally.so/year-2-bootstrapping-our-saas-to-30k-mrr/

5/ Reaching $60K MRR with a team of 4. Rewatch our keynote at SaasOpen.

https://blog.tally.so/bootstrapping-our-saas-to-60k-mrr-with-a-team-of-4/

***Marie Martens*** posted to Building in Public on Aug 29, 2023

Hey guys...thanks for sharing the journey map of things that worked and that which did not. For builders like us, this is wonderfully helpful. Well documented notes. Thanks again.

We will soon write up a journey on us as well :)***AIQExp*** 2 months ago

I read all the articles you wrote. I think they are the masterpieces to educate anyone to skyrocket his/her business.***HamimHacker*** 2 months ago

Wow, thank you!***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

thanks for sharing, about to dig in on these articles***KingRomstar*** 2 months ago

Discovered Tally through IndieHackers podcast. Used it the exact same day. LOVE IT.***JamesAndrewHarris*** 2 months ago

This is such a great post, thoroughly enjoyed reading all 5 articles! Love the product and In fact after reading your blog posts, I created a validation form using Tally for a product I'm also planning on developing with my partner!

Can't wait to see what you guys do next, keep up the great work.***cjrsmith*** 2 months ago

Really glad to hear you read all of them. I try to document as much as possible even though it gets more difficult to find the time. I also love reading blog posts from other open startups/indie hackers, they always have the most valuable insights***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

That's an awesome read! I liked your blog1 tips of approaching PH ppl who upvoted on similar idea :)***TimeHacker2023*** 2 months ago

You guys are killing it! I traveled for work to the US. Ended up doing a random escape room with a few colleagues and was excited to see they were using Tally for their signups. Excited to see you guys grow.***majorbits*** 2 months ago

Really?! That's so cool to hear ☺️***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

Thanks for sharing your story, it's really inspiring. Me and my partner are on the way to launch a new project that we are very confident about. We hope our story will be similar to yours. I wish you success.***egesabanci*** 2 months ago

Wishing you and your partner the best of luck!***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

Thanks for the awesome journey documentation! Your other articles are also a great read, lots of practical information!***romanj*** 2 months ago

Glad to hear it's useful!***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

Thanks for sharing the information, it is literally a roadmap for many, cheers for sharing!***yaelf*** 2 months ago

Amazing, it really inspired and motivated me when I read this article, thank you for sharing. I have just started launching my SaaS MVP, hoping it goes smoothly and can grow quickly.***mrustams*** 2 months ago

Whishing you all the best!***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

Wow, thanks for that. Huuuge amount of information and inspiration for me.***pobidowski*** 2 months ago

🙏🏼***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

Congrats @MarieMartens. I am new to this community. I have been lately evaluating ideas for SaaS (and building one) and every idea I look I doubt if this will make it or not. When I went into Tally website and learned what you guys do, I was not sure how much traction you would get, but it is amazing to know that you have had considerable success and the product features sound solid.

So, curious to know what made you select this idea. What made you think a better form creator is needed?***sramv1686*** 2 months ago

At the time, we didn't find a form builder that we enjoyed using, and that was affordable for bootstrappers. We used Google Forms, and it did the job but we didn't like the look and feel, and alternatives such as Typeform became pretty expensive fast because of volume-based pricing. We felt like there was room for a different type of player, with a generous free plan and an intuitive interface.***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

Thanks for sharing***uy\_hacker01*** 2 months ago

Great resources for people starting out!***superamplify*** 2 months ago

Congratulations @MarieMartens. The blogs and resources are really helpful. However really curious to know what has been Tally's biggest failure until now and how you guys handled it.***hijunedkhatri*** 2 months ago

Thanks! I don't think there is one big failure, but probably a lot of small things we have learned along the way. We waited pretty long to hire and expand the team, which slowed down our development and support processes significantly, to the point where we felt like we couldn't move forward anymore. I would probably try to hire earlier, but as we were bootstrapped we also needed to make sure that we have enough budget to hire senior people.***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

Well noted, thanks, Marie.***hijunedkhatri*** 2 months ago

I went through everything on your blog and Twitter, also watched Marie's keynote. Extremely informative stuff. You guys are amazing. Huge thanks for sharing!***kubasobecki*** 2 months ago

Congratulations, and great job with the growth and documenting the journey!!!***dipbhi*** 2 months ago

This is an amazing piece and the resources you shared are great.

I’ll keep them in mind while I work on my own product.

Thanks for sharing and good luck Tally***lennyaiko*** 2 months ago

Thanks a lot!***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

I read through the entire article.

Really love that you mentioned you didn't spend any marketing dollar.

That's the true #buildinpublic spirit!***ffclassroom*** 2 months ago

Great articles thanks for sharing! Very educational if you’re starting out!***pietersimons*** 2 months ago

Happy to hear they are helpful!!***MarieMartens*** 2 months ago

You guys are fricking awesome, what a good read***kayuzee*** 2 months ago

Thanks a lot!

MarieMartens 2 months ago

## From $400/mo to $188,000/mo in 3 yrs

Marko Saric of Plausible tells us how he did it.

by James Fleischmann

Marko Saric and Uku Täht built their privacy-friendly analytics platform from $400/mo to $188,000/mo in 3 years.

No investment. No slimy marketing tactics.

I caught up with Marko to find out how. 👇

Marko and the hockey stick

James: Plausible has had hockey-stick growth from pretty much the moment you came on. Let's start there.

Marko: My co-founder Uku is the developer. He started developing Plausible with the regular ‘build in public’ approach. This included posting what he was up to on Twitter, Indie Hackers, and the blog — what feature he was building, the thinking behind it, feature announcements, feedback gathering, etc.

I joined a bit over a year into that. When I joined I continued the public approach but added some content marketing into the mix too. This included a lot of content with educational, informational, and opinionated angles focusing on the world of web analytics, online privacy, and bootstrapped startups.

Hockey-stick graph

Content marketing done right

James: Sounds pretty standard. What did you do differently?

Marko: I think what’s unusual about the way we grow is more about what we haven’t done rather than what we have done.

We’ve never done any type of paid advertising, we don’t have an affiliate program, we don’t pay anyone to recommend us, we don’t have a mailing list that we use to broadcast marketing messages, we don’t do any sales calls, etc.

James: What's the thinking behind that?

Marko: We want to grow without supporting surveillance capitalism. Some may say that we’re growing too slow or we’re leaving money on the table or someone less ethical will steal our lunch, and we're okay with that.

We don't want to sacrifice our principles or happiness to become the next unicorn.

James: Right, and these principles are core to your branding — they're a big part of why customers choose your product. So it's a win-win.

How did you approach writing content?

Marko: When there were headlines or happenings that our potential audience cared about, I would post about it. I didn't just repeat the information everyone else was reporting. I put our personal spin and point of view into it.

There’s a lot of interest in this type of content. And for us, Google Analytics is a competitor, so there’s always something to talk about.

James: How did you differentiate these from other posts?

Marko: The posts were not promotional at all. I tried to make them as useful and as educational as I could.

And I wouldn’t just publish and move to the next post either. After each post, I would try and get some attention by posting it in relevant communities and niche sites in order to drive interest.

Sometimes I would simply submit the post to Hacker News. Sometimes I would take the full content of the post and republish on Indie Hackers and so on. Without doing this second part, nobody would have known about all the content we were publishing.

James: Make sense — if you're avoiding surveillance capitalism, you probably aren't focusing on getting traffic via Google.

Ok, back to the hockey stick... so um, how?

Marko: It’s really difficult to know. And I doubt we could simply replicate this same success if we tried to create a new startup.

Luck and timing have a big part to play. We’re riding the privacy wave which is increasing in popularity. We're in a huge market and the big player made so many bad decisions. Plus, new privacy regulations have opened the doors to new ways of doing analytics.

Our experience and passion for this field have a role to play as well. The product needs to deliver. The communication needs to be clear. The fact that we’re transparent and try to run Plausible with specific principles and values helps a lot. There needs to be some message in there that resonates with people.

And then there's consistency. It might seem easy and quick from the outside, but Uku has spent countless hours writing code and I’ve spent countless hours writing words. We’ve been taking small steps consistently day after day for several years now, and all that time and effort, including all the tiny wins along the way, make a difference.

James: What, no silver bullet? Darn.

So when did you start seeing progress?

Marko: The first blog post I published was called 'Why you should stop using Google Analytics on your website’. I submitted it to Hacker News. It made it to the top of the front page and it changed traction for us.

A growth spin on building in public

James: Ok, let's talk about building in public.

Marko: We continued the ‘build in public’ approach but with a growth spin to it by sharing our marketing steps taken, achievements accomplished (including sharing our MRR milestones), and lessons learned.

James: Do you do it from your personal accounts or brand account?

Marko: My own account was larger than Plausible’s account early on so I posted a lot there in those days. These days, I mostly post from the official Plausible account.

But I post much less than I used to. Brand recognition for Plausible is strong now, so posting on social doesn’t make that much of a difference in terms of signups.

I know that, in general, personal accounts tend to get better engagement than brand accounts, but we’re trying to make it work with the brand account. I also like the idea that Plausible can stand on its own and be relevant without using my personal profile to amplify the message.

Maintaining hockey-stick growth

Doing what works

James: Ok, so you worked your content magic, built in public, and now you've got traction. What did you do next?

Marko: It’s remarkable how little our growth approach has changed from when we were two people with $400 MRR and less than 100 paid users.

James: For sure, I would have anticipated new strategies.

Marko: We just continued doing what worked. I published new blog posts twice per week several months in a row in that first year. It’s busier now, so I don’t publish as often.

Baking in retention

James: What about retention?

Marko: Looking at ProfitWell benchmarks, our Voluntary Churn Rate is 52% lower than average for a company of our size MRR-wise. We’re somewhere just under 2% churn on an average month so the retention doesn’t seem to be much of an issue and we haven’t done much about it.

James: How'd you pull that off?

Marko: It’s connected to the way we communicate and do marketing, I think. Most of our paid users come through word of mouth. They have a specific need or a particular issue with Google Analytics and they come to us because we help them solve it. It’s all pretty organic and natural, which means the people who sign up are likely to stick around.

James: Makes sense. What about the product itself?

Marko: The product is solid, fast, easy to use, and stable. And we regularly improve it according to the feedback, which also helps to keep people happy.

One rule we have is to never overpromise and underdeliver. It’s pretty common for companies to promise a certain feature will be built at a certain time to get someone to sign up. We don’t do that and I think this helps in terms of retention too.

This also means that we rarely make big breaking changes to how the product works. Our dashboard on the surface level is pretty close in terms of look and feel to how it was three years ago when I joined, but it’s just got so much more powerful and is providing many more insights for many new marketing and business use cases.

Boosting LTV (plus their business model)

James: Have you optimized the lifetime value of your users?

Marko: This is something we’re not that good at and we haven’t focused much on. ProfitWell tells me that our Lifetime Customer Value is 77% lower than the average for a company of our size MRR-wise. We have over 11,000 paid users, but our average revenue per user is under $20.

I think this is because our pricing is purely based on our cost at this stage (the number of pageviews a site gets) but we plan to experiment with value-based pricing later this year by introducing a business plan with some premium features exclusive to the paid users on that plan.

We’ve never increased the prices for our paid users either and I think doing it this way with premium features rather than increasing prices to all is a better approach. If you don’t need these new features, you can stay on the same plan and same price.

James: That's a good segway into your business model.

Marko: Our business model is a typical SaaS startup model. We offer a service that we charge subscription fees for.

But we’re an open-source SaaS startup too, mainly for the sake of trust and transparency but we’ve also decided to make it so that you can download our code and run it on your own server. You don’t get support from us, you don’t get to support further development of the product either and you need to do all the work managing an analytics infrastructure yourself but it’s free as in beer for those who want it.

James: Going open-source seems particularly important in your niche. Must be a little scary to give away the keys to the castle, though.

Marko: Luckily for us, there are a lot of people who would prefer to pay us a fee to manage and maintain everything for them so they can focus on running their business and whatever they’re passionate about instead of being focused on managing the uptime and backups of their web analytics server infrastructure.

James: Nice. And we touched on that last time we spoke, so let's leave it there. Alright, where can people find you?

Marko: Plausible.io. And we’re present on Twitter, Mastodon, and LinkedIn. James Fleischmann

posted to The Boot's Trap on August 9, 2023

we don’t have a mailing list that we use to broadcast marketing messages … We want to grow without supporting surveillance capitalism. Some may say that we’re growing too slow or we’re leaving money on the table or someone less ethical will steal our lunch, and we're okay with that.

This is the kind of thought that becomes thinkable when you're an indie hacker. I had an argument with a friend this past weekend who's an executive at a popular tech unicorn company. We were discussing a small company that was taking a political stance in its public messaging and my friend essentially argued any messaging (political or otherwise) not aimed at the express purpose of generating higher revenues ran counter to the entire point of running a business.

It was hilarious. He'd internalized the rule that applies specifically to publicly traded companies and generalized it into a fundamental definition of what a business should be. I'm excited to show him this article and see his reaction.***channingallen*** 3 months ago

Thank you Channing!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

Great article and great service I'm one of those 11,000 happy paid users. So much better than GA.***kaiburnett*** 3 months ago

Thanks very much for your kind words and support Kai!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

Great read! I completely agree on importance content quality. However I'm curious about backlink strategy for Google ranking.***myron\_nestor*** 3 months ago

This is epic. Always thought your branding was spot on as well. Congrats.***arainey*** 3 months ago

Thank you, appreciate that!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

Also decided to go with plausible some time ago.***Kota*** 3 months ago

Nice! Hope you're enjoying Plausible!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

James & Marko - Thank you for an insightful conversation. Marko - It is really interesting that how you pretty much went against what is thought to be the "right" approach to scale and still achieve what you did. My learning from your dialogue is to understand what is the fundamental value for your product/service and stay consistent with that, and the success will follow***consinet*** 3 months ago

Thank you, I'm glad that this was useful to you!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

Thanks for sharing your experience with us, @markosaric! So cool how you and the team stood by your principles, and how that actually helped you grow even more. 🔥***IndieJames*** 3 months ago

Any time James! Thank you for reaching out!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

no paid advertising, no affiliate program, no mailing list that we use to broadcast marketing messages...I think it's incredible how far you can go without doing the typical marketing job.***Luke\_Pioneero*** 2 months ago

It's inspiring to learn more about what y'all have done to get to this level of success, especially as I'm already a user of your tool, making me love you even more. Thank you so much for being so open about what worked and what might have been lucky. You've done a great job of putting in the work and setting up the company to take advantage of the lucky breaks.

It'd be fun to see a tool that helps you customize the setup script, like a quiz-style questionnaire. There's so much Plausible can do; I keep finding new features to add as we go!***Leslie\_Arete*** 2 months ago

Marko, I'm blown away by Plausible's incredible growth! 🚀 Your approach is so inspirational for fellow bootstrappers like me. I especially love how you stuck to your principles and still achieved wild success - proves you can win on your own terms.

I'm the founder of SynapseTech.net, an AI solutions provider synapsetech.net. We're struggling to gain traction and hoping to make the leap from $400 MRR to hockey stick growth.

Your advice on useful, non-promotional content marketing and slowly building community really resonates. We want to emulate your organic, ethical approach. But we aren't sure how to best attract and serve potential B2B clients.

With your experience growing a successful SaaS, I'd hugely appreciate any tips on identifying our ideal customers, crafting compelling messaging, and getting the word out. We want to build lasting trust and provide immense value. But we're still newbies when it comes to customer acquisition.

How did you initially connect with your first few customers and prove Plausible's value? What advice do you have for attracting the right users and nurturing adoption? Any specific strategies we could try, or pitfalls to avoid?

Sorry for all the questions! I just know your wisdom could be game-changing for SynapseTech.net If you're open to sharing more learnings, it would mean the world. Thanks for considering! Wishing Plausible continued success as a beacon for principled SaaS growth.***SynapseTech8*** 3 months ago

Huge congrats, Marko Saric and Plausible team! Your journey from $400/mo to $188,000/mo in just 3 years is truly remarkable. Your 'build in public' and educational content approach is inspiring, and your commitment to values shines through. Best of luck with value-based pricing and the open-source path. Keep rocking it! 🚀👏***edwinjesudass8787*** 3 months ago

I love the story of Plausible, I would have never had the courage to compete against a Google product, let alone a free one!

Well done!***tarekrahme*** 3 months ago

Thanks sharing your growth hacks!***jiteshghanchi*** 3 months ago

interesting. Branding is considered toughest in marketing but somehow you have cracked it.***pdyc*** 3 months ago

Hope our story is useful!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

This gives me a lot of inspiration as a solo maker of software products: I don't think I'm emphasizing enough how much I care about privacy on my landing pages and this made me realize that not only is it the right thing to do, it's also a selling point. I love the privacy-first approach here and $188k MRR is insanely good - makes me think I should aim for bigger goals (mine is $10k/month right now as a solo founder). I've gotta level up my blog writing game it seems!

I bet the margins on an analytics product like this are also insanely good as the only real expenses should be a minor bit of support + server bills which have probably already been optimized. Great writeup.***ben\_makes\_stuff*** 3 months ago

Thank you! I'm glad this was inspiring!***markosaric*** 3 months ago

One of the important lesson I learnt from this interview is making content/marketing/ads that will not waste other people time. It should be either funny, educational or entertaining so anybody who spent time reading or watching it will not feel regret.

This is the same thing that Elon Musk talked about, less regret time. Where when people watch the ads they wont feel regret.

Seth Godin in his book also talked about it. Don't try to spam people or make people annoyed by our product, instead provide value and put our product on the side.

Seth Godin Book

Also things we need to avoid when doing marketing and how to do it right : Dont Spam Do This Instead***aquidor223*** 3 months ago

Seth Godin is a legend and I recommend anyone to read 'This Is Marketing' to learn more about how to do similar style marketing to what we do***markosaric*** 3 months ago

Do you mean that all success comes from content marketing?

Can you share step-by-step details of what you did, and do you have any advice for developers who are just starting out, when they don't have an audience on social platforms yet?***khanhhungnguyen*** 3 months ago

Content marketing is at the core for sure. It drives traffic from search, word of mouth and brand awareness too. We've shared our journey and lessons learned all along the way. Here's a recap post that has links to previous posts too https://plausible.io/blog/open-source-saas

markosaric 3 months ago

## The SaaS sales process

…I used at Drip, which I sold in a life-changing exit

by Rob Walling

I'm self-aware enough to know that I’m not a great salesperson. But even if you don’t think of yourself as a salesperson, every founder needs to be able to sell — whether you’re talking to potential customers, trying to raise investment, or “selling” the company’s vision to new hires.

One of the most important parts of sales is nailing your sales demos. Below, I'll explain the process we developed at my last startup Drip — a process that evolved over several years and helped us grow Drip from nothing to millions in ARR and on to a potential life-changing exit.

Educate; don't sell

Sales shouldn’t be sleazy. Instead, it should be an educational conversation. I now run a startup accelerator called TinySeed, and my cofounder Einar Vollset says:

"When selling SaaS, think of yourself as an unpaid expert who’s helping the prospect solve their problem using software."

You’re not trying to force a fit between your software and your prospect’s problem. You’re putting on your consultant hat to help your prospect define their problem and come up with a good solution.

Thinking of yourself as an expert problem solver first sets a good tone for sales demos. When I used to do sales demos, I would introduce myself as the founder and say, “I’m not trying to talk you into anything. I’d just love to show you our tool and get your feedback on how it might fit your needs.”

If your tool doesn’t fit their needs, it’s far better to let that prospect move on (maybe with a recommendation for a tool that’s a better fit) than to pressure them into signing up. Don’t waste time or money onboarding someone who’s just going to churn out after a month or two.

Qualify before you demo

There are few things worse than showing up to a sales call to find out the person doesn’t have the budget or the need for your product. As someone with intimate knowledge of customers who buy your software, you should have a good idea of the common threads that link them.

Asking even a few questions about budget, timeline, and the problem they are trying to solve can be a window into whether it’s worth your time to jump on a demo.

Say no to people who aren’t a fit

If you know someone will not get value from your product or believe they will be a problem to support, do not be afraid to let them know you don’t think they are a fit and recommend competing tools. If you are qualifying people in advance of your demo, this shouldn’t be something you have to do often, but forcing a sale only to have a customer churn out a few months later will waste a lot of resources.

Follow up

It’s amazing how many salespeople don’t bother following up. People are busy, and following up until someone tells you they are no longer interested is the process that good salespeople follow.

If possible, take payment over the phone

Giving a demo and hoping the person signs up through the web site is not a great way to close a deal. Not every SaaS application is a one-call close, but if yours is, set up their account at the end of your call, including taking their payment info over the phone.

Ask the right questions

Here are good questions to ask during sales demos:

1. What problem are they looking to solve?

Your demo is not a product tour; it’s proof you can solve their problem. Focus on the customer’s pain and how you can fix that.

Sometimes your prospect may be unable to clearly articulate the problem they’re trying to solve. Or they may come in thinking they’re trying to solve one problem when they actually need help with something else. The more conversations you have with prospects, the better you’ll be at consulting with them.

2. How are they solving that problem today?

Finding out what other tools and software they’re currently using to solve their problem helps you frame your solution relative to what they’re already familiar with.

For example, if they’re using Mailchimp, I could compare Drip’s features to what they already know. If they say Infusionsoft, I know they’re used to a more expensive and clunkier tool. If they say they have an Access database and they’re sending emails through a hacked-together system, then I could start by talking about the benefit of using an email service provider at all.

3. How big is their organization?

Are they a solopreneur with 500 people on their email list? A company with a few dozen employees? A Fortune 1000 company with an intense enterprise sales process?

Knowing this can help you understand how valuable this sale is to your company and how much value you’ll be able to provide to them.

4. How sophisticated is their understanding of this category?

Try to ask tactfully how much expertise they have so you can speak to their level. Again, when you’re thinking like an expert problem solver, your goal will be to educate your prospect. They should walk out of the sales demo better able to do their job — regardless of whether your product was a good fit.

One way to ask about their expertise is by going deeper into how they’re using other tools. For example, if a prospect tells me they’re using Mailchimp, I could gauge their sophistication by asking if they’ve used any of the automation features.

5. What’s the decision-making process?

Toward the end of a sales demo, it’s good to get a sense of who else needs to weigh in on this decision. Are you talking to the decision maker? Does your prospect need to go back to a group? Is there any collateral you can provide, like a PDF or a guide, that will help them champion your product to their organization?

Talk through the timeline of when you can expect to hear from them, when you should follow up, etc. Then, when the demo’s over, make sure they’re in some type of CRM so that you follow up at the right time.

Demonstrate how your tool solves the problem

Thinking of yourself as a problem solver first helps solve another common issue I see with sales demos. Instead of giving prospects a painfully detailed explanation of every feature, only show them the relevant parts.

Software demos are not tours of your product. You don’t need to take a deep dive into all your settings and obscure integrations, no matter how proud you are of them. Instead, think of a sales demo less as a presentation and more as a conversation. You should be asking questions and listening more than talking.

A hack to lower sales effort

Sales demos are pretty high-touch, which means they should be reserved for customers who are going to pay you enough to be worth it.

You need a good process for qualifying prospects before they get to you so you’re not stuck doing demos with people who will pay you $30 a month or are the wrong fit for your product.

Dialing in your positioning, website, and marketing is one way to make sure you’re attracting the right prospects and weeding out those who aren’t a good match. Using a qualifying form to schedule a demo is also good. Have them put in the company’s name, the company’s size, their best work email, and other information you need to know.

Weeding through those prospects can be time-consuming — especially if you have a dual funnel with low-priced and enterprise-level tiers.

Here’s a hack: At Drip, anytime someone clicked “Book a Demo,” they got a pop-up that asked for their name and value metric (i.e., how many subscribers they had). If they put in a low number, they were redirected to a page with a video demo, a 10-minute screencast of me walking through the product. If they put in a high number, they were directed to our scheduling link to book a time for a more extensive conversation.

As Drip grew, the cutoff number for in-person demos grew, too. At first, we were doing demos for people in our lowest tiers because it was early and we wanted to learn about our market by talking to anyone we could. Bit by bit, we ratcheted up the number on the form based on how many salespeople had the bandwidth to run demos.

Check out my new book, The SaaS Playbook, for more on how to build a multimillion dollar startup without venture capital.

And if you want to dive deeper into sales demos, I recommend the book Product Demos That Sell: How to Deliver Winning SaaS Demos by Steli Efti.

**Rob Walling** posted to Sales on July 7, 2023

Thanks for sharing. When I develop my own products, I also put myself in the user's shoes and use my own product. When explaining the product to users, I also use empathy to explain, because users are not familiar with the product design process.***ShawnGuo*** 3 days ago

Really interesting post - What would be your recommandation when launching a micro-saas that brings a new tech to a quite saturated market ?***Robin\_Saulet*** 7 days ago

Really a great post - thanks for sharing.

We recently launched our SaaS solution and now doing a lot of demos. I am happy to hear (in the end of your post) that you in the beginning took all demos (To get as much feedback from the market as possible) and then over time you graduatly screened the potential customers to optimize your demos/sales resources.

We are taking the same approach and the input in your post is really helpful for us - appreciated👍

Can you maybe share how you approached getting the leads / demo bookings? How did you attract potential customers/leads? Google adwords, cold calling, Capterra?

Could be interesting to hear and also your experience on does/donts in this field.

Thanks***JannikAndersen*** 8 days ago

At Drip, anytime someone clicked “Book a Demo,” they got a pop-up that asked for their name and value metric (i.e., how many subscribers they had). If they put in a low number, they were redirected to a page with a video demo, a 10-minute screencast of me walking through the product. If they put in a high number, they were directed to our scheduling link to book a time for a more extensive conversation.

I love customization hacks like this, and want to do more of them for Indie Hackers.

For example, right now we're surveying people who join to find out where they are in their journey, what their interests are, etc., but we're not doing anything with that information. Everyone gets the same Indie Hackers no matter what they select.***csallen*** 4 months ago

I agree this hack is actually brilliant and very parallel to how a lot of other things happen. Just like the very example in this article of the Access Database and Email solution that was hacked together is good when you're a small company and don't have resources to create a solution, but once you grow and that solution doesn't scale you have to address it differently.***indie\_mark*** 3 months ago

Maybe an odd question @robwalling but do you have any suggestions for ways to help solo founders workout the "sales muscle" besides just doing lots of it? Like is there anything you did in your personal life early in your career to become more comfortable in your own skin and gain confidence to help your salesmanship? 9 years ago you and mike taber were the reason I was inspired to learn to code btw so thanks for the content!***colincampbell*** 4 months ago

I’ve seen folks do a few things to get more comfortable with sales:

Listen to recorded sales calls. I’m not sure if you can find some online, but I’d bet if you asked here on IH or in MicroConf Connect you could find someone who would share a few calls with you.

Do a role play with a team member or friend. This is if you’re very early and still stressing about talking to unfamiliar people.

Hone your pitch at in-person events. I went to a conference where I had to explain what Drip did about 100 times and that got me way more comfortable with talking to people about it. I wasn’t selling the software, just explaining what it was and how it worked helped break down some mental barriers I had around talking to people about the product.

And, of course, doing sales demos :-) In the early days you’ll need to give a lot of them, even to unqualified prospects, just to learn how people think about your product, and to improve your interpersonal skills.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

Thanks so much for the tips. I really appreciate you taking the time to respond! I think some roleplay sales is my first step. Hopefully I can say hey one day at a microconf***colincampbell*** 4 months ago

Thanks for this quick tips, Rob.

As an introverted-creator, I dread talking to people.

Seems like these steps could help me prepare for it.***SathyaHQ*** 4 months ago

Loved your book, already rereading it <3***LeeEnglishman*** 2 months ago

These are great tips, especially for the modern way of doing sales. Less of trying to be pushy and be more focused on giving / asking for info.

How did you get those first few sales demos when you were growing?***electrolytes*** 4 months ago

I tend to be good at inbound marketing so I used content, SEO, appearing on podcasts, and working my network to get early demos.

Honestly, going to my network with direct, warm emails was a big driver in the early days (“I know you use XYZ-ESP, here’s how we’re better. If you’d consider a switch let’s chat!”).***robwalling*** 4 months ago

Thanks for sharing - absolutely agree.

Sales is about building a relationship, earn trust and help them solve their problems.

& if you focus on transformational outcome rather than transactional only, i guess it will play out for you on the long term :-)

1e9 a month ago

Reeeally interesting article, Rob, thanks! We recently bought your book "Start Small, Stay Small", and using it to launch a SaaS (which we've internally used for ≈ 1 year, too slow, we know haha).***mxgma*** 2 months ago

Solid article, Rob. Thanks for the overview.

What lead nurturing techniques did you use, if any?***aioverlord*** 2 months ago

Almost solely email sequences.***robwalling*** 2 months ago

Good stuff. Also found your website. Bundling the books based on content type is genius.

Looking forward to the read. cheers***aioverlord*** 2 months ago

rob giving the best advice as usual. I book marked it and saved it to Google Keep for future use.

The number 1 I took from this was the educate don't sell quote, gonna focus on that.

Also, the whole start at a lower price and talk to whoever and whenever you can to learn as much about the market as possible.***KingRomstar*** 2 months ago

Hi Rob, thanks for the great article. I also just bought your book and I'm excited to read it ;)***josh\_the\_tech\_guy*** 3 months ago

Awesome, glad to hear it! I hope you enjoy the book.***robwalling*** 3 months ago

I hope it will give me some ideas for my current situation. I‘m building https://podcut.io/ and while I think (and have partly validated) that is definitely provides value to my users, it‘s been rather difficult to market compared to my last product. While it‘s definitely a topic too large to get into here, I‘d appreciate any kind of tiny input/thoughts/suggestions!***josh\_the\_tech\_guy*** 3 months ago

Just listened to Peter Kazanj on your podcast and grabbed his book right away. It's been an absolute game-changer! Easily the top sales book I've come across. Highly recommend it to all SaaS beginners out there.***SamraKhan51*** 4 months ago

When I was reading his book (Founding Sales) to prep for that interview I was immediately struck by how good it was. Since then I’ve been recommending it with the same fervor you feel.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

Great post @robwalling! I have a question about when it is worthy a demo or not, and maybe it is aligned with your hack for recorded video vs live demo. You mentioned something about price as well and I am curious to know what would be the price threshold, in a ballpark, that you would consider worthy of a live demo.***pedroassumpcao*** 4 months ago

Ooh, this is a really good question.

For one-call closes, it depends on how much you have to pay to your sales people, and the cost of your marketing channels (i.e. cold outbound requires a higher ACV to justify). But realistically, we used to do demos for people paying us $149/mo or $199/mo, which is probably the absolute lowest end I would consider.

If you're doing cold outbound it's closer to $7500/year. And if you're going through an enterprise sales process with multiple calls, procurement, etc you need to charge $25k/year at a min, and ideally $30k and up.

HOWEVER...in the early days, I would talk with pretty much any qualified prospect because learning is your most valuable asset. At a certain point you'll see the same patterns over and over and at that point you tweak your javascript to show the pre-recorded demo to more and more people coming through as you expand your sales capacity.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

Perfect! This approach really makes sense for starters or long-runners.***pedroassumpcao*** 4 months ago

You just had Peter Kazanj of Founding Sales on your pod. I picked up his book, and it has been extremely helpful. Probably the best book I’ve read on sales. I can’t recommend this book enough for anyone starting a SaaS.***shanefromfargo*** 4 months ago

I know, right? It’s such a good book. I’ve started recommending it to anyone who asks me about doing sales as a founder.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

Great list. Another tactic I would add to #1 is storytelling. If you can connect with your customer through your own stories, or other customers stories, and really bring to life the problem that you're solving; it's way easier, cognitively, for them to see themselves solving their problems with your product.***sarmenti*** 4 months ago

Hey @robwalling, under "Ask the right questions" you have several questions that really reminded me of the JTBD (job-to-be-done) framework. Was this your inspiration for this particular section?***zerotousers*** 4 months ago

JTBD definitely influenced us as we developed our sales process. We started with our own questions based on gut instinct (this was 2013/2014 so before JTBD had become so popular). Then we massaged the questions over time as we learned more about how others were doing this.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

Qualify before you demo

Yeah, this has been one of my biggest learnings as I learn how to sell. At first, I wanted to talk to anyone who would speak to me, but it's a waste of everyone's time. Worse, it even resulted in me building features that nobody (except someone who never became a customer) wanted.

If possible, take payment over the phone

@robwalling so you're saying that if they're a 'yes' at the end of the call, you create an account for them on the spot and input their CC details for them? That's a cool move. Does anyone ever take you up on it? For me, it'd be rare for someone to be ready to pay then and there.

And what's the process — they stay on the call while you ask them for their info and you input it manually through your backend, then send them a temporary password?***Silvio\_SF*** 4 months ago

Yep, I've actually done it two ways. At one point we would just create a free trial account for the prospect and let them enter their CC info, then we started offering to take their info over the phone and we would just enter it into the payments screen on their account as any other user would. Some folks would do it and some folks would decline, but we'd still turn the account over to them in either case.

For the password we'd typically ask them to click "forgot password" so they'd get a reset email. If I had less technical users I would do that for them.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

Love this, thanks for sharing @robwalling! When does your new book come out?***IndieJames*** 4 months ago

Thank you!

The Kickstarter hardcovers should start shipping next week from the fulfillment house. Paperbacks ordered from saasplaybook.com will go out a week or two later, and it will be up on Amazon/Audible a couple weeks after that.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

How did you get the audio for your book? Did you read it aloud yourself, or hire someone else to do it? Or is there some new AI tool for this***AustinCarvey*** 2 months ago

I read it myself. The AI we have access to as consumers is still not close to replicating individual voices.***robwalling*** 2 months ago

Excited for it! I should be getting a couple of copies in my mailbox ☺️***csallen*** 4 months ago

❤️❤️***robwalling*** 4 months ago

It's good to be a hacker... but at first place, a sales hacker

Thanks for sharing this

quierolaweb a month ago

Love the hack about booking a demo

pratiks a month ago

@fastsociety We will have to discuss our lead qualification strategy in future as we learn and grow

pratiks a month ago

Thanks for sharing Rob! Funny I read this today, I was just doing research on new sales calls tactics yesterday.

One thing I'd add is that prospects are now used to sales calls starting with questions, but they just want to see the demo. It's important to make them feel like their time isn't being wasted, and they don't become impatient.

here are a few notes I'll add to what you have:

Be authoritative

No need to be overly nice

Internalize the fact that I am certain that I can help them

Get them to explain their why

Ask questions to have them share a story

Get emotionally invested into their problem

First part of the call

Show you’ve done research

Build rapport

Be genuine, say something that is actually interesting about them

Set the agenda

well [name] the reason that i'm jumping on this call with you today is honestly sometimes we can help customers with [thing], other times we can’t, and my goal is just to understand if there's a problem that we can help you solve and give you a sense of where we can be helpful, if we can.

the way we're gonna do that is usually it's helpful to start with like why you took the call and what you're level of needs around startup analysis overall, just to get a sense of like if there's a problem we can solve so we know exactly what we can show you

and then at the end of this call you're going to have a good sense of whether or not you want to like go deeper on this thing and at that point we would get you on a 14-day trial, oftentimes we would loop in like your associates to join the call as well um but we can talk about that at the end but does that sound like a high-level plan that works for you?

Hope this helps whoever is looking for more sales advice.***esfahani*** 2 months ago

Thanks for sharing! Great additional inspiration.

tiloso a month ago

thank you for sharing this Rob!

How many were you at Drip? Would be interesting to know if you implemented this approach from the beginning or later with more resources–eg who was doing sales and demos? Was the same dev team in charge of both dev and sales or there was a split of roles?***zuck\_fredo*** 2 months ago

How did you generate more leads?***Marcus\_lewis8*** 2 months ago

Great read and insights. Coming from a sales background, taking this consultative approach pays dividends, especially for long-term customer trust.***AdamCL*** 2 months ago

In short, make it about them and not you or your company, product etc. Develop an emotional connection through showing concern towards a problem they are facing and one which you can solve.***HarisZafar*** 2 months ago

You truly have been an inspiration to me Rob, ever since 2010 when I read "Start Small Stay Small"***ruess*** 2 months ago

Amazing. Glad to have been part of your journey. 🚀***robwalling*** 2 months ago

That pop up idea is wonderful, so easy to make demos nowadays with products like Loom or Vidyard. How did you structure your demos? I know for some doing a demo and asking discovery questions can quickly turn into word salad, interested to hear how you structured your calls.***AustinCarvey*** 2 months ago

I love your advices explained in this thread. Another great tip I would like to add for growing Saas business is to user feedback and retention.

If you can't convert your existing customer into a retention customer, you are already losing the business***rajeshgajera*** 2 months ago

Woah, I did NOT realize I was doing sales demos all wrong! 😱 This is a total game changer.

I used to think demos were just boring product tours. Now I see they should be like Oprah - ask questions, listen more than talk, and focus on solving problems rather than features. 💡🗣️

My favorite tips: qualify leads BEFORE the demo to avoid time wasters, and follow up relentlessly until you get a hard yes/no. No more crossing my fingers they'll come back! 🤞👋

Also love the genius pop-up hack to redirect low-value prospects to a video demo. Save the hand holding for big fishies! 🐟🎣

This advice just revolutionized my sales strategy. So helpful! Who's with me in leveling up their demo game? Share the most valuable tip that clicked for you! 👇🙌***SynapseTech8*** 3 months ago

Thanks for sharing your experience and tips, Rob! I'll definitely be implementing some of these strategies in my own startup.***roonwal*** 3 months ago

Thanks, Rob. Lots of good points about sales. I like this especially,

"If the customer is not fit, be confident & polite to say no and move on. That is better than a churn after 2 months"***worldofprasanna*** 3 months ago

Nice tipps @robwalling, would you be interested to act as mentor for a rising saas?***achess*** 3 months ago

I appreciate the offer, but I am fully booked advising my current investments.***robwalling*** 3 months ago

Thanks for sharing this.***Indiehacker\_FR341*** 3 months ago

Valuable insights, thanks for sharing!***Waivly*** 3 months ago

Great insights, thanks for sharing.***thetink*** 3 months ago

Very useful budy***growthfunda*** 3 months ago

Do you advice to use third party website to sell you Saas or just go pitching to potential buyers? How do you go about that***katemiller*** 3 months ago

This is valuable ! I have built my product but I don't know how to land my very first client !***kathan*** 3 months ago

This article on SaaS growth and sales demos is a gem! Thanks Rob!

It's brilliantly written for folks like me who aren't sales experts. As I grow my app - YVisuals.app, I realize the importance of educating rather than just selling in our email campaigns. It's the game-changer.

Here's hoping we'll have the energy to run more successful campaigns and convert our free users into paid customers. Wish us luck on our journey!***SathyaHQ*** 4 months ago

These are great tips, thank you! I've curious about the idea of offering a free option as a trial. Do you think this is a good idea, or are demos with upfront monetary requests a better option?***BotButcher*** 4 months ago

Really depends on your price point and how your customers want to buy. Surprising to most of us developers/makers, most customers want a demo of software they are considering. But it doesn’t always make financial sense to do so (I had another answer in this thread about price points where it makes sense).

Free trial vs. not, demo vs. self-serve, CC upfront vs. not, freemium vs not…all complex questions with many variables. I have a few rules of thumb in my book (saasplaybook.com), and usually I recommend starting with those and then re-evaluating as you learn about your specific market.***robwalling*** 4 months ago

nice tips I still cannot follow cause I am too lazy***HilaryMersi*** 4 months ago

You're the man Rob

***DavisBaer*** 4 months ago

## Dead-simple Marketing Roadmap

…for first-time Founders by Dan Kulkov

#1 question I get asked:

How do I get started with marketing?

Good news: it’s easier than you think. Here’s my roadmap.

1) Pre-launch 💡

Got a new product idea? Start completing these tasks.

Define one specific audience segment you target (e.g., startup founders without a marketing background)

Define in one sentence what rational and emotional value your product delivers

Pick one status-quo solution (can be “do nothing”) that most users will compare your product with

Build a prototype or design a mockup of your future product in 72 hours

Create an early bird landing page with a lifetime deal offer

Tweet and send an email to your subscribers

Build the thing if you get enough sales (if not, refund and pick a new product idea)

2) Launch 🔥

Day X is close. Let’s make sure you get as many sales as possible.

Tease your product launch with free content and build in public stories

Collect emails for a waitlist after your early bird deal is over

Beta-test your product with early bird customers to get testimonials

Build a simple landing page with Webflow / Framer / Typedream (Hero block, Problem Agitation, How does it work, Testimonials, Key Features, Pricing, FAQ)

Show your landing page to 10 people and improve based on their honest feedback

Create a special deal for the launch (less special than an early bird, but still)

Record a catchy product video for your launch with Typeframers / Screen Studio

Launch it on Product Hunt, Twitter, and Email list on the same day

Distribute the launch to relevant Facebook Groups, Slack communities, and Discord servers

Create unique launch posts on Reddit, Indie Hackers, HackerNews

Post your product to Product Hunt alternatives (Betalist, There’s an AI for that, Ben’s Bites)

Get a shit ton of sales because you did marketing

3) Post-launch 🚀

Launch traffic is over. Here is how to grow next.

Add more social proof to your landing page (e.g., # of customers, Product Hunt badge, Featured in)

Increase the price of your product

Write down 10 marketing experiments you can run (e.g., different Heading 1, new onboarding flow, etc.)

Pick 10 user acquisition tactics to try in the next 60 days (e.g., sponsor newsletters, buy Google Ads, write curation threads)

Talk to your power users to get 10 feature requests that make your value proposition x10 better

Split marketing and development weeks 50:50

Hit a nice revenue milestone

Decide: either sell while having nice traction or continue growing

The hardest part is to actually execute these tasks.

Learn how for free — makerbox.club/free-resources

You are welcome!

**Dan Kulkov** posted to Growth on July 11, 2023

"Tweet and send an email to your subscribers" - what subscribers? First time founders do not have subscribers, and getting subscribers takes months***Goodfolk*** 4 months ago

Haha ! Agreed ! Also what about prelaunch? How to prelaunch ?***kathan*** 3 months ago

Getting subscribes doesn't get months.

Build a freebie and share it on Twitter and forums. You will get hundreds of emails in weeks.***kronop*** 4 months ago

If it was that simple we’d all be millionaires.

I think your advice is fair - just not for first time founders.***RyanRobinsonUk*** 4 months ago

Your advices are terribly overstated.

It's like saying:

-You want get to the NBA?

-Shoot 3's like Steph Curry.

You're welcome!***Mike\_Firkowski*** 4 months ago

"Build the thing if you get enough sales"

Sales of what? 😆***bohdan\_v*** 4 months ago

sales of early bird deal***kronop*** 4 months ago

Nice I like this! One of the things that’s also helped me as a founder for marketing is having niche brand ambassadors! They can definitely be useful for user acquisition.***Cheicolate*** 4 months ago

Nice sharing ! Really insipired***DaisyDo666*** 4 months ago

Hey! Thanks for the great article! would love to see these kind of articles more!

one I really want to know: "what are the essential features that every micro-saas app should have?" like email automations ( welcome email etc ), feedback channels and ... .

Some questions:

"Tweet and send an email to your subscribers"

what if I don't have any subscribers or twitter followers? where to get early birds?

"Create an early bird landing page with a lifetime deal offer"

how can I know I will be capable to support LTDs? I don't know how much cost my app will have and my estimation could be wrong. getting LTDs sounds scary at least at first. how can I make sure that my LTDs doesn't going to unbalance everything?

Thanks!***devhe4d*** 4 months ago

There are no essential features. Build what your specific audience in your specific product needs.

Build followers and get subscribers to get early birds. Everyone starts with 0.

Don't overthink LTD. In most apps, user costs are $0. Most LTD users won't use your product forever. But you will get traction and validation.***kronop*** 4 months ago

Would you do any ideation before pre-launch or is that something you can do after "Define one specific audience segment you target" ?***indie\_mark*** 4 months ago

Ideation is okay exercise.

But I recommend doing it after you picked you dream audience for the next 1 year.***kronop*** 4 months ago

I thought you were about to share something like the 1 page marketing plan, by Allan Dib 😉***romaindewolff*** 4 months ago

Felt like your roadmap successfully demystifies the marketing process and serves as a testament to the power of focused action and continuous learning. It’s an exceptional guide for beginners, but it’s also an astute reminder for seasoned marketers about the vitality of the basics. Thank you for sharing this, Dan!***SurveySparrow*** 4 months ago

You two are my go-to resource for solopreneur marketing tips. Thanks for all that you do!***ScottJames*** 3 months ago

My biggest advice would be: stop romanticizing the Launch if your app doesn't depends on store's rankings to get views.

Launch is important if you are an app on a store like Google Play or Steam that would get more traffic if you are in top spots, but otherwise launch day is just another day. That doesn't define your success and honestly nobody cares.

Care about getting little progress and sales every day as long as your Cost of Acquisition is lower than your Revenue.***nestorvc*** 3 months ago

Love this so much, thank you!***SirRyan*** 4 months ago

Loved it. very straight forward, thanks for sharing!***Asicreativedude*** 4 months ago

Very simplified roadmap but it was the goal I believe.

Still useful for 1st time founders like me, thanks Dan.***MajorBaguette*** 4 months ago

Dan, your roadmap is truly remarkable! It not only demystifies marketing but also emphasizes the significance of focused action and constant learning. A valuable resource for beginners and a timely reminder for seasoned marketers. Thank you for generously sharing this gem!***SamraKhan51*** 4 months ago

An insightful read! This article brilliantly simplifies the complex world of startup marketing. A must-read for every first-time founder. Kudos to the author!***huzhi*** 4 months ago

This was such a great read!***LystenMobileApp*** 4 months ago

Thanks for sharing. Would be great to have a few actual examples too.***SolopreneurWanderer*** 4 months ago

Well Written, Would love to see once try Executing!***Anisha0102*** 4 months ago

One-click solutions work for apps, but not for specialized technical solutions that take months to develop.***sanju12*** 4 months ago

I'd love to see this list backed with a real story. Definitely worth giving a read, though.***adasq*** 4 months ago

Well, it works well for apps and one-click solutions but doesn't work for specialized technical solutions, which require months to get something demonstrable.***SavantAI*** 4 months ago

Nice list, some points will take a longer time to execute for sure. It's not as straightforward as you say to "create a freebie" and tons of people will subscribe to the mailing list, if that would be so, all of us would be having thousands of people on our mailing lists though.***Sinkevicius*** 4 months ago

Pre-launch: Define target audience, highlight value proposition, create prototype, build early bird landing page.

Launch: Tease launch, collect waitlist emails, beta-test with early buyers, create simple landing page, seek feedback, offer special launch deal, share product video, multi-platform release, drive sales.

Post-launch: Enhance landing page, adjust pricing, run marketing experiments, employ user acquisition tactics, gather user feedback, balance marketing and development, achieve revenue milestone, decide on growth path.***alxender518*** 4 months ago

Getting started with marketing involves understanding your target audience, developing a strategy, and implementing various marketing tactics to reach and engage your audience. Here are some steps to help you get started:

Define Your Goals: Determine what you want to achieve through marketing. Common goals include increasing brand awareness, driving website traffic, generating leads, or boosting sales. Clearly define your objectives to guide your marketing efforts.

Understand Your Target Audience: Conduct market research to gain insights into your target audience. Identify their demographics, preferences, needs, and behaviors. This information will help you tailor your marketing messages and select appropriate channels.

Develop a Marketing Strategy: Create a comprehensive marketing strategy that outlines your overall approach. Determine your key messaging, positioning, value proposition, and competitive advantage. Set a budget, allocate resources, and define metrics to measure success.

Build Your Brand: Establish a strong and cohesive brand identity that resonates with your target audience. Develop your brand elements such as your logo, tagline, colors, and tone of voice. Consistently apply these elements across all marketing channels.

Build an Online Presence: Create a professional website that showcases your products, services, and brand. Optimize your website for search engines (SEO) to improve its visibility. Establish a presence on social media platforms that are relevant to your audience.

Content Marketing: Develop a content strategy to provide valuable and relevant content to your audience. Create blog posts, articles, videos, infographics, and other content formats that educate, entertain, or solve problems for your target audience. Share your content through various channels to attract and engage your audience.

Email Marketing: Build an email list and develop an email marketing strategy. Create personalized and targeted email campaigns to nurture leads, build relationships, and drive conversions. Use email marketing platforms to manage your subscriber lists and track performance.

Social Media Marketing: Leverage social media platforms to reach and engage your target audience. Identify the platforms most popular with your audience and create compelling social media content. Use paid advertising options to increase your reach and target specific demographics.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM): Consider using paid search advertising (e.g., Google Ads) to appear prominently in search engine results for relevant keywords. Set up campaigns, select keywords, create compelling ad copy, and monitor performance to optimize your campaigns.

Analytics and Optimization: Continuously monitor and analyze your marketing efforts. Use tools like Google Analytics to track website traffic, user behavior, and conversions. Make data-driven decisions and optimize your marketing campaigns based on the insights gained.***timjohnson2584*** 4 months ago

Set goals: Define what you want to achieve through marketing.

Know your audience: Understand your ideal customers.

Create a plan: Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy.

Build your brand: Establish a strong brand identity.

Create engaging content: Produce valuable and relevant content.

Choose marketing channels: Select appropriate channels.

Implement and monitor: Execute your plan and track performance.

Engage with your audience: Interact and build relationships.

Learn and improve: Stay updated and refine your strategies.

Use digital marketing tools: Adopt tools for efficiency.

Optimize for search engines: Improve website visibility through SEO.***techplex623*** 4 months ago

Thank you for the summary It was spot on and cleared my mind instantly***happykaikai*** 4 months ago

How product managers choose good ideas if they go astray when gathering user requirements***happykaikai*** 4 months ago

Get the word out to everyone in your network who could benefit from your app. Offer valuable content to related communities, and introduce your concept to gain preliminary feedback. Conduct a few paid advertising trials to establish a foundation for your Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC).***hacksman*** 4 months ago

Post-launch marketing is indeed a critical phase where many founders face challenges. It's common to feel excited about the pre-launch stage, but maintaining momentum and user engagement after launch is equally important.

I loved the idea of planning the next 60 days. This timeframe allows you to strategically distribute your products across various channels, ensuring maximum visibility and reaching your target audience effectively.

By proactively thinking about distribution strategies, you can counter the gradual decrease in traffic and enhance user retention.***annamalai*** 4 months ago

In the Pre-Launch stage, it would be a good idea to build a network with like-minded founders. This can be done on the social media profile of your choice but I would personally prefer either LinkedIn or Twitter.

This would help you learn from their experiences & if you are able to build genuine connections, they would help you spread the word during the Launch time.

So for both marketing & personal growth, it's a win-win situation.***upretification*** 4 months ago

This is a really good roadmap for people who are stuck on finding a simple path forward.

Curious to hear what you'd recommend in a scenario where there is no Twitter audience or email list given most Indies seem to be in that situation.

Personally I would say the best approach is DMing 200-500 over the course of a week or a few days to get either early users or validation.

Here's what that DM might look like:

You: "Hey (name) saw you're building a (category) product. It looks awesome. How's the project going?"

Them: "Oh hey it's going good/bad... blah blah"

You: "Oh that's interesting to hear. What's your biggest challenge right now?"

Them: "(Challenge)"

You: "Oh nice have you tried (suggestions)"

Them: "Yes/No"

You: "cool man. Well I'm working on (product). I would really love to get your feedback on it. Can I give you a long trial?"

You can just go for the jugular on the first message but you'll lower your response rate by doing that. Also, I have found people are much more open if you start, even with just a couple of messages, about them instead of your thing.

The key is sending as many of those outreach messages as possible. Holding the actual conversations, even though each one would be unique, takes way less time than just sending a bunch of them.***adamkstinson*** 4 months ago

Do you find it more effective to open with a conversation?

From my experience, going straight to to CTA is always better but curious what you've found.***devinkearns*** 4 months ago

Just depends. Opening with CTA is going to dramatically lower your response rate. That said, it's probably going to lead to results faster overall.

If you're just focused on the bottom of the funnel, a well-written CTA message can work wonders. But for building long-tail marketing systems I preference building relationships. Though I make sure to always make my ask at some point.***adamkstinson*** 3 months ago

Nice list. I would emphasize that even before pre-launch you need to build an audience, or pay to access one. Building an MVP and sending it to Twitter, Reddit, email lists, etc is great but you need people to be there to listen.

I think and underrated tactic is joining communities related to your product and the problem you solve. Go there, become an expert and offer your expertise, help people solve their problems. Don't overtly promote your product but make connections with people that will pay you too solve their problems and they'll become long-term customers and get that strong LTV.***sarmenti*** 4 months ago

Hey, so i see you mentioned paying to access an audience do you mean sponsoring newsletters, ads, influencers etc? or more of joining groups that promote your stuff and other black market type things. If it's the second honestly I'd like to learn how to do those. @tunjiadeyeri on twitter. dm me.

tunji 3 months ago

## The ultimate guide to SaaS pricing

by Ross Simmonds

In this guide, I'm going to help you understand everything you need to know about different SaaS pricing models and strategies, and how to determine the right one for your business. Whether you're just starting out or looking to optimize your current pricing model, this guide will provide you with the information and tools needed to succeed in the 2023 SaaS market.

What Are SaaS Pricing Models?

When it comes to SaaS pricing, it can sometimes feel like you're stuck between a rock and a hard place. On one hand, you need to charge enough to cover your costs and make a profit. On the other hand, you don't want to price yourself out of the market and lose potential customers. The good news is that there are several SaaS pricing models available to help identify the right pricing model for your business.

SaaS pricing models

The three primary models are:

Cost Based Pricing: A methodology that is based on the cost of developing, designing, and selling a software product. The price of a SaaS product is determined by adding a percentage of the creation and selling costs to the selling price to make a profit.

Market Based Pricing: A methodology when the price of a SaaS product is set according to current market prices for the same or similar SaaS products.

Value Based Pricing: A methodology setting prices primarily based on a consumer's perceived value of a SaaS product or service. Value-based pricing is more customer-focused, meaning SaaS companies base their pricing on how much they think customers will pay.

The key to identifying the right price strategy for your SaaS is to understand the different models and how they can benefit your business. Every business is different and what works for one may not work as well for another.

Today we’ll be giving you the key concepts of the top SaaS pricing models.

Importance Of Saas Pricing—Why Does It Matter?

As a business owner, understanding the implications of SaaS pricing is essential for success. From revenue generation to customer retention, SaaS pricing affects every aspect of running a business. With the right strategies, businesses can leverage SaaS pricing to maximize profits and increase customer loyalty.

Here are three ways SaaS pricing affects your business.

Revenue Generation & Competitive Advantage

One of the primary benefits of SaaS pricing is its ability to generate revenue. By offering subscription-based services, businesses can generate predictable income streams that can be used to fund additional initiatives or projects.

Statistically, SaaS businesses have a much higher recurring revenue rate than traditional software companies, making it an incredibly attractive option for entrepreneurs looking to maximize their profits.

Product Positioning & Profit Margins

Another benefit of SaaS pricing is its ability to position products in the market. This means that businesses can strategically structure their pricing plans to attract the right customers while simultaneously maximizing their profit margins. Businesses can increase profits—without sacrificing customer satisfaction—by offering different tiers of service and charging a premium for advanced features or services.

Customer Acquisition & Retention

Finally, SaaS pricing can be leveraged for customer acquisition and retention purposes.

The best way to acquire new customers is by offering attractive pricing plans and promotional offers. For example, businesses can offer discounts for long-term commitments or bundle services together to attract customers.

Slack is a great example of a SaaS product that leverages pricing for customer retention. Slack offers a free plan and has premium plans offering additional features and more storage space.

Seven Pricing Dimensions for SaaS Companies

The range of SaaS solutions available to businesses today can be incredibly powerful.

Not only do they make operations more streamlined and efficient, but they also have the potential to help drive growth. To get the most out of them, you've got to select the right fit—and that means getting the pricing model right.

There are seven distinct SaaS pricing dimensions (aka variables), each of which has advantages and drawbacks. A dimension is a secondary consideration to be made when deciding how to price your product. It’s similar to the way some products at the grocery store are sold by the individual item (ie. one avocado) and others are sold by weight (potatoes per lb).

Finding the right pricing dimensions for your SaaS depends on your use cases and customers, so it’s important to understand the details of each model before making a decision.

Let’s dive into them:

Flat-Rate Pricing

Basecamp pricing

What Is flat-rate pricing? In a flat-rate pricing model, customers pay a set amount for access to a given service or product on an ongoing basis.

This could be anything from monthly or yearly subscriptions to ad hoc charges for additional features. This pricing type's main benefit is that it allows businesses to monetize their services quickly and easily.

When writing about their pricing strategy, the founder and CTO of Basecamp wrote: “The problem with per-seat pricing is that it by definition makes your biggest customers your best customers. With money comes influence, if not outright power. And from that flows decisions about what and who to spend time on.”

Examples of Software Using This Model

Many software companies use a flat-rate model for their services, including Adobe Creative Cloud, Dropbox Pro, Slack Plus, and Microsoft Office 365.

These services typically offer basic features at no additional cost, while premium features such as additional storage space or advanced analytics come for an extra fee.

It allows businesses to tailor their subscription packages according to their needs and budgets.

According to one research by Salesforce in 2019, 66% of consumers prefer subscription models over traditional ownership models when purchasing software products due to their affordability and convenience.

This suggests that there is high demand for SaaS products with flat-rate pricing models as people are more likely to pay for them on an ongoing basis than one large upfront fee.

Pros & Cons Of Flat Rate Pricing For SaaS Companies

Pros:

Quick access to cash flow through recurring customer payments

Predictable costs for customers, builds trust between them and the business

Cons:

Customers may only pay once but expect unlimited access leading to losses for companies

Customers not getting full value from subscriptions and churning out, resulting in loss of revenue income

Pay As You Go or Usage Based

Marketing Hub pricing

One of the most common pricing models used by SaaS companies is the pay-as-you-go or usage-based model. In this model, customers are charged based on their usage of the software. This could include the number of users, the number of transactions, the amount of storage used, or any other metric that is relevant to the software.

Examples of Saas Companies Using this Model

Examples of SaaS companies that use the pay-as-you-go model include:

Amazon Web Services (AWS): Customers pay for the amount of storage, computing power, and bandwidth they use.

Salesforce: Customers pay for the number of users and the amount of storage they use.

Zoom: Customers pay for the number of meeting minutes they use.

Rates for these services vary depending on the specific usage and plan chosen, but they can range from a few cents to several dollars per user per month.

Pros and Cons of the Pay-As-You-Go Model

Pros:

Flexibility: Customers can adjust their usage and costs based on their changing needs.

Predictable costs: Customers can easily calculate and budget for their monthly or annual costs.

Low risk: Customers can start with a small investment and scale up as their business grows.

Cons:

Complex billing: Customers may find it difficult to understand and manage their usage and costs.

Higher costs at scale: As usage increases, costs can also increase significantly.

Limited features: Some features may only be available at higher usage tiers, which could limit the functionality of the software for some customers.

Tiered-Based

Dropbox pricing

The tiered-based pricing model is a type of pricing strategy that divides customers into different groups, or tiers, based on their usage or needs. Each tier is associated with a different price point.

One of the key advantages of tiered-based pricing is that it allows SaaS companies to segment their market and target different types of customers with different pricing options.

This can help to increase revenue and profitability, as customers are willing to pay more for additional features or higher levels of service.

Examples of Tiered-Based SaaS Product Companies

Examples of SaaS companies that use tiered pricing include:

Mailchimp: Offers a free plan for small businesses and basic features, and three different paid plans with increasing features and capabilities.

Dropbox: Offers a free plan with limited storage, and three different paid plans with increasing storage and advanced features.

HubSpot: Offers a free plan for basic features, and four different paid plans with increasing features and capabilities.

The pricing of these services varies depending on the specific plan and usage. For example, Dropbox offers a basic plan with 2GB of storage for free, and a plus plan with 2 TB of storage for $9.99 per user per month.

Pros and Cons

Pros:

Tailor packages to suit multiple buyer personas

Maximize revenue generated from different types of customers

Direct route to the next price point when customer outgrows current package

Cons:

Too many choices may lead to an abandoned sale

Appealing to too many needs can lead to a lack of focus

Uncompensated usage beyond allocation in top tier users

User-Based Pricing (Non-Active Users)

User-based pricing is a model in which the price of a service is determined by the number of users that will be using the service. This model is particularly useful for companies that have a large number of users, as it allows them to ensure that they are paying for only the number of users they need.

Examples

Slack: Slack is a popular communication tool that charges customers based on the number of users that will be accessing the service. The company offers different pricing plans, including a free plan for small teams, and paid plans for larger teams.

Trello: Trello is a project management tool that also uses a user-based pricing model. The company offers different pricing plans, including a free plan for small teams and paid plans for larger teams.

Pros and Cons

Pros:

Allows companies to scale their service as their user base grows

Allows companies to offer different levels of service to different users

Encourages users to upgrade to more advanced service plans

Cons:

Difficult to keep track of who is using the service and how many users are active at any given time

Can lead to billing errors

Can create an unnecessary financial burden for the company with non-active users

Active Users-Bases Pricing

Zoom pricing

The active user-based pricing model works by charging customers for each user that is actively using the software. This means that companies will be charged for each user who signs up for their account and uses it at least once in a given period. The amount that companies are charged typically depends on the features they are using and how many users they have accessing those features.

For example, Company A has 10 employees who use a certain SaaS product regularly and two additional employees who only use it occasionally. Company A would pay for all 12 users, not just the 10 regular ones—and depending on their agreement with their SaaS provider, they might also be charged extra for those two occasional users.

Examples of Active Users-Bases Pricing

Dropbox, Asana, Zendesk, and Salesforce are all examples of providers who have adopted active user-based pricing models. As a part of their pricing plans, these companies charge customers for each user actively using their software in a given period.

These are just some of the many companies that use this pricing model.

Pros & Cons

Pros:

Flexibility in budgeting for software needs

Ability to add or remove users without long-term contracts and upfront costs

Cons:

Possibility of paying more than necessary with too many inactive users

Necessity of tracking active users to maximize savings

Features-Based Pricing

Evernote pricing

The features-based pricing model is a popular option for SaaS applications. This type of pricing model focuses on providing customers with bundles of features at different price points, allowing them to pay only for the features they need most and customize their plans accordingly.

Examples of Featured Based Pricing

For example, a SaaS application might offer three tiers of plan options: basic, pro, and enterprise. The basic plan could include core functionality such as an online store and basic analytics software, while the professional plan could offer more sophisticated tracking tools and customer support chat integrated into the platform. The enterprise tier would then provide additional advanced features such as automated workflows, data mining capabilities and other sophisticated customizations.

Each level would come with its own associated cost. For instance, the basic package may cost $10/month, while the professional package costs $20/month, and the enterprise package could cost $50/month or more. Customers can select the appropriate plan based on their needs and budget in order to get access to only what they need without having to pay for more than they require.

Examples of this kind of pricing model include: Adobe Creative Cloud and Hubspot. You would see different plans for various levels of features, such as the Photography Plan or All Apps Plan. The more features you need, the higher price you would have to pay.

Pros & Cons of Features-Based Pricing Model

Pros:

Allows customers to customize packages based on their needs

Easy to understand consumers

Flexible to scale up as business expands

Cons:

Can be challenging to price different feature bundles accurately

May be difficult for consumers to compare prices across products

Can lead to “Feature Creep” where too many unrelated features are incentivized

Freemium Pricing Model

Canva pricing

The freemium pricing model is a pricing strategy that allows customers to access a basic version of a service for free, with the option to upgrade to a paid version for additional features and services. This model is particularly useful for companies that want to attract a large number of customers and build a customer base.

Examples Of Freemium Model

Canva: You can use Canva for free or you can sign up for additional features and benefits that go beyond the free version of the product and app.

Spotify: Spotify offers a free version of its music streaming service, with the option to upgrade to a paid version for additional features and services such as ad-free listening and offline playback.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn offers a free version of its professional networking service, with the option to upgrade to a paid version for additional features and services such as advanced search and messaging capabilities.

Pros and Cons:

Pros:

Attracts a large number of customers

Builds a customer base

Increases brand awareness

Cons:

Can be difficult to convert free users to paid users

Can lead to decreased revenue if free users do not upgrade

Can lead to decreased revenue if free users do not upgrade

SaaS Pricing Strategies Most Commonly Followed

Common SaaS pricing strategies

Understanding the pricing models is essential, but it's also important to know the strategies behind them. After all, effective execution starts with proper planning.

In this section, we'll dive into the strategies that drive these pricing models and how they can be implemented to optimize your SaaS pricing and drive growth for your business.

Penetration Pricing Strategy

This pricing strategy is often used by businesses to quickly gain market share by setting a low initial price for a product or service. The idea is that once a significant portion of the market is captured, the price can be increased. This strategy is particularly effective for new businesses entering a crowded market, as it allows them to quickly establish a foothold with a low-priced offering. However, it can be difficult to raise prices later on without losing customers.

Captive Pricing Strategy

Captive pricing strategy is used to make it difficult for customers to switch to a competitor's offering. This can be achieved through proprietary technology, exclusive distribution agreements, or other means. This strategy is used by companies that have a unique product or service that is not easily replicated by competitors. It is especially useful in cases where switching costs are high for the customer.

Skimming Pricing Strategy

Skimming pricing strategy involves setting a high initial price for a product or service, and then gradually lowering the price over time. This is often used when a product or service is new and there is a high level of demand. The high initial price allows the business to generate a large profit early on, while the gradual price decrease can help to maintain demand as the product or service becomes more widely available.

Prestige Pricing Strategy

Prestige pricing strategy involves setting a high price for a product or service in order to create an image of exclusivity or luxury. This can be used to differentiate a product or service from competitors and appeal to a certain type of customer. This strategy is often used by high-end luxury brands and can be effective in generating a sense of prestige and exclusivity.

Bundle Pricing Strategy

Bundle pricing strategy involves offering a group of products or services at a discounted price when purchased together. This can be used to increase sales and customer loyalty. Bundle pricing is often used by retailers and service providers to offer customers a deal that is too good to pass up.

Freemium Pricing Strategy

Freemium pricing strategy involves offering a basic version of a product or service for free, with the option to upgrade to a paid version with additional features or services. This can be used to attract a large user base and generate revenue from a small percentage of users who upgrade. This strategy is particularly effective for software and app development companies, as it allows them to provide a taste of their product to a large user base at no cost.

Value-Based Pricing Strategy

Value-based pricing strategy involves setting the price for a product or service based on the perceived value that it offers to customers. This can be used to appeal to customers who are willing to pay more for a higher-quality or more useful product or service. This strategy is particularly effective for businesses that can demonstrate the value of their product or service through research or testimonials.

Cost-Plus Pricing Strategy

Cost-plus pricing strategy involves setting the price for a product or service by adding a markup to the cost of production. This can be used to ensure that the business is generating a profit on each sale. This strategy is often used by manufacturers and wholesalers, as it is a simple and straightforward way to ensure profitability.

Pricing Strategy examples

Penetration Pricing: Slack

Captive Pricing: Apple (with proprietary technology such as iOS)

Skimming Pricing: Tesla (with their new car models)

Prestige Pricing: Louis Vuitton

Bundle Pricing: Amazon (with their subscription service, Amazon Prime)

Freemium Pricing: Spotify (with their free version and premium version)

Value-Based Pricing: Patagonia (with their high-quality outdoor clothing and gear)

Cost-Plus Pricing: Wholesale distributors such as Costco

Psychological Tactics to Successfully Price your SaaS Products

SaaS companies are always looking for ways to optimize their pricing strategy to maximize revenue. Fortunately, psychological tactics can give you an advantage when pricing your product. These tactics are based on human behavior and can help influence customers’ decisions when purchasing your product or service. Let’s look at some of the most effective psychological tactics used in SaaS pricing.

Anchoring with a Free Trial

One of the most commonly used psychological tactics in SaaS pricing is anchoring with a free trial. By offering a free trial of your product or service, customers will likely view the full version as cheaper than if they had not experienced the free version first.

This anchoring can be very effective in getting people interested in your product or service and making them feel like they are getting a good deal when they purchase the full version.

We spoke to Bill Wilson of PriceToProfit about one of the strategies called Good-Better-Best pricing and how it dominates B2B SaaS pricing. This is what he shared:

Create packages built around your target personas and the problems you solve But psychological effects also play a huge role. Utilizing the psychology of choice, this strategy leverages two key principles to drive conversions:

Single Option Aversion. Avoid presenting just one option. Prospects are hesitant to make a purchase without comparable options. By offering "Good," "Better," or "Best” options, prospects will feel more confident in making a decision.

Extremeness Aversion. The core principle behind the Good-Better-Best strategy is the Goldilocks effect. This principle states that prospects will tend to disregard the extreme options and instead choose the middle option. "Best" serves as a high anchor, "Good" keeps them grounded on the low end, but "Better" is the sweet spot, just like the porridge in Goldilocks.

The Good-Better-Best pricing strategy can help eliminate hesitancy, fulfill the prospect’s need for comparison and guide them to the package you want most for them to buy.

When asked why this strategy could help Wilson said:

“Ultimately you want to change the conversation in your prospect's mind from: "Am I going to buy from you?” to "What am I going to buy from you?"

Decoy Pricing

Decoy pricing

Another tactic used by many SaaS companies is decoy pricing. Decoy pricing involves offering multiple different versions of the same product at different prices. Two of the products are so closely priced with so much additional value that the one that is slightly more expensive tends to be perceived as a no-brainer decision for the customer.

For example, if you were selling a subscription-based software, you could offer two packages—one for $20/month and one for $35/month—and make sure that there is something exclusive about the higher-priced package that makes it appear worth spending more money on. This tactic encourages people to spend more money on the higher-priced option because it appears more valuable than the cheaper option.

Price Ending

Price ending strategy

Price ending is another common psychological tactic used in SaaS pricing strategies.

This tactic involves setting prices that end in “9” or “99” instead of round numbers such as “50” or “100” (e.g., $49 instead of $50). The idea behind this tactic is that customers perceive these prices as lower than they are because they perceive it is a dollar less (e.g., $49 versus $50). Studies have shown that price ending can effectively encourage customers to purchase products or services at slightly higher prices than they would normally pay for round numbers such as fifty dollars ($50).

These are just some examples of psychological tactics many successful SaaS companies use today when setting their prices for products and services.

Other popular psychological tactics that can influence pricing include:

Loss Aversion

Scarcity

Social Proof

Justification Pricing

Inertia Pricing

Familiarity Pricing

Reciprocity Pricing

Anchoring With A Free Trial

Key Metrics That Will Help Guide Your Pricing

You now understand how to use psychological tactics when planning your pricing strategy.

The next step is to understand the metrics that need to be considered to ensure it all works out. It's also important to track and analyze key metrics associated with your business to ensure that the pricing model you choose is =working effectively. Keep in mind the following key metrics as you iterate and build on your SaaS pricing strategy:

LTV/CAC Ratio

The idea of an LTV/CAC ratio compares the lifetime value (LTV) of a customer to the cost of acquiring that customer (CAC). A high LTV/CAC ratio indicates that your pricing model is sustainable and profitable and a low ratio will give you an indication that you may want to make some adjustments to the way you’re operating and running your business.

Gross MRR Churn Ratio

The Gross MRR Churn Ratio is a formula that measures the percentage of monthly recurring revenue (MRR) that is lost due to customers canceling their subscriptions. A low gross MRR churn ratio indicates that your pricing model is retaining customers effectively.

Expansion MRR

Another metric measured in SaaS pricing model analysis is the additional revenue generated—or the expansion MRR—from existing customers who upgrade to a higher-priced package or add additional services or features. A high expansion MRR indicates that your pricing model is effectively upselling to existing customers.

Upgrade MRR

Finally, the upgrade MRR metric measures the revenue generated from customers who upgrade to a higher-priced package. A high upgrade MRR indicates that your pricing model is effectively encouraging customers to upgrade.

Factors to Consider when Setting SaaS Pricing

Setting the right price for your SaaS product is essential to ensure that you are both profitable and competitive.

There are several factors to consider when it comes to pricing, so it’s important to understand these factors and how they can impact your pricing model.

Let's review some of the key pricing factors for SaaS products and provide tips for setting effective prices.

Target Market Analysis

Before you set a price, it’s important to understand who your target market is and what they are looking for. This will help you determine the value of your product and the price point most likely to attract customers.

It’s also important to research the competition to understand the current market prices and what customers expect.

Cost of Goods Sold

When setting a price, it’s important to consider your cost of goods sold (COGS). This includes everything from materials and labor costs associated with producing the product and any other costs related to running your business, such as rent or utilities.

Knowing your COGS will help you determine a fair price that covers your expenses while leaving room for profit margins.

Sales and Marketing Expenses

In addition to COGS, you must factor in sales and marketing expenses when setting a price.

These costs include advertising fees, sales staff salaries, website maintenance fees, etc.

Knowing these expenses can help you determine how much money needs to be made from each sale for your business model to be successful.

Development Costs

Finally, when setting a price, you must consider any development costs associated with creating and maintaining your product or service. This includes software licensing fees, server costs, hosting fees, etc. These costs can quickly add up, so they must be factored into your pricing model to make sure you can profit on each sale.

5 Best Practices for SaaS Pricing Strategies

As the industry grows, businesses must have an effective pricing strategy to compete and remain profitable. Here are the five best practices for creating and optimizing your SaaS pricing strategy.

Test Different Pricing Models

One of the most important aspects of creating a successful pricing plan is testing different models and seeing which works best for your business. A few common strategies include charging a flat fee, offering tiered plans, or using pay-as-you-go subscriptions.

It’s also important to consider how other companies in your field are pricing their services, so you know what competitive rates look like in the market. It may be helpful to test different options on small subsets of customers before introducing them across the board.

Communicate Value To Customers

Your customers should understand why they should pay for your services and how much value they get from them. Ensure this message is communicated clearly throughout all customer communications, including emails, website messaging, sales calls, etc.

This will help increase customer loyalty and engagement with your product or service.

Be Transparent About Pricing Changes

Customers need to be aware of any changes to the prices of your services so they can make informed decisions about whether they want to stay with you or switch providers. Be sure to provide ample notice before any changes take effect so customers can adjust accordingly.

If possible, offer existing customers discounted rates compared to new ones as an incentive to stay with you during increased prices or decreased features/services offered.

Discounts And Promotions

Offering discounts and promotions can be a great way to attract new customers and retain existing ones who may be considering switching providers due to increased prices or decreased features/services offered by your company.

When offering discounts, make sure that they are tailored specifically towards certain customer segments, such as students or small businesses who may not be able to afford full-price services but still need access to quality products/services provided by your company to remain viable competitors in their respective fields/industries.

Continuously Review and Optimize Pricing

You must continuously review and optimize your pricing structure to keep up with changing market conditions and customer needs/preferences. This will help you maximize profit potential while still providing quality products/services at competitive rates within your industry sector.

Final Verdict: Pricing Depends On The SaaS

And with that, you now know exactly how you price your SaaS.

A solid pricing plan is the foundation for a thriving SaaS business. With the right approach and strategy, you can unlock the full potential of your product or service and stand out in the competitive SaaS market.

By determining the value of your offering, researching the market and your competitors, and utilizing the seven strategically-minded techniques outlined in this guide, you can craft a pricing plan that truly resonates with your target audience.

Furthermore, it's essential to understand the different pricing models and how they can be tailored to fit the unique needs of your business.

Get creative with monetization tactics, stay on top of industry trends, and you'll be well on your way to crafting a pricing plan that drives revenue and keeps customers coming back for more.

***Ross Simmonds*** posted to Growth on June 23, 2023

In China, users prefer lifetime purchases. Of course, the desired strategy is the method of bait pricing.***ShawnGuo*** 2 days ago

Hey Ross, thanks for sharing. What is your take on life-time deals ? In which case is it work trying according to you ?***Robin\_Saulet*** 7 days ago

More informative. thanks***graphtrade*** 19 days ago

As an indiehacker, you don’t need to think about it so much in the early stage. The pricing strategy should be adjusted every three to six months. Move fast.***arminli*** 4 months ago

I agree that it's key to adjust quickly! The key is to have at the very least a pricing strategy to start that aligns with your market. I see a lot of indie hackers going into markets with pricepoints that are actually TOO SMALL to be taken seriously.***thecoolestcool*** 4 months ago

Agree with this wholeheartedly. Validating market is way more crucial than optimizing pricing. secondary discussion for newbies. Have seen indiehackers jack up pricing and crush it after minimizing churn a few years in.***AmerigoApp*** 4 months ago

indeed***arminli*** 4 months ago

Love the content. As I just started my own sass business AskGenie, this will be super helpful when we need to iterate on our current business model.

askgenie a month ago

Informative article, thanks!

Mosmn a month ago

Great post, I'm building microsaasdb.com a database of 1700+ money making saas and I always wondered if I should add a pricing section in the metrics section. Now I'm convinced! it's interesting how different saas founders make choices on pricing.***Subro*** 4 months ago

Amazing breakdown, thank you for the shared knowledge***iva\_buzuk*** 4 months ago

Thanks for the kind words !***thecoolestcool*** 4 months ago

Great write up. One other model not discussed is the "pay what you like" model. I realize this isn't very common but for certain products, like mine for example, where the value is really in the eye of the beholder I think this model can make sense. You can set a floor but also allow those who really love the idea to support it how they see fit. Probably not the best for a mission critical business but for a find side project I think its a viable option.***APSquared*** 4 months ago

A very in-depth article about pricing! I conducted extensive research on this topic, investing several hours, and I can confidently say that your comprehensive guide provides ample knowledge for startup founders and indie hackers. You highlight the most critical models, weighing their pros and cons! I would advise others to utilize this article as the foundation for their pricing decisions and to experiment a bit with it. Discovering the right pricing strategy often unfolds as the business itself evolves.***cyberlulu92*** 3 months ago

Thank you for the insights! As a beginner I'm not yet at a stage to think about pricing strategies, but this will surely be helpful in the future***moritzroessler*** 3 months ago

the reason why Saas matters: Value Perception: Pricing directly impacts how customers perceive the value of a SaaS product. If the pricing is too high, potential customers may perceive the product as overpriced and seek alternatives. On the other hand, if the pricing is too low, it may raise doubts about the quality and capabilities of the solution.***HilaryMersi*** 4 months ago

Great post! Thank you for sharing it.***AlyAb*** 4 months ago

So valuable article, thanks Ross!***LeonardoCitton*** 4 months ago

Nice - how would you propose pricing something that is somewhat of a commodity? Such as a UX layer around a (specially trained) ChatGPT chatbot? Im aiming at a freemium model for now with $20 p/m if above a certain usage limit.***Jimjoe*** 4 months ago

Insightful***Esra\_Digitalsero*** 4 months ago

One important thing that you don't talk about is the risk of Pay As You Go or Usage Based pricing.

Usage Based pricing is inherently post-paid (as opposed to pre-paid), so you have no guarantee that your customer will pay for the service they use. I have been running a small html parsing/proxy service for a couple years. It seems quite common for customers to use the service for a month and then not pay for their usage, which means if you have costs associated with this usage (e.g. servers, bandwidth, APIs, etc.) you need to be prepared to foot the bill for that.

This issue was part of the reason why I switched to a mostly Tiered-Based pricing model which requires customers to pre-pay for their usage.***Spencer\_von\_der\_Ohe*** 4 months ago

Thank you so much for sharing such an informative and valuable information, will start practical soon!***Mart\_henrey*** 4 months ago

As with all guidance, it's always best to test for each particular product situation.

For example, the Single Option Aversion is giving users multiple choices which may adversely lead to Decision Paralysis: the customer finds it too difficult to make a choice and therefore makes no decision at all (E.g. doesn't purchase the product).

For the product I develop, I originally implemented both a monthly and an annual payment option. The annual option was more than 12 x the monthly option, so it should have encouraged users to purchase an annual plan.

Two problems occurred with this:

Overall conversion rate was low

Most customers still chose the monthly option

After testing, changing to only having an annual option got a better overall outcome.

More customers converted, revenue was higher and the retention rate was higher.***mbickham*** 4 months ago

Nice article, Ross! Interesting read. A while ago I wrote an article around strategic positioning of a product. I think yours is a nice deepdive on the pricing!***Ruben88*** 4 months ago

Thank you for this deep dive! Pricing tends to be a big question for many early-stage startups, so this thorough breakdown is quite helpful to determine which structure could work.***tori*** 4 months ago

Amazing post! really informative and helpful for me.***neha\_*** 4 months ago

This is absolutely incredible info. I launched an unlimited software development subscription service today on PH named poket dev and I implemented a flat rate pricing model with discounts based on monthly, quarterly, or yearly payments. My monthly plan is $5995/mo, quarterly $5495/mo, and yearly $4995/mo. I used "value based" pricing methodology as it's called in your write up. I don't have any direct competitors and am the first person in my space. It will take a lot of work/effort from me per customer and it will save the customers a lot of money versus hiring/contracting software engineers directly. I think my pricing is a win/win? Although, I believe it will take quite a while before I get my first subscriptions.***trevtravtrev*** 4 months ago

Can you share the link to your service? I'm curious to see if it's a right fit for me...***Hiredgo0on*** 4 months ago

Website: www.poketdev.com

Product Hunt: https://www.producthunt.com/posts/poket-dev***trevtravtrev*** 4 months ago

Wow, very informative! Thanks, it's clear you put a lot of time in this***ViktorBash*** 4 months ago

Very comprehensive guide! Really love the detail that you went into. I'd like to add that there's no simple way to discover the right price to maximize the revenues. Always experiment and find out what works for your market and how far you can push it.

I haven't been afraid of sharp price rises nor price drops. Just take care of your existing customers and you can do a lot with this.***cyrilgupta*** 4 months ago

Well-organized handbook for SaaS pricing!***eric\_lee*** 4 months ago

Thanks Eric - Glad it resonated!***thecoolestcool*** 4 months ago

Pretty extensive guide!! Very informative.***n\_a\_\_m\_\_a\_n*** 4 months ago

Ultimately, this guide will help you make informed decisions about your SaaS pricing to maximize revenue and customer satisfaction.***indiancodegirl*** 4 months ago

Thanks for the great analysis. It was informative and really helpful for me.***northerlyaffected*** 4 months ago

Appreciate the kind words.***thecoolestcool*** 4 months ago

Great content!

I interview a pricing advisor on other aspects of marketing such as positioning and trust-building. If anyone is interested we recorded it - https://youtu.be/ADVOCa9Jeso***oba2311*** 4 months ago

Thanks for sharing it. It's informative and truly helpful to me.***NaomiChiu*** 4 months ago

Love hearing that!***thecoolestcool*** 4 months ago

Very solid introduction to a complex topic! Also important to consider is that if you 'experiment' on live customers in switching between models, you need to estimate how many customers you are prepared to lose.***lynnfredricks*** 4 months ago

Thank you so much. 100% agree with the idea of experimentation.***thecoolestcool*** 4 months ago

The information presented is insightful. I believe the real tussle is choosing between market-based and value-based pricing where most of the time market-based pricing wins.

I'm also building a saas product named, teckle\_io(dot)

what do you think of the pricing here? (if you might go and check).***anuragmd50*** 4 months ago

Nice and simple. I like it!***thecoolestcool*** 4 months ago

It's the first article in the platform, I am amazed by the level knowledge shared in this publication. Thanks! Have you ever implemented techniques using data analytics to optimize the pricing of a SaaS?***samirs95*** 4 months ago

@thecoolestcool how do you test different price points and pricing strategies without being unfair to some of your customers? As a simple example, if you're testing $10/mo vs $100/mo and $10/mo wins... you'd have to refund the people who paid $100 and switch their plan to $10/mo, right? And that might be jarring/confusing for people. Seems like a problematic test to run. Same goes for different strategies. Would love your thoughts on this!***fleur\_inthecity*** 4 months ago

Wow, that might be the most thorough rundown I've seen - thanks!***Toni\_notTony*** 4 months ago

Love to hear it! Thank you so much.

thecoolestcool 4 months ago

## Product-led SEO in the age of AI

and why it matters by Tyler Scionti

We’ve all heard the news: AI is killing search.

Pictures of evil robots and nuclear blasts dot the web as marketers around the globe tremble at the thought of their traffic plummeting.

Already the odds are grim. As it stands, 90% of content does not get any traffic from Google, and as the web grows more crowded (and AI-driven) those odds likely will not improve.

Should marketers throw in the towel on SEO? Or is there a path forward we can take to rise above the competition and continue to grow our traffic?

There is a path forward, but only if you evolve your approach to SEO. In this post, I'll dive into the newest wave in SEO: Product-Led SEO. I'll teach you to think strategically and creatively about SEO so that you can adapt to any change Google throws your way.

Why “Old School” SEO does not work

The reason so many folks in SEO are panicking is that the way most people approach SEO is dying out.

For years, since the dawn of SEO, the method has been straightforward:

Open your favorite keyword research tool

Plug in a seed keyword

Write a blog post (first it was 500 words, then 800, then 1,000…)

Ask for backlinks from webmasters

Repeat.

In the early and mid-2000s, this approach worked wonders. It was the golden goose for many and was unquestionably successful. However, as we moved past the 2010s and now in the 2020s, the golden goose is aging and it’s no longer laying eggs.

Why? Because everyone does this now.

Everyone uses the same keyword research tools, plugs in the same seed keywords, follows the same suggestions, creates similar content, and ends up with SEO strategies that mirror their competitors.

In other words, they don't stand out in Google.

This scenario worsens in the age of AI, where content generation has sped up. The time to write several dozen blog posts has shrunk from months to minutes, thanks to AI tools. In this context, a cookie-cutter SEO strategy will no longer cut the mustard since so many more people will be doing this at scale.

So what are we to do?

Well, we can think differently about SEO. We can think product-led.

Product-led SEO: A new way of approaching SEO strategy

Product-led SEO is a fairly new term (coined, I think, by Eli Schwartz’s book of the same name), however, the principles of it are not entirely new.

I like to define product-led SEO as thinking about your website as a product as opposed to a collection of content.

When most people think about SEO, their mind immediately jumps to blogging. They think, "We need a blog” or “We'll put content on our blog." This has been the common perception of SEO for the past 20 years and it has led to many websites featuring blogs bloated with old content.

Instead of using SEO and keywords to market the product, let your product and customers drive your SEO strategy.

Just as good product managers know their users and this knowledge to inform a product roadmap, good SEO strategists need to know the target user, their challenges, and what their buyer’s journey looks like to inform a content roadmap.

What are the principles of good product management?

I’ve worked as a product manager for over 5 years at HubSpot as well as another tech startup, and over my time at those two companies, I have honed a product manager skillset that adapts surprisingly well to SEO.

“Product management” comes in a variety of flavors, but can usually be boiled down to “own the problem, and be the voice of the customer”. Good product managers have a deep understanding of the customer they solve for and can communicate that understanding to stakeholders. There are three things that I’ve seen product managers do very well:

Understand their users

Innovate

Back up ideas with data

So let’s examine these in a bit more depth.

Understand your users

Good product management starts with a rock-solid understanding of your users.

I have yet to meet an effective product manager who did not regularly talk to customers. It’s just impossible to know what to build if you do not have a firm understanding of the problems you are solving. Knowing the customer is the first step of any product strategy. This involves knowing their preferences, needs, and wants, and translating this understanding into a product or feature that provides value.

Innovate

Good product managers don’t just look at what their competition is doing - they innovate.

Product managers seek out opportunities to innovate and carve out unique spaces in their customers' minds. This involves considering what competitors are doing and finding ways to improve on it, or better yet, identifying what competitors are not doing that can potentially be a unique offering.

Back up ideas with data

Good product managers always rely on data to validate their ideas. Using data-driven insights can show if what you're doing is successful and inform the direction you should take next.

In product management, we often talk about the concept of 'ship it' — regularly releasing features and getting them into users’ hands. This allows you to collect feedback, understand how users interact with the feature, and make iterative improvements.

Now let’s apply these to 5 principles that I believe define product-led SEO.

How product management principles can be applied to SEO

SEO is a heavily data-driven aspect of marketing, and when we look at SEO through a product management lens, we can approach it in innovative and highly effective ways.

Know who you are targeting

To successfully apply product management principles in SEO, we first need to understand who we're targeting. By developing detailed buyer personas, you can get a clear picture of who your audience is and what their pain points are. This will guide your SEO strategy, helping you create content that resonates with your target audience and solves their problems.

Align your SEO efforts to a business outcome

Just like product managers align their work with business goals, SEO should also be aligned with specific business outcomes. You're not just aiming for more traffic or checking off items on a content calendar. The goal is to help the company reach its business objectives. So, it's essential to start with the end in mind, considering what you want to achieve with your SEO efforts.

I’m a big fan of setting SMART SEO goals, these are goals that are specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-bound.

Innovate in the SEO space

You should always be looking for opportunities to innovate within SEO. Instead of replicating what your competitors are doing, find ways to stand out. Consider what questions your competitors aren't answering or find new ways to address those questions.

You can also innovate through the type of content you create. If a video library or interactive quiz would serve your persona better, do that instead of writing the same blog posts as your competitors.

Use data to guide your SEO strategy

Data plays a critical role in a product-led SEO strategy. It can help you understand how your content is performing and how it's impacting your business. Pay attention to the data to be strategic in your approach, be unique, and differentiate yourself from your competition.

Where possible, track metrics that matter to the business (revenue, demos, leads, subscribers) and find ways to attribute movement in these metrics to the activities you are doing (writing content, earning backlinks).

Ship content relentlessly

In the same way that product managers ship features regularly, SEO professionals should be 'shipping' content regularly. Don't sit on drafts or wait for your content to be perfect. Publish it, see how it performs, and then optimize it based on user feedback and data insights.

Applying product management principles to SEO can bring about a fresh perspective and open up a world of opportunities. Understanding your users, aligning with business outcomes, innovating, using data to inform decisions, and relentlessly shipping content are all principles that map well to SEO and marketing. There are three key activities you will do as an SEO: keyword research, content creation, and link building, so let’s apply these principles to them next.

How to apply product-led SEO to your website

When most people talk about SEO it usually comes down to keyword research, content strategy, and link building. Technical SEO is worth paying attention to, but for most websites as long as you have a sitemap and aren’t doing anything too funky with your subdomains, you don’t have to worry too much.

The traditional methods of keyword research, content strategy, and link building are as follows:

Plug a seed keyword into a keyword research tool, and filter by search volume, difficulty, or some other metric.

Create blog content to target these keywords

Spam websites similar to yours for backlinks

Rather than take this approach, here is a product-led way to approach these common SEO tactics.

Product-led keyword research

Keyword research tools are great (we built a pretty good one!), however, they only tell part of the story. If you limit your keyword research to what a tool will spit out, then you will end up with an SEO strategy that is fairly flat and not compelling.

Rather than let a tool do all the work, I try to center my keyword research around the customer I am targeting and the core problems they experience, the goals they have, and the challenges they face in trying to achieve these goals. Like any good product manager, I try to take in as much data (and with as much variety) as possible:

Customer conversations (support or sales)

Customer reviews

Online forums my customers spend time in

Native features within Google (autosuggest)

Traditional keyword research tools

I also like to brainstorm bottom-of-the-funnel keywords by looking at:

What does the product/service do

What are synonyms for it

What are the different categories the target customer would place the product in

The goal here is not to end up with a long list of keywords to target. The goal is to understand how and why your target customer uses Google to solve their problems. When done well, this should give you a sense of the questions your customer is asking and how those questions change and evolve through the funnel.

As an example of creative sources for keyword research, one of my clients sells insoles online.

They have the benefit of competing with major retailers like Amazon, REI, and Dick’s Sporting Goods along with the actual insole brands that they sell.

It’s a recipe for SEO disaster.

Rather than fight the same game all these e-commerce giants play so well, we wanted to know why people bought insoles and if Insoles.com could build a defensive moat for their website. We ran a survey with the Insoles.com team to better understand why their customers bought insoles and how often they did. We found that people buy insoles for three reasons:

For a specific type of shoe

For pain relief

For an activity

So we engineered the entire website to make it as easy as possible for people to find insoles for these three reasons. Insoles.com has pages that cover insoles for any sport, the most common conditions their customers have, as well as many different types of shoes. This led to a small team of 5 absolutely crushing their rivals at SEO and building sustainable traffic over time.

Product-led content strategy

Good products solve problems and do so creatively and uniquely - your website is no different. A product-led content strategy goes beyond the cookie-cutter “write a blog post once per week”. Rather than think about content as some static thing on your website, I like to think about content as a feature designed to serve your users and fit into a larger feature set on your website.

Now, blogging very well could be a great feature for your website. We blog frequently, however, there are other types of content to consider as well:

Landing pages for your SaaS features/use cases

Interactive tools on your website

A resource library

Video/audio content

In building content strategies for clients, the chief aim is to brainstorm a content strategy that is designed to solve problems for the target customer and move them further down the funnel. For an example of this in action, one of my clients is in the video SaaS space and had been burned before by “blog-centric” approaches to SEO.

One of their greatest strengths is the fact that they support converting text to speech for 80+ languages in their video software. This is the key differentiator between them and their competition who are venture-backed and have more powerful user interfaces. Rather than fight on features, we leaned into the fact that Narakeet can blow their competition out of the water with their language support.

They published a series of pages for each language that they support and their traffic exploded. This gave them an authority boost that allowed other pages and older blog posts to start ranking, and the compounding effects of SEO took over from there.

Product-led link building

And lastly everyone’s favorite topic: link building.

Playing the link building numbers game sucks. We’ve all gotten emails that start off with “Hello dear” and then continue on with some drivel about DA and a list of spammy websites. Don’t do this.

Instead, let’s think outside the box, and instead of creating content and then trying to find someone to link to it, create content with the express purpose of earning links.

No one wants to link to your blog unless you have:

Original data

An original interview

Some unique (truly unique) insight

And if you have done a good job of networking in your industry, then you have a recipe for link building success.

Wrapping it all up, what does product-led SEO mean for you?

While the search landscape is undoubtedly changing, I have zero doubts that a product-led approach to SEO will allow websites to adapt, evolve, and continue to grow their traffic.

While generative AI is powerful, most people are using it to simply do what they have been doing for SEO faster (building generic lists of keywords and writing blog posts). All this is going to do is make the web even more crowded than it currently is, which spells disaster for new websites hoping to use SEO as a channel.

Product-led SEO is not a hack or fad, it is an approach to SEO that relies on strategy, creative thinking, and puts your customer at the center of your efforts. While the tactics at our disposal will change, the principles and thought processes will not.

Rather than go into SEO thinking “Oh I’ll just start a blog”, think “How can I make this the most useful and usable website for my target customer”. The more you can lean into solving real problems for your users with content and other SEO tactics at your disposal, the higher your chances are of success. I’ve seen firsthand how this approach can help small teams topple big competitors on Google, and I am confident it will help you carve out a niche for your website in search.

***Tyler Scionti*** posted to SEO on June 28, 2023

How do you see the role of technical SEO evolving in a product-led SEO framework, especially when it comes to site structure and user experience?

miguelcdpm a day ago

Good question!

Technical SEO (IMO) boils down to:

What is the user experience (speed, accessibility, etc)

How can Google access this page

As always, technical SEO is important and a key piece of ensuring your SEO strategy actually is product-led.

At the same time though, it's easy to fall into the trap of over-indexing on technical SEO. Personally, I try not to worry too much about it beyond making sure my website loads reasonably quickly and key pages are being indexed. In that regard, I wouldn't say it needs to evolve much from the priority I would put on technical SEO earlier in my SEO career.***tscionti*** 21 hours ago

Thanks for posting, and sharing this!***briankwizera*** 12 days ago

Glad you enjoyed it!***tscionti*** 21 hours ago

Great post!

Any resources you recommend to learn the fundamentals of SEO quickly? Say a book or course perhaps?***AbhiJariwala*** 15 days ago

Good question!

Biased, but I have a lot of content on my own site (centori.io), The Art Of SEO is good, as is the Product-Led SEO book. The best way to learn though is to practice. Create content, analyze it in Google Search Console, see what works and repeat from there!***tscionti*** 21 hours ago

Great information!***Waivly*** 3 months ago

Thanks glad it's helpful!***tscionti*** 3 months ago

can you share , how can i make seo strategy for a SaaS product, let say it is verification service, can you share actionable steps ? highly appreciate your help***facia*** 4 months ago

i can help!***ella\_hashir*** 2 months ago

Building an SEO strategy is highly nuanced and varies from company to company so without knowing a lot about your business I can't advise much - however I would recommend checking out this guide as I lay out my full SEO strategy process in it! https://www.centori.io/how-to-build-a-winning-seo-strategy***tscionti*** 4 months ago

As someone new to indie hacking this is awesome. I work a difficult job that leaves me about 10 hours free each week to hack on my own site. The goal atm is to release a handful of tutorials to get some SEO going. Each tutorial is in-depth and comes with an open source repo. This means my time between each finished piece is a bit...long. So my thinking is to pepper in lower effort (but still insightful) content between these longer form posts to keep the SEO going. But it's hard to justify spending time on anything that doesn't help me get these tutorials out faster. So for the sake of discussion lets say it takes 3-6 weeks for me to create a full-blown tutorial without any distractions but 5-8 weeks to create one if I devote a bit of time to 2-3 lower effort posts in between. Is the decrease in efficiency on the primary content worth the potential SEO gains by publishing a higher volume of content?***colincampbell*** 4 months ago

Glad to hear it's helpful!

Hear you there, I'm just recently working full-time on my business and used to juggle a day job as a product manager which makes free time (and energy) very scarce.

Great question, when it comes to volume/content production I always lean back on two things:

What is most useful for your target customer?

What is most likely to get me results?

With a newer website, I would try to publish content quickly and at a reasonable scale. This builds up the pages on the site, helps establish topical authority, and can more quickly build up some authority in your niche. However, you need to look through the lens of those two bullets above.

If the low-effort content is not useful for your customer and unlikely to get results (will not rank, or if it did it won't really help your business grow) then I'd nix it. If the lower-effort content is useful and gets results, then I'd probably start there because spending weeks on a content piece means you're that much delayed from getting any traffic/visibility to your website.***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Thanks for the reply! I think that's what I needed to hear :)***colincampbell*** 4 months ago

No problem!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Very good article, thank you.

As a non-SEO expert and non-English speaker, you didn't explicitly name programmatic SEO but I found some similarities.

Am I right? And if not, what's your take on the subject?***MajorBaguette*** 4 months ago

Glad it's helpful!

I would put programmatic SEO under "product-led seo" as a way to approach content. The idea behind product-led SEO is to think of content as a tool for your business as well as for your users.

Programmatic SEO is one way to approach content (if it is applicable to your business/the use case you are trying to solve for) that differentiates from the standard "just write a blog post".***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Nice article. I've started on the SEO game myself, and have some similar thoughts. Most of my blog posts are more like features than articles. I figure AI can regurgitate stolen content easily, but it's not yet at the point where it can augment content with features.

I made an article about vocal ranges where the reader can actually hear the ranges and take a test to find their own vocal range (https://tonescholar.com/blog/understanding-vocal-ranges-and-how-to-find-yours) and another article that let's people test if they have perfect pitch (https://tonescholar.com/blog/can-perfect-pitch-be-learned)

I'm finding that making this type of SEO content is time consuming, so I'm hoping it'll eventually pay off

strugbus a month ago

insightful! thank you!***Unicorncorn*** 2 months ago

Glad it's helpful!***tscionti*** 2 months ago

This is actually a huge problem exactly as you mentioned. The key is standing out from the noise and being smart about your approach. Strategizing with the integration of innovation is key.***HarisZafar*** 2 months ago

Yep exactly!***tscionti*** 2 months ago

Hey Pal! Thank You for the information I am also a Digital marketer this information is really important for me. I am quite impressed with how you wrote every detail in very simple language. Can you give me some tips for content writing?***nezuko3104*** 3 months ago

Thanks!

Honestly, practice.

I've been writing for many years, for myself and for clients and I read a lot too. Sure, some people are "natural" writers, but anyone can become a great writer with consistent practice. I try to write every day, and with a decent enough client load, it is not hard to keep that habit up.

If you want some books to help you upskill as a writer, I'd recommend:

On Writing by Stephen King

Everybody Writes by Ann Handley

The Copywriter's Handbook by Robert W. Bly

But also find an author (or authors) that you like to read, and mimic their style. I'm a big C.S. Lewis fan, who does an excellent job of writing about complex topics in extremely simple and matter-of-fact language, so over time it has gradually influenced my own style.***tscionti*** 3 months ago

Thank you for suggestions.***andrewboman*** 3 months ago

Thanks for the great article, as a beginner this is helpful.

For me SEO is still a difficult topic. It's a shame that I have little experience in SEO even though I'm working as a web dev for over 10 years.

That's something I need to research. I have almost no traffic coming from google, so I definitely need to work on that.***moritzroessler*** 3 months ago

Glad it's helpful!

I'd recommend browsing some of the free resources on my website (https://www.centori.io/resources) as they'll give you access to some more in-depth guides to help you on your way!

It's easy to overcomplicate SEO, but I try to boil it down to 2 things:

Are you answering questions your customers are asking with useful content?

Can Google see and index this content?

If you do those 2 things consistently, it will pay off. People overcomplicate SEO by worrying about technical aspects, crawl depth, etc - but that's irrelevant for most websites, especially small websites starting out.***tscionti*** 3 months ago

It makes sense, but many products have encountered difficulties in finding product positioning and market pain points. There are not so many users and feedback. What should we do? How to quickly obtain feedback, find positioning, and find market pain points? opinion?

ps, can you distinguish the ai content? Seriously, I can’t***PDFReaderPro*** 3 months ago

Great question!

I would argue that if you do not yet know your product positioning and who your customers are, then SEO is not the right channel/it's not the right time for SEO.

Yes, SEO is a long game so you need to start early. However, from experience working with dozens of early-mid stage SaaS companies, next to impossible to get any value out of SEO when you don't know who you are marketing to.

If I did not have users/clearly defined positioning, I'd spend a lot more time talking to people. Build your network, show up where your customers are, and do the necessary research to define what it is that you do, and who your best-fit customer is.

As for whether I can tell the difference between ai content and "real" content, it's a bit of a moot point. AI content is here (to stay, for now), what matters is are we creating the right content for the right person.***tscionti*** 3 months ago

Great post Tyler!

No one wants to link to your blog unless you have:

Original data

An original interview

Some unique (truly unique) insight

I think you hit the nail on the head here. With more and more AI generated blog posts popping up, these 3 things differentiate insightful & original content from the AI word vomit blog posts.***ScottJames*** 3 months ago

Thanks Scott glad you liked it!

Bingo - big opportunity to stand out and cut through the clutter on the web, all it takes is a bit more creativity to do it***tscionti*** 3 months ago

Make sense, great post!***ahaapple*** 4 months ago

Thanks!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Loved the Article!***Anisha0102*** 4 months ago

Thanks glad it's helpful!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Good article! New websites can find it really hard to get any views through google search with the traditional SEO. Product led SEO seems to be a good approach, but maybe need to explore some more examples to create strategies for it***snehalm*** 4 months ago

Thanks! Agreed - I'd recommend testing it out. Look for the pain points of your target market and see how you can address them in unique ways with content, then monitor the content and see what results it generates. An iterative/experimental approach to SEO (coming from a product-led approach) helps a great deal here.***tscionti*** 4 months ago

While it's true that the traditional approach to SEO might be losing its effectiveness, I believe that AI and advancements in technology actually provide us with more opportunities to optimize our websites and content.

Rather than abandoning SEO altogether, we should embrace these changes and find innovative ways to leverage AI and automation in our strategies.***SolopreneurWanderer*** 4 months ago

I'm interested to see how this trend will continue as traditional SEO becomes less useful. I would also be interested in seeing how it improves products as a whole, as companies learn the true value of product-led SEO.***BotButcher*** 4 months ago

it doesn't work because the internet is changing, google search and the data and rules are changing as well***HilaryMersi*** 4 months ago

AI is absolutely an amazing opportunity but within some limit as we are humans and only human can actually understands what we want not some restricted robots. so, seo is always ever-green industry in my opinion. I have researched on it a lot and also created a site: "thetophoops" totally human created and going very good.***thetophoops26*** 4 months ago

Great article. The only way to win at SEO now is by raising the bar and adding actual value to the user.***andfacts*** 4 months ago

Thanks!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

No doubt Ai is beneficial but we can not 100% on it. sometime it did a very common mistake which we can not expect from anyone. Like i have a site goldcartsguide some time i got information from AI for blog and most of the it gives wrong information.***lily1*** 4 months ago

Great article, i also recommend scanning reddit for question and intent combinations. I have been able to find low difficulty keywords by following random Q&A channels and writing SEO pieces to target recurring questions (after checking Semrush ofcourse that these are low keyword difficulty keywords)***Jimjoe*** 4 months ago

Thanks! Reddit is one of my favorite sources, Quora as well depending on the market you're in. Real questions from real people are where I usually start my keyword research as well!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

I think the approach of SEO is changing every day. Earlier the number of backlinks on a website used to matter but now the quality of links matters. When we thought AI can take SEO roles but now we can use AI for our SEO activities. The way you explained product-led SEO is interesting and we can give it a try.***kanika*** 4 months ago

Great article, I hate the old SEO ways and it's really refreshing to see everything move towards a more organic approach.***becks0509*** 4 months ago

Glad you enjoyed it! Likewise, glad to share another approach to SEO (and one that I've seen work much better than the old ways of doing it)***tscionti*** 4 months ago

hey really love this article, Tyler. Somebody said a while back that as a new agency owner, it is better to do cold outreach than SEO. What do you think of this take?***sandra\_vu*** 4 months ago

Glad it's helpful!

Really good question. While I love SEO as a channel, it's not my top choice to get the first customers for a new business. The reason for that is SEO is so competitive that you really need a firm understanding of who your customer is so that you can target them effectively. You can't really do that (IMO) until you have customers.

To get your first customers (by first I mean 1-10) I'd plug your network, and show up where your audience is. Build up a sense of who your best customer is, and then lean into SEO to target them and grow your client base at scale.

I checked out your profile and saw you have a design agency, which is awesome because good design is really difficult (speaking as a non-designer who loves/hates designing) so if you show up where your audience is and are helpful you stand a very good chance at getting people to pay attention to what you have to say. For example, I read an article here the other day on "design thinking" - that is a crowded space and probably wouldn't rank on Google, but I read it here and found it to be immensely helpful.***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Thank you, Tyler. This is an incredibly thoughtful response. I have some more ideas to advertise my service.

It is also great that you appreciate design too.

Good luck with your venture. I believe if you keep this up, you will have traction.***sandra\_vu*** 4 months ago

Thank you and likewise!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

bookmarked***tamfocus\_*** 4 months ago

This is quality mate!***IronBrands*** 4 months ago

Thanks glad you liked it!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

That was a great read, well put.***RogerX*** 4 months ago

Thanks glad it was helpful!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Awesome***fajarsiddiq*** 4 months ago

Great advice! What should someone do if they don't have any customers yet to gather feedback from for SEO optimisation?***sayonidroy*** 4 months ago

Good question!

If you don't have any customers then I assume/hope you're talking to your target market to validate your product/service. I'd lean into that for a source of feedback and questions!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Great post, bookmarked!***raiusamG*** 4 months ago

Thanks glad it is helpful!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Growth by Word of mouth becomes ever more important***Adamator*** 4 months ago

I'm a big fan of interactive tools in terms of engagement. But what would you suggest for distribution to an early stage startup?***n\_a\_\_m\_\_a\_n*** 4 months ago

Any way that makes them easily accessible and useful IMO.

For the SEO benefit, I'm a fan of either having them in the top-level nav or in the footer nav. This signals to Google that the pages are high-priority which can improve their organic rankings as well.

Other distribution tactics could be ads, your email list - it depends on what tool you've built, who you are going after, and the best medium to catch their attention to try it out.***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Appreciate this, Tyler! What advice can you give to a newbie about backlinks?***MM\_Alex*** 4 months ago

Thanks!

Build relationships, not links. I've gotten guest postings through relationships with other websites and folks in my niche. It's much better to be asked to guest post than emailing 100 people hoping you'll get one response.

Also, create content worth being linked to. No one is going to link to a blog post, but if you have original data, insights, or an interview (something that is hard to create) then you stand a much better chance at someone paying attention to your content and linking to it!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Thanks for sharing Tyler. I will definitely implement some of the stuff you mentioned.***IIvtan*** 4 months ago

Glad it's helpful!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Pretty cool article, thanks for sharing!

My biggest accomplishment around SEO is being on a top 3 position for this page: changelog tools. Only issue is that there is a lot of competition, but not many people searching the keyword.

Any recommendations?***Ruben88*** 4 months ago

Thanks!

And awesome job! I see it as well for "best changelog tools".

My next step would be to ask what else your customers are looking for/asking online. A good topic for you might be "customer feedback" and I'm guessing you sell to product managers.

Assuming that is correct, from experience, not every product org has a good way of collecting and using feedback. I've worked for some companies that did it very well, and others that did it very poorly -> there's an education opportunity there throughout the funnel for you. Try to think of your website as the ultimate destination for your target customer to A) Get answers to their questions B) Learn to do their job better and C) FInd a product that solves their problems.***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Great article. Will share that in the next edition of The Traffic Talk. Thanks for sharing! 👍***whereismypen*** 4 months ago

Thanks so much!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

That's so useful!***Outflow*** 4 months ago

Glad to hear it!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

so helpful***kylewillson*** 4 months ago

Glad to hear it!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

find ways to attribute movement in these metrics to the activities you are doing (writing content, earning backlinks)

I often find it difficult to connect KPIs to specific SEO efforts (or other marketing efforts for that matter). Any tips on how to do this?***IndieJames*** 4 months ago

Great question!

I always start with the end result in mind: what action do we want a user to take? And then work backward from the steps to get there.

For instance, if I want demos for my SaaS app, then I need people to either:

Book a demo from the home page

Book a demo from a features landing page

Book a demo from the pricing page

I'll want to track those events (using Google Tag manager and Google Analytics), and then see what is driving those events.

For instance, I log an event when people visit the pricing page. This allows me to see which content and channels drive that event the most. I can compare PPC campaigns to SEO, or social media channels, and even see what content someone landed on that led to that event being completed.***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Yeah, I worked at an SEO shop for a while and they pretty much just found keywords and wrote for them. Oh, and link-building. There was very little interaction with the client's customers and even less focus on alternatives to long-form blog content or landing pages. What you're describing here makes a lot of sense!***Toni\_notTony*** 4 months ago

Thanks glad to hear it's helpful!***tscionti*** 4 months ago

Tyler, you've brilliantly highlighted the need to adapt our approach to SEO in the age of AI. The traditional methods are losing their effectiveness as everyone follows the same cookie-cutter strategies. That's where product-led SEO comes in. By treating your website as a product and focusing on understanding your users, innovating, and using data strategically, you can rise above the competition and create compelling content that resonates with your target audience. I love how you emphasize the importance of solving real problems and constantly shipping valuable content. It's a refreshing perspective that opens up new opportunities. Thanks for sharing these insights and showing us a path forward in the ever-evolving world of SEO! 🚀💡***umararshad2*** 4 months ago

The article sheds light on the significance of product-led SEO in the age of AI. It emphasizes the need to align SEO strategies with user experience and leverage AI technologies for personalized and relevant content. By embracing product-led SEO and harnessing AI's power, businesses can enhance online visibility, drive organic traffic, and stay competitive in the digital marketplace***Mart\_henrey*** 4 months ago

Loved the article !!

Humans have discovered information through people since the birth of language. Now, we get most of our content recommendation from AI and 95% of AI is either sales or spy agent. That's why we are building https://treeved.com.

TreeVed is a URL discovery platform through people you trust. It helps you to express and connect with people by the content you consume.

example:

Suppose you want to learn psychology and you searched it on google. All the results will be focused on the sales. But on TreeVed you can find lists like this https://www.treeved.com/list/?id=psychology-resources-2295946843

or connect with people in the domain to get recommendations.***SatyatheBuilder*** 4 months ago

This comment was deleted 2 months ago.

DavidsonCliff 3 months ago

1

Totally looks like AI response***kinder*** 2 months ago

This comment was deleted 4 months ago.

DeletedUser 4 months ago

1

No problem! Glad it's helpful!

tscionti 4 months ago

## Side project hit $10K MRR!

by Kyle Nolan

It took 2+ years of bootstrapping solo on nights and weekends, and frankly I did not believe I would get this far.

I remember an old tweet from Jon Yongfook about the idea of a community for $10k+ MRR founders. At the time, I felt like that would apply to me in approximately... never in a million years!

I marveled at what life might be like for guys like him, Pieter Levels, Danny Postma, Damon Chen, Dan Rowden, and Arvid Kahl, and admired the blend of skill and scrappiness they applied to build and scale real businesses.

But for me? No, that didn't feel like it was in the cards. The voice in my head would say I'm just a guy that likes to make stuff, not a "real entrepreneur" or startup founder.

And yet, here I am drafting THE UPDATE. The one on reaching the mythical $10k MRR milestone of indiehacking lore.

Initially I built https://projectionlab.com simply because I wanted a better plan for my own financial future. And the fact that so many others wanted that too came as a bit of a surprise! But when people signed up and started asking for new features, I put my nose to the grindstone. And kept it there for the past two years.

This is not a viral growth chart like you're used to seeing with all these new AI products, but here is a look at my journey so far:

→ 9 months to get to $1,000

→ 4 months to get to $2,000

→ 7 months to get to $5,000

→ 2 months to get to $6,000

→ 2 months to get to $8,500

→ 2 months to get to $10,000

Building PL as a side project has been a double-edged sword. It meant not worrying about survival, but it also meant making sacrifices and prioritizing my time ruthlessly.

It forced me to focus on tasks that actually moved the needle, but also came with some side effects I am not as proud of:

Less and worse sleep

Rarely have time to visit family

Have not been to the gym in months (just bike + calisthenics at home)

Still, nothing matches watching a passion project blossom into something real that can make a small impact in the lives of people you've never met. And it may come at a price, but it does feel good to put those early feelings of imposter syndrome to rest. (well, mostly)

As I look ahead to what's next, I wonder if now is the moment I should start dedicating a more formal percentage of my time. e.g. if I could drop to 75% or 50% at my day job, how many of you think that sounds like a good idea? Let me know in the comments!

***Kyle Nolan*** posted to Growth on June 16, 2023

Let me just say this: you're awesome for being so kind, sharing your journey, and being "this person" for so many others in our community right now :D***arvidkahl*** 5 months ago

Thanks so much Arvid! There have been a lot of ups and downs along the way, and at times it has felt like a real grind. But being able to take something that's just an idea and manifest it as a real thing that makes a small impact in the world is an experience I wouldn't trade for anything :)***knolan*** 5 months ago

Thanks so much for sharing this post, I really needed to hear a story like this to help keep me motivated. I've been sloooowly chipping away at a side project for 2 years, we are getting there but little reads like this are really needed.

Looks like a great product, huge congrats on tour success! Keep pushing to the next milestone 💪🕺***ewhicher*** 4 months ago

Congrats! Your landing page and product look really cool.

Also, the achievement is huge! Remember to also take care of yourself and reward yourself for the amazing results!***XCS*** 4 months ago

Thanks for sharing your story, it's inspiring to see what you've achieved.

You mention ProjectionLab being something you wanted to use yourself, and I'd be interested to know if the personal desire to see this project had much of an impact. Have you found it easier to motivate yourself? Has it helped or hindered when thinking about how other people might want to use the product? If you were to start again would you look to find/interact with potential users earlier?

I'd also love to know how you've managed to be so productive. Any tips for choosing technology, workflows, etc that allow you to iterate quickly whilst ensuring costs don't snowball?***adie*** 5 months ago

Thanks Adie! Honestly, if I didn't have the burning desire to use the tool for my own life planning, there's no way I could have mustered the motivation, consistency, (and obsession) required to get it to this stage.

Something I definitely should have done earlier is build a community and audience. I didn't even have an email list you could sign up for until like version 2 or 3 😅

Choosing a tech stack that played to my existing strengths helped a lot with efficiency and kept me from tripping over architecture / technical scaffolding.***knolan*** 5 months ago

Congratulations! Which did you find the hardest jump out of interest (e.g. $0 - $1,000 or $1,000 to $2,000 etc.?)***cerwind*** 5 months ago

Probably the 1k-3k time frame, since that's when I spent several months (with nearly flat growth) working to transition from MVP stage to something more robust.***knolan*** 5 months ago

Given that hindsight is a wonderful thing, do you think you would've done anything massively different to what you did in that phase?***cerwind*** 5 months ago

I think that work was necessary to support scaling up further, so maybe not(?) But of course if I could clone myself and have the clone work on growth/marketing in parallel, that would be nice 😂***knolan*** 5 months ago

amazing! congrats man!

Any top 3 advices for someone who started several months ago on side project?***Kota*** 5 months ago

You did it the right way. Self-funding side-hustle with 9-5 job until your Revenue per Employee is right. $10K MRR is a great starting point to start growing!

Congrats and much luck Kyle!***alvarovillalbaa*** 5 months ago

Thanks man! Not sure yet what the next stage really looks like, but I guess overall that's a good problem to have 😂***knolan*** 5 months ago

Huge congrats!

I’d ask myself if more time is actually going to result in better product/growth. Something I’ve come to appreciate about some side projects is that they actually get elegance and simplicity correct.

What is behind making the growth go faster?***pr33t*** 5 months ago

Well there is an overflowing backlog of feature requests 😅

But I think the big thing PL needs at this point is a more consistent growth engine. Not yet sure what the best strategy is there.***knolan*** 5 months ago

You're obsessed, and it's beautiful!***MarioAdabachy*** 5 months ago

Sometimes I wonder if it's even possible to bootstrap a profitable solo business without a little obsession and paranoia 😅***knolan*** 5 months ago

Congrats, and thanks a lot for sharing your experience with such humble writing :) The only question I have is that have you considered quitting your daily job and work on full-time on your side project - considering the growth rate and potential.***mertnesvat*** 5 months ago

I think if I was already financially independent or was planning to never have kids, then that would be a no-brainer. But as it is, I'm a little hesitant to take that plunge too early. Might try to phase into it more gradually by reducing hrs to part-time and seeing how that balance feels.***knolan*** 5 months ago

Congrats!

Landing page looks beautiful! How did you make it? did you use any specific templates?***james991*** 5 months ago

Thanks! And no templates, custom built with Vue.js and Vuetify. Plus prerendering with vite-plugin-ssr***knolan*** 5 months ago

This is awesome and super inspiring for someone starting their journey to build a profitable side project.

In terms of reducing day job hours, I think that sounds like a good idea, as you seem to have found some product market fit and it would be just about finding 1 or 2 scalable growth channels.

Can I ask what your main growth channel has been so far?***FreddyNBruce*** 5 months ago

Thanks man! Mostly just posts to HN / Reddit and word-of-mouth growth so far. A little more detail here: https://www.indiehackers.com/post/building-marketing-kyle-nolan-of-projectionlab-5k-mo-on-focusing-on-product-over-marketing-3b38edfe22***knolan*** 5 months ago

Nice - cool getting shout outs from pretty huge personal finance blogs definitely plenty more of them out there.

I weirdly thought there’s kinda a B2B element here as an employee benefit, I’ve been offered financial advice/planning as part of employee benefits. Either going direct to the companies or partnering with employee benefit companies like PerkBox or Ben. Might make acquiring customers easier…ignore me if it's a silly idea.***FreddyNBruce*** 5 months ago

Does sound like potentially a good idea. Currently no clue how to get after it though. I've always imagined enterprise partnerships as being the kind of thing you might need a sales team for(?)***knolan*** 5 months ago

Yep maybe - all about prioritising I guess***FreddyNBruce*** 5 months ago

Congratulations on hitting $10K MRR! I have a question. Your prices are $9 and $45. Have you always used these prices during your journey or have there been any changes to your pricing?***mergisi*** 5 months ago

Thanks! Initially I had no idea how to price a product and started out way too low. Over the past two years, I've increased prices a few times, but always kept existing users grandfathered in to their original rates.***knolan*** 5 months ago

Thank you! You just confirmed that I am on the right path.***dkudosz*** 5 months ago

I can say the same thing to you guys***theodoreevans*** 5 months ago

Congrats on the milestone! I appreciate that you gave us a breakdown of the financial journey along the way to show how long it took to hit new milestones. Also, checked out ProjectionLab... great product + priceless value to customers. Keep going!***tori*** 5 months ago

Congrats, Kyle! This looks hard earned and like the tool we don't deserve :), how are you celebrating?

It looks like you definitely got more efficient over time, especially in the last few months. ...Do you feel like you had to escalate what you did each month to move the needle up?

To your other question, in the beginning, did you have a # after which you could quit your day job or scale back? If 10K hits that mark, then I'd say maybe give it a month or so to see if you can do less and still hit the 10K, then start to drop some of your day job. If you can, you could probably use a 100% break to recalibrate, even if it's just a few weeks.***solo\_claire*** 5 months ago

Amazing!!! Well done!

How did you validate the product? How did you market it?

Thanks.***andhapp*** 5 months ago

Thanks! A little more detail here: https://www.indiehackers.com/post/building-marketing-kyle-nolan-of-projectionlab-5k-mo-on-focusing-on-product-over-marketing-3b38edfe22***knolan*** 5 months ago

Thanks, man! Very helpful.***andhapp*** 5 months ago

Thanks for sharing your journey. Im currently building Pivotlar a platform to manage WP hosting and Im curious to know some of the strategies you have used in the validation stage of your product. Thanks in advance***anouarabsslm*** 5 months ago

Congrats man.. super impressive. Site is so clean, tidy, and performant. Is your 9-5 in finance?

I’ve been curious since joining a few weeks ago if anyone here was working on (non-ai) b2c apps, esp finance. Seems like most are building tooling for other entrepreneurs.***duffdevone*** 5 months ago

hey thanks! day job is software engineering, unrelated to finance. had to pick that up on my own.***knolan*** 5 months ago

Congrats Kyle on the rev milestone ! Respect the slow but genuine organic growth you've had with PL between 0-2k MRR and the features from the couple of finance blogs. Inspired !***davidamunga*** 5 months ago

thanks David!***knolan*** 5 months ago

Wow, congratulations on reaching the incredible milestone of $10k MRR with Projection Lab! Your journey is truly inspiring and a testament to your hard work and dedication. It's amazing how your side project has grown into something that resonates with people and addresses a real need.

Actually, I still have a question, What challenges did you face during the two years of bootstrapping and working on Projection Lab as a side project? How did you manage to overcome those challenges and stay motivated?***Adbou\_*** 5 months ago

Congrats on this milestone!!! Throughout your journey of building Projection Lab, what has been the most unexpected or rewarding moment for you so far? Would love to hear about any surprising insights or moments of personal growth that stood out along the way!***IIvtan*** 5 months ago

The tool you created and the story behind it, pretty amazing. Now you are an inspiration for all of wannabe indie hacker. Strength to you.***anshul360*** 5 months ago

Congratulations on the big milestone. This is great inspiration for me and I'm sure many others on here. This is something I really want to do as well, to start a side project, bootstrap it and grow it until I can start tapering off my hours at my day job and put more and more time into the side project and eventually making the side project my full time project.

I'm only in the idea phase right now but I still love seeing success stories like this. Helps keep me going. Keep up the great work.***Swinterbourne*** 5 months ago

Congrats man and thanks for sharing. This is really inspiring.***sheyapetrus*** 5 months ago

Landing pages are awesome. Could you plzzz help me out to make such leading pages for my website***Robergates*** 5 months ago

I coded these from scratch in Vue.js, but sounds like you might want to check out Framer.***knolan*** 5 months ago

I see I'm not the only one inspired by Jon Yongfook success story, despite not liking him too much.

You are really inspiring me. And when I opened PL site, it felt like I hit a gem. Very pleasant&clean looking landing page and something I could use by myself. I'll have a look at it, thanks.

To answer your question, you did a good job. Now start prioritising your own life and health :)***Vergil333*** 5 months ago

Thanks Martin!***knolan*** 5 months ago

Congratulation and more power to you***resultho*** 5 months ago

Inspired! Thank you for sharing!***AkshayRaveendran*** 5 months ago

Congratulations, Kyle!***Iveren*** 5 months ago

Congrats! Less time definitely means more prioritization and a more ROI business-oriented mindset. Well done Kyle***ybr8*** 5 months ago

Congrats!!***4lien\_dev*** 5 months ago

Congrats. That is awesome!***BotButcher*** 5 months ago

Congrats mate ✌️***nafetswirth*** 5 months ago

thanks Stefan!***knolan*** 5 months ago

Congrats***maxn0d3*** 5 months ago

This comment was deleted 5 months ago.

maxn0d3 5 months ago

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This is so very cool! Congratulations on your growth!

If I might add my 2 cents here - have you thought of opening up an affiliate marketing program for your product to do a little bit more marketing? You can do a small beta run with those members who've been with you for a while.

Just a thought. Ignore me if it's not in line with what you're building. :)***perksofbeingpam*** 5 months ago

Thanks! I did actually spin one up recently (in the footer on the landing page).***knolan*** 5 months ago

Congrats***username001*** 5 months ago

Congrats!

air727 5 months ago

## Adding auth to your project

— everything you need to know, plus recommendations

by Dorota Parad

If you’re someone who builds software, sooner or later you have to concern yourself with securing the thing. Finding the right solution is confusing.

As a founder of Authress, from the time we've launched over 3 years ago till now, it's been part of my job to stay up to date with the existing products in the auth space. I spent countless hours researching our competition and the broader market, while talking to our users about their needs as software makers.

With this article, I hope to bring some clarity on what parts of auth and data security are relevant if you’re building software, and how to think about the space. I’ll clarify the terminology around it, list the most important considerations when picking a solution, and mention any caveats or pitfalls you may hit along the way.

If you’re looking for concrete recommendations, feel free to jump straight to the end. I'll provide specific auth suggestions for:

Side-projects

Personal use

MVPs for public use

B2C software

B2B software

Public APIs

Login

When most people hear “auth”, they think login. Login is authentication, or auth-N for short. It’s the first step of securing your software.

Even if you’re making a small side-project just for yourself, as soon as you host it somewhere outside of your machine, you want to implement some sort of authentication. The days when obscurity saved your little inconsequential personal website or crawler from DDOS attacks are long gone.

It’s really simple - if it runs on the internet, it has to require login. Unless it’s just a static website, but let’s not be pedantic.

Good news is, it’s really easy to add login to your software and it will cost nothing if you play it right. Bad news is, it can get really complicated and expensive unless you spend a moment to think about what you need exactly.

Username and password

Username and password may seem like the easiest, most basic thing to do - just plop a form, maybe use a library to support it, and you have your login. Wrong. This is a trap.

First of all, it puts you on the hook for storing and processing personal identifiable information (PII). That’s because for this to work you need to collect and store a user’s email address. Why? Because sooner or later someone will forget their password, or will want to change their existing one. To facilitate it, you need an email - and just like that, you now have to comply with local regulations surrounding PII: GDPR, CPRA, CPPA, LGPD, PDPA, the list goes on... You really don’t want to do that unless you absolutely have to and have the resources to do so.

Social login a.k.a. federated login

When you want to add login functionality to your project quickly, use a social login. This is also known as federated login provider, and it is the way to go. It’s free, fairly painless to configure (although there are caveats) and you won’t have to worry about handling personal identifiable information - the provider will do that for you.

Login with Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Github, …the list goes on and on. If you stick to a single provider, integration ranges from super easy to manageable, but as soon as you want to support multiple options, it may be easier to use an Identity aggregator or a login box solution. Those usually aren’t free.

SSO (single sign-on)

If your software is used by other companies, and your users are their employees, you want to allow those users to login via their standard corporate login. There are multiple standards here and each company will have their own authentication format - SAML, OpenID, OAuth, or something custom. And just like the federated login providers, they too are usually creative with their implementations.

It gets complicated real quick, that’s why you probably want to go with one of the identity aggregators or a full featured auth SaaS. If you’re after enterprise customers, you likely have other requirements that mean you really can’t just cobble something together on top of your existing solution. It’s worth paying for the convenience and peace of mind in this case. On the other hand, some solutions will make you pay the enterprise tax for no good reason, so make sure to compare different providers and read what’s really included.

Some key providers in this space are Auth0, FusionAuth, Ory, Authress, each with their pros and cons.

It’s worth noting that this is different from using SSO internally at your own company. You can’t extend your own SSO to your customers. Solutions dedicated to providing access to enterprise employees, such as Google Workspace, Okta or Azure AD, aren’t the ones that will help you add such functionality into the software you’re building, it’s an entirely different category.

Login box and identity aggregation

If you know your users will need multiple options for login or you simply don’t want to worry about the whole authentication part, there are quite a few providers that offer a login box you can simply drop into your website. These also act as identity aggregators - they will accept whatever login method you have configured, or your customers want to configure, and return a consistent token that your software can consume directly. Convenient.

Providers include Authress, Auth0, Clerk, or FusionAuth. There’s also Keycloak if you’d rather self-host and are willing to become an expert in the topic.

When picking a solution, make sure that all the login options your users will care about are supported. That may include things like passkey, WebAuthn, or passwordless login, on top of the most common social logins. Also check if there’s an enterprise tax and whether you have to pay extra for SSO integration. Some providers charge for the number of users and also for the number of customers and each extra SSO integration you add.

There are a few potential gotchas here. Sometimes an aggregator promises support of all the different login providers but when you go ahead and try to integrate, you end up having to do all the hard work yourself. That’s something you can only evaluate through a proof of concept. Most of the open source frameworks fall into this category. There’s usually multiple extra packages, and whole sets of additional configuration to set up.

Another thing to look for is reliability - you need an SLA that’s at least as good as the one you plan on offering yourself. If login is down, your software is down.

What also happens is that some aggregators will make it easier for themselves to integrate with all the different identity providers and use a security standard that’s a lowest common denominator. This means that sometimes an identity provider offers a more secure standard to login, but it’s not utilized by your aggregator. For instance, some providers offer EdDSA token signatures, but most aggregators only provide RS256. It’s not something that’s easy to tell by just looking at their website, as obviously no one will advertise this. If you care about security, you’ll have to poke around documentation and code samples to find out the real story.

Access control

Now that your users can log in, let’s talk about the hard part - the actual authorization, auth-Z for short. Historically, this was lumped together with login - the scope of what a user could do was determined solely by whether or how they are authenticated. It turns out this is not good enough, especially if your software involves any sort of data sharing. That’s where authorization, or access control comes into play.

Solutions range from classically sticking the claims into a user token to full-fledged authorization decision engines which can support even the most sophisticated cases.

Sadly, which one is the “easy way” is a strong case of “it depends”.

Simple authorization

If all your users can do exactly the same things in your software, or if you’re building it just for yourself, the quickest way to secure access is by piggybacking on the access tokens. This means sticking the resources that a given user should have access to directly into the token using claims.

This works when you have a simple access model - users can see and do everything in your software, nasty bots can’t. It may also work if your model is slightly more nuanced, as long as all your users follow the same pattern. It breaks as soon as you have a lot of users, your users can have multiple roles, or your resource hierarchy is a little more complex than a very short list. In some cases you’re not even able to rely on this method, as you easily exceed the maximum field or token size.

This is where many login box providers, such as Auth0 and FusionAuth, fall short - they only offer simple authorization as of now. If that’s sufficient for your use case and you’re happy with their pricing for the other features you need, no need to look further.

DIY authorization

Even 5 years ago, if you wanted something more robust, you had to build your own authorization engine. Everyone who’s ever built software in the B2B space knows this very well. It may seem like a simple thing, just a single database with some simple checks - 5 months later you’re still tweaking and fixing and cursing. It’s a death by a thousand cuts. In the past, there was no choice. Nowadays there are multiple providers you can choose from with much better developer experience, tighter SLAs, more features, and at a fraction of your own cost.

These days, you really don’t want to build your own, unless you’re a masochist and have extra time and money to throw away.

Authorization as a service

There are many SaaS solutions that offer the authorization decision engine as a service. They will handle all the complexity, reliability, and security, and you only have to map your permissions model to theirs.

With growing awareness on security and data privacy, this is a quickly growing space, and new startups are popping up to solve the problem seemingly every other month. This is good for you as the user, but also confusing, as everyone thinks about it slightly differently and uses different words to talk about it.

There are a few things to consider when picking your solution:

The main one is obviously the features - other than providing a structured way to model your permissions, you may also want intelligent integrations with things like machine to machine authentication, permissions for service clients, and login that complements what you were planning on using.

Also think whether you want to be running the solution yourself - you probably don’t, unless it doesn’t have to be very reliable, but you may have no choice if you’re working in a highly regulated environment. If you have specific requirements for data residency, also make sure your selected solution will accommodate it.

Another consideration is the ease of getting started and overall developer experience. Is there documentation? How quick can you get support if you have a question? Is support provided by technical people or an offshore customer support center on the other side of the world? Do you even need support, or is everything clear enough for you to have something running within hours?

Then there’s the ease of use once you’ve set everything up. Software rarely stands still and your permission model will evolve. How easy is it to change it once you have hundreds of thousands users in production relying on a given authorization system? Is the model inherently flexible and extensible?

There’s also a matter of pricing. There are a few strategies that providers use. Most common one is based on the number of active monthly users, which also means you can easily estimate how much it will cost you. This is a good approach if your unit of value directly corresponds to an active user. It gets expensive if you offer a free tier, your users use your software only a couple of times a week, or you often run marketing campaigns that result in spikes of new logins that don’t fully convert. A few providers offer metered pricing, similar to how your cloud provider charges you. This is a bit more tricky to estimate your actual cost, but in the grand scheme of things, it usually ends up cheaper than per-user pricing. Some providers will want you to pay a monthly minimum. Most offer some sort of volume discount. If you consider authorization engine a part of your infrastructure, metered pricing is a good fit.

There’s a bunch of options to choose from, some of the more established ones include Authress, Ory, Oso, or Permit.

Internal security

All you’ve read so far was about application-level security - all the things that make your software secure for your users. When people hear “security” though, they usually think “infrastructure security” - all the things that make your software secure to build and run.

This is a complex topic of its own and only tangential to what this article is about, but auth is an important part of it, so let’s include it for the sake of completeness.

Cloud security

If you’re hosting your software in the cloud, which is most likely the case when you’re building something new, then you most certainly want to secure that infrastructure, if only to prevent someone else’s bitcoin miners running at your expense.

Luckily, all cloud providers offer plenty of options for you to do so. First thing you want to look at is to use your cloud provider’s IAM to configure access policies for your account. There are many other things you could do for cloud security, so if you work in the cloud a lot, invest in learning about it.

Most cloud providers offer some sort of tool that may look like it will let your users login into your app - AWS Cognito, Azure AD, or Firebase. It may be tempting to try and use these. Thing is, these are good choices if you’re building something for yourself or to be used by your own developers, or family members, as they will be the ones with access to your cloud account. When you need something to handle your end users’ identity, cloud native options just don’t cut it.

API security

Securing your APIs consists of two main parts. It is analogous to securing your application by forcing your users to log in in order to authorize them.

First part is the machine-to-machine authentication - you don’t want to let just any service call your API after all. Your options are plaintext API keys, mTLS, public/private key pairs, or a combination of them - there are libraries in each major language that should help with these. Or you could use one of the SaaS solutions that handles machine to machine authentication as a first-class concept, such as Authress or Ory.

Authenticating your clients is better than nothing, but if you leave it at that, you’re still open to Broken Object Level Authorization (BOLA) vulnerabilities. This means that if you want your API to be public at any reasonable scale, you need to consider the second part - an authorization layer on top of the authentication. If you’re using a SaaS for access control, see if they offer the same functionality for service clients.

At the time of writing, Authress and Ory are the only providers that do this in a straightforward manner, but the space is evolving rather quickly.

Secret sharing

Sometimes you want to securely share credentials (if sharing credentials can ever fall in the category “secure”). You may need to share a login to a particular piece of software, e.g. if you’re paying per seat or for whatever other reason. If so, you’re looking for a password manager for business. That’s what solutions like 1Password or Zoho Vault are for. LastPass is another solution worth mentioning if only for their inability to keep your passwords secure.

Then there’s the separate matter of using secrets by your services in production, to access a third party integration. This is what AWS Secrets Manager and Hashicorp Vault enable. If you’re running your software in the cloud however, there is a more secure way of handling it though, by encrypting your credentials and using your cloud provider’s Key Management Service.

Employee access control

If you’re a big company, you may want to manage access to all your third party applications that you have licenses for - Figma, Salesforce, Zendesk, etc. You probably also already have an employee directory such as Azure AD, Google Workspace, Microsoft AD, Rippling or the likes. In that case, you can hook up your directory to something like Okta to let your employees use their single sign on to login into the apps. This is less about security and more about convenience of managing your software licenses, especially if you pay per seat.

Summary and recommendations

Here is a visual summary of what all the different providers I mentioned offer:

Summary of providers

Let me make things really simple by providing recommendations for most common scenarios. These are opinionated and don’t include all the intricacies of your individual situation, so use these as a starting point and do your own research.

Recommendation for side-projects and personal use

When you’re building a small side-project, or something just for yourself, friends and family, you don’t want to overcomplicate things and you want things cheap, if not free. For login, use one of the social logins, like Facebook or Google. This is a standard OAuth implementation, which you should get familiar with anyway, and most languages have libraries that help.

You want to run the thing in the cloud rather than your own machine - it’s super easy, comes with a lot of security options out of the box, and it costs peanuts.

If you need to restrict access to specific resources (e.g., your mom can delete her own data, but she can’t delete yours), use claims and the simple authorization access control in the access token to save this information.

Recommendation for MVPs

When you want to build a product quickly to validate it, you may need something slightly more robust, especially if you’re going to share it with the wider public. If you can get away with a single social login, great. If not, use any provider that offers a login box cheaply. Authress or Auth0’s free tier fit the bill.

If you have a monolithic app and don’t need SSO, Auth0 should be good enough. If you are building microservices and you need machine to machine authentication, Auth0 gets expensive real quick. You should be able to work around this using your cloud provider’s Key Management Service and storing your encrypted keys in git.

Recommendation for B2C software

If you build something intended for consumers (individuals rather than businesses) at any reasonable scale, you shouldn’t cut corners regarding the login experience. Use a well-established login box provider, such as Auth0 or Clerk.

If your software involves any sort of data sharing, you can use Auth0 if you only have one or two simple permissions. For fine-grained access control, use Authress or Ory. The latter two also include login box support. Which one to use depends on how complex your use case is - you don’t want to spend weeks configuring and tweaking if things are simple, but you also don’t want to rewrite your stuff after finding out your initial approach doesn’t scale.

If your software integrates with third party tools, you definitely want to look at Authress or Ory for secure machine to machine authentication and access control.

Recommendation for B2B software

If your software is meant to be used by companies, regardless if we’re talking about small businesses or enterprises, you absolutely have to support SSO. Some login box providers offer this: Auth0, Clerk, FusionAuth, Ory, or Authress, although most of them charge an absurd amount of money for the privilege. Still, if you’re selling to enterprises, this may pale in comparison to your other costs, but it could land you in a spot on SSO tax.

Proper access control is essential in B2B, because most companies will have a notion of user roles with different levels of access and different data visibility depending on who’s logged in. If you would like a solution that only handles access control, use Oso or Permit. If you want one solution that also handles sign-on, machine to machine auth, monitoring, and auditing, use Authress or Ory. If, for whatever reason, you really want to host the solution yourself, both Oso and Ory offer that as an option.

Recommendation for Public APIs

When your product is an API, you don’t have all that much choice. You want to go with a solution that supports API security as a first-class notion, that is, Authress or Ory. This will give you machine to machine authentication, as well as resource-based access control, to protect yourself from BOLA.

And that's it - all you need to know before adding auth to your project.

***Dorota Parad*** posted to Developers on June 9, 2023

@DorotaParad when you use social logins like FB or Google, how much data can they take from your users? Knowing FB/Google/etc, there are going to be some pretty hefty privacy concerns, right?***LucyAnimus*** 5 months ago

Not really, in fact you can't offer your users better privacy than FB or Google, as you probably don't have a whole team dedicated solely to identity, account abuse, hijacking, compliance with local privacy regulations, etc.

When using federated login, your users will use their existing social account, and the data flows from the federated provider into your app, not the other way around, so the provider isn't getting anything they don't already have. What user data from the account is shared with your app is defined by a combination of what you ask for, what the provider has, and what the user approves, so that's also fairly limited.***DorotaParad*** 5 months ago

wow, insane information!***titas*** 4 months ago

That is extremely interesting, thanks for sharing this.***MajorBaguette*** 4 months ago

Out of curiosity, what would you recommend an indie dev uses who has multiple projects running? With Authress as an example, I can have multiple applications but the login screen will always be the custom domain (it’s not specific to the application). Which means I can’t use login.x for one and login.y for the other.

So if I wanted to use Authress, would I have to have two accounts with two different emails ?***scottywalker92*** 5 months ago

You could absolutely hook up multiple custom domains to a single login box in Authress, unlike in other identity aggregators. The only limitation is the branding - afaik, all ID aggregators only let you setup one kind of login box appearance per account, so if your apps have a different look and feel, this may be awkward (aside: if you find that you really want multiple login box styles in a single account, email Authress support and my team will surely add it).

With that said, it's generally a better pattern to direct all your apps through the same login domain, it's not like your users will spend a lot of time looking or interacting with that url. With a single domain, you're avoiding extra complexity and configuration work, and your users won't notice anyway.

A good rule of thumb here is to think of auth provider like you would of your cloud or payment processor - if you want your projects completely isolated from each other, then you'd setup multiple AWS or Stripe accounts, otherwise it's all single account with multiple projects/products.***DorotaParad*** 5 months ago

Thanks for the advice! I always thought it was bad practise to move consumers to a different url?

I’m looking forward to trying Authress, just waiting for your guys to provide some docs on how to configure the auth in C# (already made an issue on GitHub for it). I’m currently using AzureB2C which works really well but forces you to use Azure Front Door if you want to couple a custom domain. More Microsoft anti consumer bs unfortunately.***scottywalker92*** 5 months ago

There's nothing inherently bad about urls or domains. Just like to log your users in with GitHub or Google, you will have to direct them there. That's unavoidable. Whether or not you have some proxies in the middle doesn't matter too much. Login works either way. There are some benefits and trade-offs so it depends what's most important for your users in the end.

There's a lot of additional configuration and complexity that can go into having multiple authentication "realms" or "custom domains", and reduces the value ROI on going down that path. On the flip side, if the number of products is really small (two or three only) and they are completely independent (or mostly) as in they are separate monoliths or have pretty good isolation in platform architecture, that might not be a concern.

We do have a few customers in both models, some with multiple Authress accounts or one account with multiple domains, and others with only a single domain. If it isn't obvious which is better we could sit down and discuss what's aligned in the long term. The good news here is that this a two-way door. If one path doesn't look like it will work out after trying it, it's easy for us to support a Migration between accounts.

RE the open issue: I'm going to update the GitHub issue today, I have news on that front. (The TL;DR is, I expect if you try again it will work)***wparad*** 5 months ago

Wow, very thorough and those recommendations at the end were really helpful - thanks!***inmypjs*** 5 months ago

Founder of Infisical here 👋

Curious, what are your thoughts on SuperTokens and Supabase Auth? — Open-source alternatives.***dangtony98*** 5 months ago

I'm not familiar with SuperTokens, and Supabase fills a fairly narrow B2C niche, with limited authentication options and requires you to have a postgress backend.

In general, anything open source that's bigger than a single library for a very specific thing, ends up being almost as much effort as if you'd written it yourself. I suppose that's a topic for a whole other article :)***DorotaParad*** 5 months ago

Recently just found this article related to issues with using Supabase which I thought was super interesting. The issues faced by the author might not be the same as your challenges, but are fairly common issues with open source technologies.***wparad*** 5 months ago

I was actually looking at SuperTokens not too long ago, and their comparison list to Auth0 seemed lacking: https://supertokens.com/blog/auth0-alternatives-auth0-vs-okta-vs-cognito-vs-supertokens, there's a conclusion section at the bottom which compares the features they think are important.

So if I were reviewing options again later, I'd probably he to go out and find a solution that fits more of my needs and also doesn't cost a shit-ton like Auth0. There are quite a few interesting recommendations above, I'm going to have to bookmark this page somewhere.***ShellingFord*** 5 months ago

Saved!***CodeAJ*** 5 months ago

Thanks for such a detailed article. Found some new companies where I can peddle one of my domain (auth dot so)***aloksoni*** 5 months ago

what are your recommendations for auth on blockchain for products that might have a natively web3 audience? Essentially for users who expect an email signup/login auth, but a wallet needs to be created and be ready for use for transaction (ideally via credit card) but buys tokens on the blockchain?***kdawg*** 5 months ago

Which side of web3? Are you building something akin to Coinbase that users would get tokens as a result of using your product, or are we just talking about logging in with the user's wallet as the federation mechanism?

For the former case, you can use any auth solution. It doesn't matter what your product is, be it e-commerce, crypto, or even AI. Anything that supports federated identities will work

In the latter case, there is no standard unfortunately. There is some consistency via DID identities using JWTs, and others piggyback on WebAuthn, but nothing reliable. Some solutions would involve wallet aggregator integrations like Metamask. However that's not really a full solution. Depending on what you are building, I might suggest letting me know (or contacting our product DL at product@authress.io) and we'll see if we can get you a solution that makes sense for your use case.

The real problem is, that often the money isn't there for these sorts of solutions to exist, and the lack of following an existing standard makes it near impossible to design a scalable solution. I'm sure there is a product out there that swears by being able to do this for some set of Blockchains, but since most crypto related products are coupled to one specific cryptocurrency aggregation isn't necessary.

If you are building an e-commerce solution and want to accept login via a standard federated providers and also some wallets, that's a definitely a case Authress handles.***wparad*** 5 months ago

I am personally using a custom patched keycloak (but that is just crazy me, copy-pasting from earlier attempts).

But, I would say that for MVPs/Demos, I would simply use user/password, easiest if I don't have framework support in my code and if I do, I can simply do a google OIDC integration. I can always add more security later. I doubt someone will care about my demo no one can find initially.

For security, I would put more emphasis on DDOS later on and move the servers behind cloudflare or similar. This masks the actual IPs.

That said, I believe the only thing that matters initially is PMF product market fit. If you don't have that, then what you are trying to protect?***Tzahi*** 5 months ago

I think you are 100% right when it comes to where to invest your time. Don't invest in technology that no one will find.

BUT, here's some counter points:

Username password is not easy, simple, and it actually requires a lot of things, first off a whole user table/database, technology to correctly salt, hash, store, update passwords. Flows - forgot passwords, password reset, change email, 2FA, and the list goes on. There is nothing simple about that.

If you are at MVP, then I would expect you need to get ready to scale, coupling your auth to just Google us going to make it a real pain very very soon. Sure if we are actually talking about a prototype, and planning to actually throw away the tech then whatever.

If we are at the vaporware stage and doing demos there are products and form builders that make it easy to collect info without building auth.

Password based login forms are the number one cause of phishing exposures and your password endpoints are the number one source of attacks, DDoS or credential stuffing. It's far better off to not even have these endpoints, than to create them in hopes no one finds them. I'd you are running a popular framework or running your database on commonly used portso you can be sure that it will definitely get hit.

DDoS has very little to do with security, so it isn't exactly clear what the relevance of it is or the purpose of masking IPs. Is there a specific problem you are trying to solve?

"I can always do more later" - when it comes to security usually results in "I wish I did more earlier". There are solutions that make make this dead easy to implement exactly what you need and scale, I feel like even if you picked a random one from this article you still would be better off than hacking something together quickly.

And I wish it was quick, every time I try to get AWS Cognito or Google's OAuth login working there are another 5 deprecated libraries and 20 pages of documentation that all say "this is out of date, see other deprecated article"...okay maybe I still have a bunch of PTSD from using those in my past.

(The other Authress Founder 😀)***wparad*** 5 months ago

As you might have guessed, i probably know one or two things about security. If someone hacks you at the stage you have nothing to protect, then he wasted his time since you can just revert to a snapshot or something. Since this is an indie soloprenuers land I am not talking about high end security. For my big pocket clients, everything you say is true and much much more you did not say.***Tzahi*** 5 months ago

Oh most certainly.***wparad*** 5 months ago

It looks like you are not favorable about using authentication libraries but I still provide it as an option, in case somebody is interested in: In popular programming languages, there are authentication libraries which are relatively simple to integrate:

Passport.js for Node

AuthJS for NextJS

Spring Security for Java.

Django has built-in authentication

...

Regarding personal information regulation (like GDPR), even if you are using a third-party services, you are still responsible for the compliancy of that services anyway (speaking from my recent experience, it could be a bit trouble if you are an European company using a American services, you will have to check quite a lot of legal stuff ). Either you store the data in your own server or in a your third-party services, it doesn't change your accountability. Using 3rd parties might relieve only the burden of protecting these data. However, if there is a leak, the blast radius could be quite big.***ManhHa*** 5 months ago

Regarding personal information regulation (like GDPR), even if you are using a third-party services, you are still responsible for the compliancy of that services anyway

That's correct. We need to keep in mind what we're talking about here - using a federated login or a login aggregator. A lot of people think about it backwards, as if you're taking user data and sharing it with a third party, while in this situation, you are the third party. The login provider shares Personal Identifiable Information with you. Unless you store the PII (which I highly recommend you don't), this makes you just a data processor. Guess who's on the hook for ensuring that third parties you share PII with are playing nice with that data? Yeah, it's the login provider.

Now, as a data processor, you also have responsibilities - you need to inform your users what you collect and why, and what you do with the data, you also need to be able to handle data export/deletion requests, but since you're not storing anything important, the scope is a fraction of what you'd need to so otherwise.

For the benefit of other people reading this, here are some examples of what you don't need to deal with if you're just a processor and don't store PII under GDPR: have a documented, enforced policy on who can access this data on your side and have audit in place recording such access, train all your employees who can access this data, have a policy for data retention and then execute on it, monitor for security breaches impacting the data and publicly report on them - this is not an exhaustive list, but hopefully it's clear that it's a very different beast.

And thanks for listing the libraries, I should have included some in the article 😀***DorotaParad*** 5 months ago

Using 3rd parties might relieve only the burden of protecting these data.

Isn't that the point. If you are using some library though, there's likely to be some unpatched thing or a security fix in a version you aren't using. I think about log4j. That wasn't actually a huge challenge to resolve, and it wasn't a matter of one company making one small change. The challenge was getting the fix out.

Sure equally problematic, when a company has some zero days (I'm thinking back in time to Auth0). For some reason I'll trust a company that does security as a service more than a couple people on another team running an open source library they just found.

It's interesting you bring up those libraries, because after using a bunch of them, they all kicked me quite hard. Using a provider's SDK is hard enough, Django and passport, please no.***ShellingFord*** 5 months ago

Yes, in the end, it is matter of trust. I'm not trying to discard these services are not good. If you like to use these services, they are good options. They are instead very good, especially if you want to have a quick PoC with decent UI and you don't have specificity about your auth requirements. Everything has its trade-offs. For security part, you still have to protect your other data anyway. Understanding a bit about security always pays off, whether we are using these services or not.

Personally, I've used Spring Security, and a bit of Django, AuthJS. I didn't have much trouble. Maybe my requirements were different. For sure, it did take me a bit time to go through their docs, however. It is of course a bit work then integrating a provider's SDK. Actually, I came from the other way around, I started my product using one of the service above, then at one point, I had some specific requirements that it it not supported by the service. Either I need to develop some quick and dirty solution by calling the API of the service, or replace it with an auth library. In the end, I chose an auth library with a bit of customization and it worked well. The auth library opens to me new possibilities to integrate with our existing customer systems.***ManhHa*** 5 months ago

I'm surprised, not surprised, that the auth provider you were using didn't want to support the features you needed. I don't know if it is bad luck, but on open source I always have a bad time getting my issues fixed. At with SaaS I get confirmation that they can't commit to a timeline, or shut me down immediately:(

Maybe in the future, I'll remember to try to ask my provider when I run into a roadblock, and see what they do.***ShellingFord*** 5 months ago

If you intend to work with some old-school industries/customers, make sure to check auth requirements with your customer to match with your provider. Not everybody is using standards like OIDC/OAuth/SAML. There are often many ad-hoc auth mechanisms also (for example, using a booking id + your date of birth, etc.)***ManhHa*** 5 months ago

I agree with @ManhHa, I'm not a fan at all of using third-party services that a) charge you and b) could be shuttered at any time. We've seen this countless times.

The OP has a vested interest in making auth sound harder than it is.***Glench*** 5 months ago

wow I found the article really useful and interesting***HilaryMersi*** 4 months ago

Dorota, your article on adding authentication to projects is incredibly informative and provides valuable recommendations. It covers various aspects of auth, from login options to access control, and offers specific provider suggestions for different scenarios. Thanks for sharing your expertise and making the authentication process clearer for software builders. Great job!***mykhanhpham*** 4 months ago

Hey, thanks for the article. After briefly looking at Authress, I'm unclear about something: if I want to expose all records from my database that the current user has access to, for example, all the records they can edit, how do I go about doing that with Authress?***cciocov*** 5 months ago

I'm going to try to take a stab at this. Let me know if any point if I missed anything. It sounds like you are asking about how to get the collect list of records that a user has access to.

So let's start at the beginning:

Users are granted access to individual records in your database. This is done using an Authress access record by assigning the relevant permission to that user for that specific record in the access record.

Then later you'll call Authress' list endpoint for resources. You can find this method both in the API and the SDKs. Authress will return a list of records the user has access to.

From there you can query your database and filter the results using this information. Further there are lots of potential optimizations you can when doing this, if you have additional information available.

Does that answer your question? I think there is more about this in the Authress KB.***wparad*** 5 months ago

Thanks for responding! So, a naive implementation would require that for every resource in my database I have to have an access record in your database? I see that the list endpoint for resources has a limit [1, 20] for the number of records it returns. How does this scale when the number of resources is large?

For example, imagine a system like Shopify, where store owners have 100s or 1000s of products. What will be the approach in this case? To the check that the user has access to the store and then assume it also has access to all the products in that store? (i.e.: when requesting products, we will actually check the access record for the store, not the access records for the products)***cciocov*** 5 months ago

an implementation would require that for every resource in my database I have to have an access record in your database

That is certainly one of the viable strategies which works well when there is a small number of resources per user.

In the example you provided with Shopify with thousands of resources, as you pointed that doesn't make sense. There are a lot of options because of the flexibility that is offered in our access records. So in this case, we can break down how that would work. With the relative size of 1000s in mind, most access patterns would be all or anything. We see in this case:

most people see a readOnly copy of the product when they go to buy that doesn't require any access record or API call

A small number of people would have edit or ownership access. That access could be defined very easily in one access record with a permission like products/\*, as Authress accepts wildcards.

So we can start to see that there are good options for defining a model, which hopefully prevents us from having to do arguably ridiculous things in our code. Of course the exact resource path is one that should make sense for your use case.

However, I think this starts to get out of the bounds of this article on IH, so instead if your curious, can I offer to continue the discussion in our Community Discord or via our support email?***wparad*** 5 months ago

Hey @DorotaParad, even though I work for a young startup who will or already is a competitor of yours in the customer authentication space, I love reading articles like this. It distills a lot questions and info into a comprehensive article that customers and even myself will have along the way when deciding how to handle authentication in their product. And for a bonus, you've expanded on related topics like internal SSO and secrets management. Great stuff.***alexander748923*** 5 months ago

Hi Dorota, thank you for writing this informative article on auth and data security. I appreciate your insights and recommendations for different use cases and scenarios. I agree that login is an essential part of securing any software project, and that it can be challenging to implement it correctly and efficiently.

I’m also a software maker and I’ve been using www.mojoauth.com for my auth needs. MojoAuth is a platform that provides passwordless login, social login, SSO, user management, and more features for any web or mobile application. It’s very easy to integrate with any backend or frontend framework, and it handles all the complexities of auth for me. It also has a generous free tier and affordable pricing plans.

I’ve been very happy with MojoAuth and I think it could be a great solution for some of the use cases you mentioned in your article. If you’re interested, you can check out their website and sign up for a free account. Maybe you’ll find it useful for your projects as well. Let me know what you think. Cheers!

***Davidtech*** 4 months ago

## How to hack Hacker News

(and consistently hit the front page) by Iron Brands

I know I’m on thin ice with a title like that. Getting featured on the HN front page is high on every Indie Hacker’s bingo card, not to mention “hacking Hacker News.” However, we found a way to consistently get to the front page using a repeatable process that you can use too.

Let’s dive in.

Together with @adriaanvanrossum, I own Simple Analytics, a privacy-friendly and simple Google Analytics alternative. Adriaan started Simple Analytics full "indie hacker style” and grew to 100K ARR by understanding the needs of his audience extremely well. Most of our users are like Adriaan, and where can you find people like Adriaan? Yes, Hacker News.

To me, consistently getting on the front page of HN seemed unrealistic. If it would have worked just once, I would have considered myself very lucky.

But once the dopamine of my first HN front-page moment kicked in, I wanted more, more, more. I spent too many hours figuring this out, but in the end, we found a way to get that HN front page coverage repeatedly.

HN spikes

These are our website analytics from last year, where I marked the HN spikes. Feel free to play around with our live analytics here to see for yourself.

Here is what worked (and is still working for us).

Understanding Hacker News

First, you need to understand Hacker News. I’m not a developer. Hacker News had never been my jam. Before posting, I needed to understand what worked for the HN crowd.

You’ll find out that the HN crowd is not the easiest. The people on HN will literally slay you if your stuff is not 100% on point. Also, don’t even try to dump your semi-interesting blog posts on HN, let alone promote your product.

Competition is fierce, and only a certain amount of articles will get that front-page spot.

But after spending many hours trying to understand HN, its users, and the content that is doing well, I identified a pattern.

Your content needs to be either:

Newsworthy

Investigative (research)

Two examples:

Investigative: “Fingerprinting is worse than I thought”

If you check the link, you will see a few things that are important here:

Someone did research and found something interesting. The writer actually put in the work.

It's written without corporate bs

No self-promotion or any CTA’s in the text

It screams value.

Newsworthy: “Apple wins antitrust court battle with Epic Games, appeals court rules”

There is only one reason this ranks on the front page of HN. It's news that is relevant for the HN community.

Other things you need to take into account:

Find the perfect time to post: Weekends - Less competition. Still tons of traffic.

You can post multiple times: HN understands that quality posts can go unnoticed, so you can try the same post again. Don’t overdo it. I would say max 2 or 3 times.

Keep engaging with the audience.

Our Strategy: The War Room

Yes, funnily enough, this is what we actually called our approach to HN. Once we got an understanding of HN, we created a strategy around it: The War Room Strategy

We chose to rank on the front page with “newsworthy” articles. This seemed to be a better repeatable approach than the “investigative research.”

The War Room Strategy has three steps:

Step 1: Newsbot

Step 1 is to stay on top of news that is both in our niche and relevant for HN. To ensure this, Adriaan created a “newsbot” to notify us immediately about news we could act upon.

For us, news on privacy issues, big-tech fines, data breaches, and anything concerning Google Analytics is relatable to us and relevant to HN.

Here is how Adriaan built the bot (only for the tech-savvy ones — I have no idea how this works. Skip this if you are like me):

Fetch data from Hacker News API

Set up Google Alerts for your query

Fetch data from Google Alerts XML

Enrich data and store in SQLite file with a cronjob

Send alerts with other cronjob to Twist API or Telegram API

Then add chatGPT in the mix and ask for a rating between 0-100 and a reason why the article is getting that rating. We send ourselves alerts when the rating is 30+

Add chatGPT

Adriaan tweeted about it here to get the full idea of this.

Anyway, this way, we are the first to get that relevant news from the source.

Step 2: War Room mode

Step number 2 is triggered by our news bot. When this happens, we drop everything and start investigating the news item: War Room mode. If we feel there is something there, we start writing about it.

To be relevant for HN, you can’t just copy/paste the news item. News items are often very plain, so by providing more context and implications, you can create something relevant that can coexist with the source.

Example: Norway takes a stance against Google Analytics - 144 upvotes

Outline:

State the news item and link to the source (so people can choose what to read)

Explain what the problem is

Explain what the implications are

Explain what we can expect in the future

Step 3: The secret sauce

We always end with a section that is called: Final thoughts. This is your moment to shine and drop a punchline that talks about your product/service.

However, be super super super careful with self-promotion. We only do this at the end of the article. After providing tons of value to the reader, only include one sentence that is the least salesy you can do.

We do it like this, and sometimes even that backfires:

Self promotion example

Depending on the news item, we can create an article in 1-2 hours and post it on HN. This way, we’re always the first to cover the issue and take a broader perspective than just the news item itself. That’s the value you add.

Timeliness + Value = HN front page

Side-effects

Obviously, the goal is to get traffic to your website and increase brand awareness and all, but there was one side-effect I did not anticipate: SEO

Because we’re the first to cover these news items, other websites started to link to our content.

Three of our most popular articles got tons of backlinks (and even more traffic from those sources):

Italy declares Google Analytics illegal: 158 backlinks from 72 different domains

EU moving closer to Facebook ban: 191 backlinks from 52 different domains

Vodafone & Deutsche Telekom to introduce persistent user tracking: 392 backlinks from 88 different domains

We even won the Dutch Search Awards for this strategy, while I am not particularly good at SEO.

In one instance, even the Indian Times linked to us:

Backlink from Indian Times

How can you reproduce this?

Understand Hacker News. Get a feeling for what works and what doesn’t. Even if you try to “hack Hacker News,” you must provide value. As explained, there are two ways to approach this, but without value, no front page.

Stay on top of relevant news in your niche that is also relevant to the HN audience. If you want to recreate our bot, check Adriaan’s Twitter, or feel free to send me a message.

Be the first one to act on the news + add perspective to the news item.

Timing + Value = Frontpage (consistently-ish)

Obviously, it does not work all the time. We’ve posted enough stuff that we thought was relevant and spent time on that was just not interesting enough.

Anyway, this approach generated many upvotes and became a repeatable process for privacy-related or Google-focused topics. If your audience is on HN, you should give it a spin. And obviously, if you reach that front page and want to track that juicy traffic coming to your website, check out Simple Analytics.

***Iron Brands*** posted to Growth on May 11, 2023

Awesome strategy! I did something similar with crypto outlets some years ago***Starinin*** 2 months ago

Very interesting! In average, what was your success ratio to hit the front page (over the total number of attemps)?***Indiehacker\_FR341*** 3 months ago

I think your strategy is relevant to other medias as well. Props to the strategy and grit behind it! It could scale to other platforms as well.***brian98*** 5 months ago

Very helpful, thanks for sharing!***George\_Apostolov*** 5 months ago

Super helpful! Thanks for sharing***NatiaKurdadze*** 5 months ago

Thanks for this great insight. Thank you! 🔥***Kamiyk*** 5 months ago

I'm launching a side project of mine next week and this was very insightful. Thanks a lot!***eihab*** 5 months ago

Suuuper insightful. HN has always been a mystery (and I am a developer) so thank you!***mjswensen*** 5 months ago

Hello!

Very interesting and insightful. Good job with the bot and also thanks for providing the repo link – I'll definitely check this out.

Always give before you're trying to get – meaning providing value upfront is a strategy that works. Big thumbs up!

Thankss***Charles122*** 5 months ago

Thanks! Agree very much with that***IronBrands*** 5 months ago

Thanks for putting this together!***tawheed*** 6 months ago

thanks for sharing your elegant strategy 🙂

i added the post to my newsletter's issue: https://10k.isora.me/***alexanderisora*** 6 months ago

Nice! Thanks***IronBrands*** 5 months ago

I do not really read HN (yes odd one out here) but this was really nice written post.

Thank you for writing this. I am sure this way of posting would be useful somewhere else! :D***stillpanda*** 6 months ago

this is a great strategy. i've heard explodingideas.co use a similar tactic with reddit.

platform native content seems to be the way to go.***ericlamcrypto7*** 6 months ago

Thanks! I hope so too***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

From what I see, the topic becomes extra hot on HN if it is either about big corporations doing shit to people or big corporations being punished for doing shit to people.***uluhonolulu*** 6 months ago

Yep I believe so too***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Thank you for super useful tips! How much time do you typically spend on writing one article on average?***michael\_ya*** 6 months ago

Couple of ours***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

This is awesome and that alert system is totally a Saas idea :)***pageshidara*** 6 months ago

Thanks for the article. I tried posting a Show HN before this and since it didn't make it to the first page, the post has no outreach***dennischia*** 6 months ago

Really great strategy. I have started to create my own newsletter based on this model. Just a question. How chatgpt rank the news?***Ahmadkhalili*** 6 months ago

Thanks! We basically give chatGPT pointers using a prompt that specifies what we are looking for***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Very interesting and insightful. Good job with the bot and also thanks for providing the repo link – I'll definitely check this out.

Always give before you're trying to get – meaning providing value upfront is a strategy that works. Big thumbs up!***igorlamos*** 6 months ago

Thanks @igorlamos! Now please start using Simple Analytics 🤣***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Haha @IronBrands – so this is the super-careful way 😁 now I got it!

Actually – I took a look and I think I'll give it a try ...***igorlamos*** 6 months ago

Wow super nice! Thanks. Let me know if you need anything***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Great read, and very useful. Thanks for writing this.***hijunedkhatri*** 6 months ago

Thanks!***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

thank you***ltim*** 6 months ago

Very useful sharing. I will follow your suggestion.***laoyan*** 6 months ago

Thanks!***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

This post blew up on HN: https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=35929794***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Thanks for sharing @IronBrands

Bookmarked for future launch!***henrybui\_io*** 6 months ago

Nice!***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

@IronBrands Any tips on how to post Show HN? I made an iOS app specifically for Hacker News, but my Show HN submission went unnoticed - got a couple of upvotes, but never left shownew pool.***ihandr*** 6 months ago

I think Show HN is easier than a regular post. What I normally do to find a title for a new product, is to study the Show HN posts that did really well. You'll see a pattern. For example, I noticed more descriptive titles do better. Instead of "iOS app for HN", I would post something like: I created a free IOS app that does XYZ.***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

I recently made the front page with my ShowHN post for Neucards via the second chance pool. Basically, you can email them at hn@ycombinator.com (https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=26998308 discusses the pool) and if they put you in the pool, watch out! My web traffic took off!***braddominy*** 6 months ago

Lot of value here and made me realize I've been posting to HN wrong this whole time haha***TechGoat*** 6 months ago

Thanks!***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

This is very sweet. I just started using HN because of this very reason. It shows that it is possible to have a post viewed by many people.***Truthkeepceo*** 6 months ago

Definitely the case!***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Super cool! I've been looking at ways to grow an audience and gain some traction and this might be one of the most interesting takes at it so far.***GlennViroux*** 6 months ago

Good wonderfill sir***alicja1*** 6 months ago

Thanks!***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Really great strategy! Thanks for sharing! Looking forward to you guys open-sourcing that bot as well.***MorganKung*** 6 months ago

Here you go: https://github.com/simpleanalytics/news-alerts***adriaanvanrossum*** 6 months ago

Awesome! Thanks for sharing!***MorganKung*** 6 months ago

Great strategy! Will probably try it in the future. Do you post the article that you write on Reddit or HN is enough?***ivandrag*** 6 months ago

We do both yes!***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

I'm going to try this for my SaaS and report the results.

But that said, you and Adriaan should open source that bot you built to catch breaking news. Sounds really useful and has "SaaS" written all over it.***superprofile*** 6 months ago

I think Adriaan will open it. Will ask him and share the link here.***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Sure: https://github.com/simpleanalytics/news-alerts***adriaanvanrossum*** 6 months ago

Thank you for the repo link ❤️.

Did you guys try different version of this ChatGPT prompt? Just curious why u included the competitors, does it lead to a better responses?

We are a business called Simple Analytics. It's a privacy friendly analytics tool for customers who care about privacy on the web. We like articles about: people writing about us, competitors in the privacy space, something related to privacy web analytics, or when Google Analytics gets negative press. Some of our competitors are Fathom, Plausible, Matomo, and Piwik. Is the following article interesting for us? Reply with a single number between 0 and 100. 0 being not interesting at all, 100 being super interesting. After this number, add a dash (-), following by a short explanation. This is the crawled article:***JanSch*** 6 months ago

It's literally in the prompt: "We like articles about: ..., competitors in the privacy space"***adriaanvanrossum*** 6 months ago

thank you for sharing!***dnilgis*** 6 months ago

@IronBrands what the heck happened on your second spike on that graph up top? Just a really good topic? Or a fluke? Or did you do something different?

And is there anything that takes priority over the war room? Like, what if you've got a critical bug or something?***Silvio\_SF*** 6 months ago

Topic was again a news article on Google Analytics, but somehow this one got more upvotes and traction.

Priority wise, yes if something critical is broken obviously, but the whole strategy only lasts for a couple of hours***IronBrands*** 6 months ago

Man, that's killer. I always thought newsjacking was kinda meh, but this could have a big impact. Thanks for sharing!***sam\_well*** 6 months ago

Thanks man!

IronBrands 6 months ago

## #1 on Google within two wks

Here's my process for finding easy-to-rank keywords

by Dmitry Dragilev

New domain ranked #1 on Google within two weeks: Here's my process for finding easy-to-rank keywords

Right after I bought the domain TopicRanker.com, I decided to make it rank on Google in 2 weeks. I was still building the software platform, so I didn’t have much to put on the website. I created a basic blog and went to work.

Because the blog and the domain were brand new, I was starting out with absolutely no popularity or domain authority. Essentially, Google would have no idea whether my blog was relevant to searchers or not.

It used to be that you could throw up a crappy piece of content on a crappy website and hire some link building agency to build a TON of links to this article it would start ranking. That is not the case anymore, topical depth and user experience of the content has become a bigger ranking factor vs. getting links.

So my goal was to find one keyword search term where the top Google search results had A TON of obvious weaknesses and problems. I found the following term:

Search term: “which keywords are best to target”

Volume: 390/mo

It was relevant to my prospective customer and the top search results had the following problems & weaknesses:

Top result does not have the exact search term in its title

Page load of top 3 results is above 3 seconds

Pages which rank #2 and #4 have only 800 words in the article – too short

Pages which rank #5 and #6 have poor readability score

These were enough to qualify this keyword for me to go after. Here is what the SERP looked like:

SERP

So I wrote my article by targeting the weaknesses above.

I used the exact search term in my title.

I made sure my page load was 3 seconds or under.

I made sure my content was 2K+ words.

I made sure my article had a readability score of 60+.

Here is the article: Which Keywords Are Best To Target

And…without any backlinks, the article was ranking #1 within a week.

SERP at #1l

I’ve received 100+ signups from this article alone. Now, I want to teach you to do the same.

Below, I’ll share a step-by-step guide explaining the process I used. Ready? Let’s roll!

What are easy-to-rank keywords?

Easy-to-rank or low-competition keywords are the keywords that, because of several factors, will be easiest for you to create content that will rank higher on the SERPs. Often, these keywords are low-hanging fruit that has been neglected by your competitors and therefore have weaknesses and problems on search results. When you’re starting out, these are the keywords that will give you the best opportunity to generate organic traffic.

Some of the factors that decide keyword difficulty include:

Weaknesses & Problems on SERP: We went over this a little bit already above, if there are problems on the google search results it’s an indication that this might be a good search term to go after. I'll list more possibilities in the next section.

Relevance: Google prioritizes content that meets the searcher’s needs. The top results will be what Google considers the best resources out there for that query. This means you need to consider search intent (the reason why the searcher is looking up that term). With that in mind, you can create effective, useful content that fulfills their needs.

Authority: Google gives more weight to authoritative sources. To be deemed authoritative, you should have a wealth of helpful content replete with social signals and backlinks from other highly ranked websites. If the competitors for the keyword are highly reputable sources like Forbes, you’ll have a harder time ranking for that keyword.

Volume: Measured by monthly search volume (MSV), this is the number of times a keyword is searched for every month. There’s no point ranking for a keyword that no one searches for. But if a keyword has a huge MSV, chances are the competition is extremely high.

Beyond this, you can exploit flaws in the top search results to find easy-to-rank keywords. For example, some of the top results may have low word counts, are not optimized for mobile devices, take a long time to load, or are missing key terms in their headlines.

These weaknesses are opportunities for you to easily rank your articles by creating stronger content. Below, we’ll explain how.

How to find easy-to-rank keywords

In the next section, we’ll break down how you can identify easy-to-rank keywords in six steps. You’ll start by brainstorming a broad list of topics and keywords, then narrow this list down gradually by analyzing the competition for weaknesses.

Below are the steps you can take to find and qualify a keyword:

Step 1: Come up with a list of potential topics

To start this process, think broadly about general topics that you want to or could rank for. These topics should be related to your website and should stem from your core expertise.

Once you have a list of topics, generate an exhaustive list of keywords that fall under those topics. These are the specific terms that are important because your target customers are probably searching for them.

For example, if you run a business texting software platform company such as SalesMessage (one of our customers at TopicRanker), then you would brainstorm a series of topic phrases that people would search for relating to business texts, like:

Sample SMS text messages to customers

How to text customers to show up to a call

How does sms texting work for businesses

Don’t worry too much about the quality and type of topic at this stage. We’ll narrow them down to the most effective terms during the next steps.

Also, aim for a list of both head terms (like” business texting”) and long-tail keywords (much more specific phrases, like “Sample SMS text messages to customers”). You’ll end up targeting more long-tail keywords as these are less competitive and easier to rank for.

There are several free and paid tools that can help brainstorm topics for your content generation strategy.

Here are a few tools that can help:

TopicRanker: TopicRanker shows you keywords you can rank for easily based on problems & weaknesses in the search results. Here is how it works: It crawls your site to determine general topics you’re a topical authority in. Then it scans millions of Google search results and recommends the exact keyword phrase which is on topic with your site content and has multiple key weaknesses. And from that data, it recommends current content on your site that should be updated, as well as new content that should be written. Here is how I use TopicRanker to find a keyword for our customer, SalesMessage.

KeywordsEverywhere: A freemium browser extension that can show you related keywords, phrases people also search for, trending keywords, and long-tail keywords relating to any Google SERP or webpage.

Ahrefs: A nice brainstorming tool to discover keyword ideas by plugging in your seed phrase. For each keyword, Ahrefs will provide a stack of SEO metrics to help you choose which are best to go with.

Ahrefs example

Exploding Topics: This tool analyzes searches, conversations, and mentions to find trends and market opportunities. You can use these insights to inform which keywords you should target.

With a preliminary list in hand, it’s a good idea to set up a basic spreadsheet. As you move through the article, you can add notes and assess each keyword at the end.

Step 2: Look for weaknesses in the SERPs

Another key factor to consider when doing keyword research is the quality of the competition on Google. If you’ve found a keyword that you could rank for, the next step is to analyze the competition for a range of weaknesses that will make it easier for you to rank.

These weaknesses include:

Domain authority: As mentioned above, if you find that the top 10 spots on Google have a lower Moz DA than yours, there’s a good chance you will outrank them for that keyword. Take a look at the example for OutplayHQ.com with Moz DA 34 below, you can see that the article ranking #2 is Moz DA 35, which is a strong signal that OutplayHQ can outrank them if they create something better.

Domain authority

Title mismatches: This is when there are words missing from the meta title that are included in the search query. Ideally, there should be none missing. For example, when you search “fixed money supply”, the first result doesn’t have this phrase in the title at all. This has a serious impact on SEO as readers are likely to skim over it.

Title mismatches

Low word counts: The word count of your article should be between 1,000 and 2,000 words to be competitive. A low word count on the ranking articles is a sign that they are thin in content and could be improved.

Readability: Content should be written at a 7th to 9th-grade reading level, which corresponds to a Flesch Reading Ease Score of 60 to 80. A reading level of 10th grade or over (or a Flesch score of under 60) is challenging for most online readers. You can capitalize on this weakness with an article that’s well-written and easier to read.

Load times: According to Google, the load time of a web page should be under 3 seconds. If the top articles for your keyword show load times higher than this, you can outrank them by producing a faster-to-load page.

Spam scores: You can use SEO tools to determine the spam scores for the pages in the top 10 results. If they have spam scores of over 10%, you have a chance to rank by developing better content that’s less spammy and more informative.

Article age: You need to have current content, meaning 6 months or less. If it’s older than 6 months, it’s time to update it! I try to update all my content every 2 months.

Forum sites: Google hates ranking Quora, Twitter, Facebook, Medium, LinkedIn, etc. on the first page for informational searches where people are looking for articles. If you see one of these on the first page of Google, it’s a dead giveaway that Google is starved for content.

Mobile compatibility: Google prioritizes this a great deal, if your site loads slowly on mobile Google will penalize you, so make sure your site loads fast on mobile. You can test your site here

You can also use a dedicated keyword research tool like TopicRanker to determine problems in the Google search results.

Your goal is to find keywords that have a few of these weaknesses. They don’t have to have every weakness, but the more there are, the easier it’ll be to rank for that phrase.

If you learn better from visuals, here is a worksheet to use when thinking about weaknesses:

Cheat sheet

Here is a quick example: I ran TopicRanker on nextiva.com/blog for one of our customers and found that the this article on Dialpad Alternatives needed a bit of improvement since it ranked in position #18 (bottom of page 2) of Google. It had the following weaknesses:

Outdated content: The content was from 8 months ago.

Low word count: It was under 1500 words.

Poor readability score: The score showed it was hard to read.

I had the team at Nextiva improve these action items and the article jumped to the #3 spot.

Step 3: Remove topics that aren’t related to your domain authority

Remember how Google determines ranking based on relevance? It’s time to take that into consideration and narrow down your keywords based on whether they fit your domain authority.

The more you post great content about a general topic (for example, SEO), the more likely Google is to see your website as an authoritative source in that context.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Does my website have topical depth authority on this general topic?

Have I written at least 6 articles on this topic in the last 3 months?

Do I regularly post about this topic on social media and via my newsletter?

If you answer no to any of these questions, you’ll have a much harder time ranking for them – especially if the top 10 results are highly authoritative. So, remove any keywords for which you answered no to all three questions.

Step 4: Check the monthly search volume (MSV)

The next thing to do is check how popular the search term is. You don’t want to target a keyword that nobody is searching for. However, high-volume keywords are often difficult to rank for as they are broader and usually very competitive.

Instead, target keywords that have 50 to 500 people searching for them per month. At this level, you have a good chance of ranking.

Using Keywords Everywhere, you can easily get search volume and traffic estimates for the search terms you’re considering.

Search terms

You can also easily check search volumes using TopicRanker:

Search volumes

Add these volumes to your spreadsheet and flag the terms that have too little or far too much traffic. You’ll probably cut these from your list before moving to the next step, but there’s one last thing to check.

There’s one exception to the rule of not targeting very low-volume keywords. In the Keywords Everywhere plug-in, you’ll see the “Trend” column. This shows you whether the searches for that keywords are increasing, falling, or staying the same.

If you see any that are projected to rise in popularity, it could be a good idea to target them before they get competitive. That way, you’ll have ranked for the term before they become higher in difficulty.

Step 5: Analyze the competition

With a narrowed-down list of keywords and a good idea of search volume, it’s time to check out the competition. You’ll want to assess both the amount and strength of the competition, as both of these factors can affect how difficult it is to rank for a keyword.

The first thing to check is how your Moz Domain Authority (DA) compares to the DAs in the search results for each keyword. Moz DA is a metric that measures the popularity and authority of a website, based on factors like the number and strength of backlinks.

The Moz DA ranges from 0-100, with a higher score indicating a higher authority (and a higher chance of ranking). You can easily qualify your Moz DA by using TopicRanker. Simply plug in your keyword, and it will show you how your website’s Moz DA compares to the SERPs for that term:

DA comparison

The Keywords Everywhere add-on also shows Moz DA:

DA comparison

When judging whether a keyword will be easy to rank for, compare your Moz DA to that of the websites on Google’s first page. If your result is close to the average Moz DA of the top ten results, you have a decent chance of ranking for that keyword.

Next, take into account the quantity of competition. If the first two results on Google are particularly strong, but the quality drops off significantly after that, then you have a chance of ranking. However, if there are dozens of high-quality articles with strong Moz DAs, that keyword is likely going to be too difficult.

Step 6: Consider user intent and finalize your list of keywords

By now, you should hopefully have found easy-to-rank keywords that:

Satisfy the conditions about topical depth authority and regular posting.

Have a monthly search volume between 50 and 500 (or lower if they’re trending upward).

Have 2-3 (or more) of the weaknesses listed above.

However, to rank for them, you still need to generate useful content that outperforms the competition. This means you need to take into consideration the user intent behind the search queries.

Not only can this guide your approach to content creation, but it can be a final step in assessing weaknesses in the SERPs.

Google’s job is to answer people’s searches with contextually relevant articles, based on clues in their search queries. If the content in the top search results doesn’t match the user intent, you have an opportunity to fill the gap and provide the content that those people are looking for.

To assess user intent, ask yourself the following questions:

Who’s searching for the keyword? Are the search results targeted at experts rather than beginners? Is there a mismatch where the top content isn’t meeting user needs?

What are they looking for? Do they want to buy a product or service, find information, or navigate to a specific web page?

What angle are the top results taking? Is there an opportunity to fill a gap that hasn’t been addressed yet?

Once you’ve answered these questions, you should have a decent idea of the kind of content that’ll stand out and meet the needs of your visitors.

Time to start creating

Targeting low-competition keywords is a great way for less-established websites to get their foot in the door and land a place in the top search results. Every article you rank means more site credibility, more ranking articles, and more conversions.

With a list of easy-to-rank keywords and a vision of the content you need to create, there’s nothing left to do but write. So it’s time to get started!

***Dmitry Dragilev*** posted to Growth on April 21, 2023

I've been focussed on improving the SEO for T.LY URL Shortener. It's a challenging market because most of the competition has been around for 20+ years.

I've found that following all the standard advice works, but it takes time.

Build backlinks (Still super important)

Have a blog producing regular relevant content

Make sure your site has an About Page, Contact Page, FAQ Page, Testimonials, etc

Build free tools that drive traffic. My example is a QR Code Builder

Google page speed

Use Keyword tools

Use Google Search Console

HvyMPbn.md.png

Currently, for the search term "URL Shortener," Im ranking around the five spot. I would love to see this move to the top 3. If anyone has advice, I would love to hear it.***timleland*** 6 months ago

Sure thing. So first of all the term "url shortener" gets 640,000 searches per month, and that's just that exact term, nevermind all the off shoot terms. So you're going after a VERY competitive term and you're fighting competitors which have been there for years.

Your strategy needs to be slow, step by step. Start ranking for all the different subtopics of your main topic and build it up.

In other words - "url shortener" is your hail mary. The ultimate goal. But to rank for that you need to rank for all the other small terms under it.

For example, google "hearing aids" - towards the bottom of 1st page of Google you'll see this page - https://www.healthyhearing.com/help/hearing-aids

Now this is a HUGE term for them, but they did not start ranking for it just because they have "great content" - they rank for it because they have most comprehensive library of subtopics out there - check out there "help section" - help menu in the right. See that?

Your job is to become the topical authority in your field! So you need to do keyword research for other keywords related to different topic clusters of subtopics for "url shortener".

Does this make sense?

We help our customers at TopicRanker with this all day long. Ping us direct if you have more questions.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

This is the right answer that I also believe works 99.9% of the time! Create a small sets of islands of subtopics around your big island to rise in the ranks!***orliesaurus*** 6 months ago

So interesting and helpful, thanks***Victoria\_Koval*** 6 months ago

Very interesting article, I'm going to test it soon!***the\_it\_guy*** 6 months ago

Nice write up! Made me super curious to dive into this further.***koder*** 6 months ago

Thanks for sharing, helps a lot on me***indieDevJim*** 3 months ago

What! This is so awesome. I've been working on our product ConveyThis. Gonna go give it a shot. Thanks dude!***mykhanhpham*** 4 months ago

I am learning to SEO and your post is an excellent guide. Loved it. Thanks for writing this.***fernslkara*** 5 months ago

Nice and very informative article. We will definitely try this. What are the paid tools that you've used? keywords everywhere? ahrefs?***TradeSchools*** 5 months ago

Noted, fire post!***Kamiyk*** 5 months ago

This is very helpful. I've created an account at TopicRanker for my new webshop: Fantasy-art,nl. The report looks good.

As a SEO newbie I need to make more time to look more into this, but I will do so soon.***FantasyArtNL*** 6 months ago

Cheers! Thanks for giving us a try. Happy to help if you have any questions.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

it's very helpful full tips for me that those use in your blog.***amelia220*** 6 months ago

Super detailed! Thanks for penning it down.***aakriti\_mahajan*** 6 months ago

Bookmarked , this is very useful***Sarahsfdas*** 6 months ago

This is freaking awesome. Excited to try this out***therealishmatt*** 6 months ago

That's very good.

I also want to rank my site. Any sugesstions.***isabellopez12*** 6 months ago

what's your site?***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Wow this is insanely helpful. I had no idea that google rank could be built in such an insanely short time. Very impressive***Dutch\_dev*** 6 months ago

To find easy ranking keywords for a website, there are several methods that can be used. One approach is to use keyword research tools, such as Google Keyword Planner, Ahrefs, SEMrush, or Moz Keyword Explorer. These tools can help identify relevant keywords with low competition and high search volume. By finding these types of keywords, it can be easier to rank higher in search results.

Another method is to analyze your competitors. Look at the keywords your competitors are using and identify any low-competition keywords that you could target. This technique is called reverse engineering. By doing this, you can gain insights into the keywords that are working for them, and use that information to improve your own keyword strategy. Personally, i have ranked my gaming site on theStumbleguys using these methods

However, by using these methods, you can increase your chances of identifying keywords that will help your website rank higher in search results, ultimately driving more traffic and potential customers to your site.***Stumble\_guy*** 6 months ago

Competitor analysis is a nice practice, I would however couple it with SERP weakness analysis and focus more on the issues and troubles on the SERP you are going after. If there are no problems with it - why try to rank for it?***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

So interesting and helpful, thanks***chanceseed*** 6 months ago

@dmitryprdude really like your site TopicRanker. Have you thought of increasing the number of keyword suggestions returned for your paid plan? 6 suggestions is a ridiculously low number to me. I'd sign up if it was at least 25-50***Mhbackpacker*** 6 months ago

Cool! I am using pretty much similar method with the help of tools like keyword everywhere, semrush, moz etc***aliiisshan124*** 6 months ago

if you would like to supercharge this method i know a few search operators that will change the game if you add them to your method. all i require as payment is a backlink from the new site :)***devinschumacher*** 6 months ago

Good tactics and intelligent move to keep up your SERP ranking in short period of time***appysa*** 6 months ago

WAO AMAZING TIPS***albertwolf*** 6 months ago

Very thoughtful and really good insights. I still feel that DA and Ur play important and link building is critical.***kashishtrivedi91*** 6 months ago

@dmitryprdude Amazing to hear your perspective and learn from your insights. Thank you Dmitry.***DSarkar*** 6 months ago

This is a very inspiring article and very helpful. I do have a question though: did you already have content on the website or was this your first article? Just curious about the work that preceded the explosion in traffic.***Jongollo*** 6 months ago

This was my first piece of content.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Thank you Dimitry for such an interesting and useful article. I'm a newbie to SEO. This definitely gave me a good understanding and directions to take for further research on the topic.***bandiomkar123*** 6 months ago

happy to help!***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Gold article, thanks !

Regarding backlinks from authoritative sources, an idea might be to launch your project on producthunt/hackernews which have the particularity of being themselves authoritative sources.***RiadEtm*** 6 months ago

Thanks for kind words.

Sure, backlinks from anywhere are great. You do eventually want backlinks from real domains, not forums/etc. A bit more on this here:

https://moz.com/blog/case-study-ranking-high-volume-keyword***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Super detailed - thanks!***whattheHEK*** 6 months ago

Is it good to use AI based content on a new blog as there are too many AI based content generating tool available online. I am planning to make a new website and I need to know this.***veronijohanz*** 6 months ago

good question, so I would use AI generated content for an outline or a first draft, but then I would edit it and improve heavily, I would never take what ChatGPT creates and publish it on my blog word for word. I'd always use it as a first draft.

Please read/watch this - https://ahrefs.com/blog/chatgpt-for-seo/***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Yes, it's totally fine as long as it's high quality. The more value and unique perspective you can add to the existing topic the higher your chances are for that content to rank highly. I would encourage you to check out some topics in content authority and relevancy like "information gain" and "topical authority" so you can see why AI content itself is not bad. There should be a point soon (maybe already here) that AI content will be much better than human-generated content as far as informational keywords go.***mscyoc*** 6 months ago

Great article and advice, Dmitry! TopicRanker looks super helpful.

As far as keyword research and really understanding topical authority for your target keyword, I would suggest running a content audit of the top 10 ranking pages in Google to figure out which subtopics they cover and which ones they're missing. This will help you build the ultimate page and make sure you rank higher on the first page.

I created a tool that does this automatically for any target keyword and then allows you to use chatGPT to build the ultimate piece of content.

Here's a screenshot of the topical report inside the tool:

H8VrIMg.jpg

I'd love to give anyone here access. Please join the waitlist on my site at

https://ousia.ai***mscyoc*** 6 months ago

Another good chrome extension to use is the MozBarchrome extension to help you find the MozDA of a website you're currently viewing***pb24578*** 6 months ago

Very helpful article thanks. Keep up the good work.***emmacole*** 6 months ago

Great content***reha\_santiago*** 6 months ago

Very comprehensive. The insight that Google is starving for content where forums like Quora are raking on page 1, is something completely new and useful to me. I am gonna give it a try soon. Thanks Dmitry.***prashantisonline*** 6 months ago

100%! Google hates to put forum websites or social media sites on 1st page of results. Nice little trick to keep in mind.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Great article, Dmitry! Loved the captivating storytelling approach to explain the process of finding easy-to-rank keywords.***estebgonza*** 6 months ago

Great article! I can relate to it as I am currently implementing a similar approach with my side project. But it took almost a year in my case to start ranking.***hegi55*** 6 months ago

Google takes a while to change it's mind and can be stubborn about certain serps! Patience is key with SEO.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Wow! This is a masterpiece Dmitry.

I started out ibiangake.com 3 months ago and haven't made any headway. Glad I found this.

I'll definitely implement to see the outcome.***PrincewillUchegbu*** 6 months ago

Sounds good! And ping us over at topicranker.com as you start to implement this stuff, happy to give more feedback.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Wow, great article. I love the step by step approach. Thanks for sharing***Mbelarrem*** 6 months ago

You have shared a great strategy to target the right keywords in the right way! We have implemented a similar strategy in the past and obtained most of our sign-ups for our SaaS tool from the article we shared on multiple platforms. We will now follow these steps again to find the right keywords for our product.***buckyjames*** 6 months ago

Thanks! What's your site?***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

That‘s some really great advice, thanks! You really shouldn‘t underestimate the power of SEO***josh\_the\_tech\_guy*** 6 months ago

Great tips!! It really helped me on what I'm working on!***LibertyLabs*** 6 months ago

cheers! happy to help***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Remarkable learning! Thank you for sharing.***keth11*** 6 months ago

What was your DA when your ranked for this world?***CCRRR2*** 6 months ago

I believe it was Moz DA 7 or 5 or so***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

So you already have a lot of work done to reach that DA before all of a sudden you ranked first for a certain keyword with brand new domain, isn't that right? With brand new domain and 0 DA I doubt you can rank first anywhere? Am I right?***CCRRR2*** 6 months ago

Not really, when I started writing the article my Moz DA was 1 and aftter I ranked my moz da went to 5.

I did not do much work before to get to 1, just promoted it on LinkedIn with some valuable content/ posts.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

So I can build up my DA just by finding unique keyword with some decent MSV and writing an article for it with good readability score targeting the search intent, which will tell Google to rank me first and my DA will go up?***CCRRR2*** 6 months ago

Here is a good article on how to grow your DA: https://moz.com/blog/how-do-i-improve-my-domain-authority***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

This was tremendously helpful, thank you for sharing such quality content***smorean*** 6 months ago

happy to share, don't be a stranger as you implement, if you have question - ping me - just hit contact on topicranker.com***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Thanks a ton for this valuable post, Dmitry.***leventaskan*** 6 months ago

happy to share, and don't be a stranger as you implement some of these steps on your own, contact me with questions, just hit the contact envelope on TopicRanker.com***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Hey Dmitry, thank you for writing such an in-depth guide.

Would you mind listing the SEO tools that you are using? Preferably free but also paid ones.***acedit*** 6 months ago

Sure thing! I use TopicRanker of course and KeywordsEverywhere extension for keyword research, MarketMuse to optimize, SE Rankings to track rankings, Ahrefs and Moz to check on other websites health/popularity. That's about it!***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Thanks for posting this amazingly informative article!

I often hesitated on choosing the blog engine. I know Wordpress is good. But I really don't want to deal with it.

Do you have any recommendation on where to host the blog that's friendly to both search engines and the blog owner?***hlwjia*** 6 months ago

Sure thing. I use Wordpress and I LOVE getflywheel.com - their support is unmatched. Been with them for a while. Even after the acquisition they rock.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

You might want to look into webflow. It's intuitive for programmers, basically a visual coding interface. Though it'll have a bit of a learning curve, you can do a lot more with it.

If you're not in it for that since you seem to just want to run a blog, then try wix or square space.

Wordpress is definitely simple when you use page builders like elementor.

The search engine doesn't really care where the site is being hosted or what platform it had been built on, rather the actual content is much more important***sunnysideup*** 6 months ago

Thanks, @sunnysideup! I know the content is king here but I just don't want other minor technicalities hindering the content taking full effect.***hlwjia*** 6 months ago

This was really helpful and informative. Thank you !

Trying this asap.***SaaSAnalyser*** 6 months ago

happy to share! stay in touch as you implement this stuff, just hit the contact link on TopicRanker.com***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

This is gold. How can TopicRanker help a brand new site? or an Old site which has next to zero content on the business topic ? I have both of these cases to deal with at the moment and reading your post is giving me ideas.***pracas*** 6 months ago

Sure thing. So for an old site our tool crawls your site to figure out your topic depth authority the way Google sees it- that is - which topics have you written a lot about and which topic clusters you're the strongest at. From there we determine overall seed topics you should write about.

Then we look for problems on search results about specific keyword queries related to these topical depth topics about your site and show you the SERPs which have problems and are on topic with your expertise. We show you specific problems the SERP has.

We recommend keywords to target for new keywords as well as updates you need to make on your old content.

For a brand new site we - since you do not have much popularity, we take your site popularity into account when determining a keyword you should go after. Wo we crawl millions of search results on topic of your new site to find ones where competition is low, popularity of sites ranking is similar to yours, topic relevancy is high, and there are obvious problems you can capitalize on by creating new content.

You can watch the video demo here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLlqWY6Go6c

Let me know if you have more questions.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

What if the old site has next to zero content (most of it is images without alt text conveying product features) and very less text? Is it better to treat it as a new site?***pracas*** 6 months ago

Basically yes, treat it like a brand new site as far as topical depth authority is concerned.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

amazing info***liamm*** 6 months ago

It's a good thing that Google indexed your page faster which is not the case in most of times.***Algeriahome*** 6 months ago

You can always submit through Google Search Console and check if there are any errors***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Amazing article! Really helpful and well structured. Planning to use this and parts of the strategy for my own tool :)***cryptoneur*** 6 months ago

Sounds good! Looks like you'd in crypto niche?***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Good work! I wonder how SEO will change with the new updates to Google search coming out soon***kd1996*** 6 months ago

It's always changing! Every single day.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

This is a goldmine. Bookmarking it and will test it out soon.***StefBellos00*** 6 months ago

Thanks. Feel free to ping our team at TopicRanker with any questions as you start to implement this stuff, just hit the contact envelope in lower right hang corner.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

Huh, maybe SEO isn't dead after all! 😂***LucyAnimus*** 6 months ago

It certainly not. It's just harder to rank #1 these days.***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

@dmitryprdude whoa that's an impressive result — kudos!

What do you think is the lowest search volume that's still worthwhile?***Toni\_notTony*** 6 months ago

Hey Toni, I'd say if you think there is demand and volume for a specific term in near future - you should go after it. The best ones are where the volume is 0 so nobody is going after it and you decide to bet on it because you know there is going to be more demand in search for that term. And then in 3 months the volume is 500/mo and then in another 3 months it's 1000/mo. Does this make sense?***dmitryprdude*** 6 months ago

I'll be adding this to my strategy***Amaning*** 6 months ago

Sounds good Edmond! Any question - just holler!

dmitryprdude 6 months ago

## 7 tips for Solopreneurs

that sound stupid but they actually work by Dan Kulkov

Sick of hearing the same advice "talk to your customers" over and over again?

Same here.

That's why I picked 7 tips from our MakerBox journey that initially seem stupid. But I can guarantee you will grow on them.

1. Don't listen to the feedback

No matter what you do — somebody will think it's terrible.

This rule applies to landing pages, SEO articles, product videos, and marketing emails. People will find weak points that are "stopping you from growing x2 faster".

But in reality, most of these weaknesses can be ignored. Yes, it's not perfect that they exist in the first place. But they don't impact your business that much.

Solopreneurs should ignore 80% of the feedback. This is the way to build a calm business. Anxiety-free.

2. Don't acquire more users

This myth deserves to be busted.

You don't grow by acquiring more users

You grow by getting more activated users that understand your product's value

Getting thousands of website visitors with a poor marketing funnel will result in... nothing. People will just stare at your landing page for 10 seconds and leave.

Instead, focus on your Activation. Learn to communicate your product's value with free trials, product videos, social proof, freebies, and other formats.

3. Forget about tactics

Every week somebody on Twitter runs a giveaway of the secret tactic to scale any SaaS to $10K MRR.

Don't get distracted by shiny object syndrome. Tactics, frameworks, and templates come and go. Foundation rules and channels stay.

SEO didn't go anywhere. Email lists are not dead. Social proof still sells like crazy.

Pay attention to marketing principles that worked 10 years ago and will work in the next 10 years. They are boring, but they do the job.

4. Lose customers

Don't try to please everyone. It's not just impossible. This mindset will actually harm your growth.

Do you have the ideal customer profile? Perfect. Write copy and optimize your sales offer for them.

But go further. Find your worst customer profile. Ensure your copy, features, and offer will push these users away from your product.

This focus will convert ideal customers better. Because they will see that you are ready to sacrifice other segments for them. What a romantic and convincing gesture.

5. Don't plan

Creating a 12-month marketing plan with every possible campaign is so appealing. But does it really make sense for Solopreneurs?

In short, no. There are 2 reasons why:

Market is changing too fast. Your plan will be off in a few months. There is no point in planning things that won't happen.

Your powers are flexibility and speed. You can adapt way faster than corporations. The more rigid your plans, the less you will leverage this strength.

Have a flexible marketing backlog for each month. But be okay with changing it.

6. Sell before building

Imagine you have a new product idea. And let's say no matter what you do; it will fail. Even with the finest execution, you won't be able to make it profitable.

What would you prefer?

Waste one weekend creating an early bird landing page to test the demand

Waste one month creating an MVP to test the demand

If people are unwilling to buy (or at least sign up on the waitlist) your product without seeing it — it's not worth building.

7. Read less

I am shooting myself in the foot on this one. But it needs to be said.

Stop bookmarking Twitter threads with startup tools. Stop listening to podcasts with famous Solopreneurs. Stop subscribing to marketing newsletters.

Sure, it's definitely helpful to get new ideas and challenge your status quo.

But you know what's better? Doing the work.

Less FOMO. More results. Highly recommend it.

Conclusion

These 7 tips are my unexpected learnings from building an Indie Business.

I see their limitations and exceptions. But they worked perfectly for me.

Use them as starting points to challenge your current mindset. If you find some idea irritating, try to think, "Why?". Maybe it's high time to try something new.

***Dan Kulkov*** posted to Lessons learned on March 17, 2023

I have mixed feelings about these tips. While some of them may work for certain businesses or situations, I don't think they are universal principles that can be applied to all startups. Here are my thoughts on each tip:

Don't listen to the feedback - I agree that not all feedback is valuable, and that you should learn to filter out the noise. However, completely ignoring all feedback can be dangerous, as it may prevent you from addressing legitimate concerns or improving your product.

Don't acquire more users - I disagree with this tip. While it's true that acquiring users who don't understand the value of your product is not helpful, it's also true that you can't grow without acquiring new users. Focusing on activation is important, but it should not be done at the expense of user acquisition.

Forget about tactics - I agree that marketing principles are important and timeless, but tactics can also be useful in certain situations. It's important to stay up-to-date on new tactics and evaluate whether they could be effective for your business.

Lose customers - I think it's important to focus on your ideal customer profile, but actively trying to push away other segments may not be the best approach. It's possible to have multiple customer segments and still provide value to all of them.

Don't plan - I agree that plans should be flexible and adaptable, but having a general roadmap for your business can be helpful in staying focused and achieving your goals.

Sell before building - I think it's important to validate your product idea before investing too much time and money into building it, but creating an early bird landing page may not always be the best approach. There are other methods of validation that can be more effective depending on the product and market.

Read less - I agree that it's important to focus on doing the work and getting results, but learning from others can also be valuable. It's all about finding the right balance between learning and doing.***gloriamaldonado*** 8 months ago

The commonality between both your and OP's advice is really: listen to your ideal customers. For example, don't listen to feedback from random people from Product Hunt or Hacker News or Reddit (unless they're your target market).***satvikpendem*** 7 months ago

Wow, that is some really good stuff here. I 100% agree!

Thank you for sharing! 🙏***thekreator*** 8 months ago

glad that yo liked it!

appreciate it 💪***kronop*** 8 months ago

Absolutely, I haven't yet launched anything yet. However, I had similar thoughts and your post kinda validated a few of my points, so thanks to you, I will stick to my guns :)

And right now, I'm at a point where I want to just get something out there even if it does not work, just for the satisfaction of getting it out there and want to do it my way. So thank you again :)***thekreator*** 8 months ago

I would say, the 7th tip is not for beginners.

If you're just starting out as a solopreneur, you need to absorb as much knowledge as possible. You can't just wing it and hope for the best.

You need to learn the fundamentals of building a product, scaling it to reach more customers, and selling it effectively.

That's why you should consume a lot of content from different sources: Twitter threads, podcasts, webinars, Youtube videos etc.

They will help you create your own roadmap and vision for your product.

Plus, you can benefit from the wisdom and insights of successful solopreneurs who have been there and done that.

They can save you from making common mistakes and wasting your time and energy on things that don't matter.***JackL424*** 8 months ago

yeap, wrote about it here — https://dankulkov.substack.com/p/46-weekly-dan-why-does-most-marketing***kronop*** 8 months ago

One of the best suggestions I've read that are not bullshiting...Great advice!***JeffreytheHacker*** 8 months ago

wow, thank you 🤩***kronop*** 8 months ago

I'll do you another controversial one:

Focus on the product, marketing is an afterthought.

Guess which one moved the needle for me...

Engaging on Twitter, sending emails, writing blog articles, etc.; or

...actually improving the product and giving my users the features they want.***simplisticallysimple*** 8 months ago

You need users to give them what they want, and you have to get them somehow 😂***TasselHat*** 8 months ago

Yes haha, get some initial users first.***simplisticallysimple*** 8 months ago

this could give user reviews too which is good for marketing***PinkishCucumber*** 8 months ago

Absolutely!

That's how I get my reviews.

Try my best to delight, then ask them respectfully to leave an honest review.***simplisticallysimple*** 8 months ago

that's a truly controversial tip 😂***kronop*** 8 months ago

Also another valuable lesson is to learn from what's making money and NOT what's just popular. A ton of popular products don't make any money (unfortunately).

Check out here if you're in a niche or category where others have already built successful apps- http://microsaasdb.com/***Subro*** 8 months ago

Bookmarked this. Wait ... did I just ignore Rule #7? Sorry, but this one is really good!***nilskoppelmann*** 8 months ago

This can be an exception? XD I agree with almost everything. I wanna keep it in my notes***PinkishCucumber*** 8 months ago

That's incredible***tempinst5*** 8 months ago

❤️***kronop*** 8 months ago

#7 is me but with YouTube videos 😂***psd*** 8 months ago

and podcasts too!***kronop*** 8 months ago

Really useful tips here 👍***Meri\_Hammond*** 8 months ago

appreciate it!***kronop*** 8 months ago

This is a good post.***Socram*** 8 months ago

thank you!***kronop*** 8 months ago

Wow***BDigit*** 8 months ago

thanks***kronop*** 8 months ago

100%. Just build and deliver!

Don't try to sell air!***ltim*** 8 months ago

I just published what might be #8 to your article:

Code Hard, Ship Harder: Just make it easy as hell to deploy what you're creating as soon as possible. Nothings outweighs real user feedback.

Thanks for your list, It needed to be said!***EeKay*** 8 months ago

That is some really good stuff***aryeix*** 8 months ago

This was very helpful and I learned something new. Thanks for sharing Dan! 🙌***aamdmn*** 8 months ago

If you're looking for inspiration or ideas for your next post, I'll appreciate it if you talk more about item #6 (Sell before building) (clearly I do not agree with item #7 😁)

Thanks!***eolivera*** 8 months ago

That's a valuable lesson***adamklepacz*** 8 months ago

@kronop I fully agree with your points. Now, we need to absorb these things if we want to succeed. I really like your idea about the marketing plan. I have seen many companies make their long-term digital marketing plan and put a lot of time into planning, but when it comes to execution, they never execute half of the plan. I'm not saying it's bad, but I agree that having a long-term plan in a few lines and making quarterly plans that are easily executable is better.

We have implemented this approach in the past for our SaaS customer retention tool Churnfree. We now make short plans and execute every plan. We focus on the flexibility of the plan because we know that time is constantly changing, as are the trends. We try to focus on current trends.

Thank you for sharing these amazing points.***buckyjames*** 8 months ago

Forget about tactics, I needed to hear that one today!

Forever bogged down in the numbers and the 'this should equate to that' so 'if I can hit this that that will happen'.

Sometimes you just have to go for it!***RebeccaGrindle*** 7 months ago

Some great tips here. For those early in the startup journey - everyone wants to offer you advice. The thing that differentiates you from the pack (for better or worse) is your own instinct on the market you are trying to win. Trust your gut.

It's a little like giving tips to a learner driver on how to win in an Formula One car. Too much information and you lose sight of the original goal (like just getting your driver license for starters!)

I'd always listen to your customers but everyone else should be filtered.***johnnyweb*** 7 months ago

Sell before building is 1000% working one! It's the basic foundation of building in public, I think.

Thanks for sharing🐲***Shuhiyo*** 7 months ago

product market fit is product market fit.

if you have it, you know it and none of this matters tbh.

if something isn't working and you don't have validation super fast, take the pill fast and move on. life is too short to pursue sluggish ideas.

test multiple ideas in parallel. some people say "you have shiny object syndrome, focus on one thing", screw that you actually have winners mindset. fact is most ideas fail, this increases you chances of hitting a homerun.

to have a constant inflow of ideas use market research tools like Ahrefs, Google trends etc. also i use 3rd party market researchers to augment my research; like trends.co ($200/year) and explodingideas.co (free). both send weekly reports with market research on new trending niches and keyword opportunities to create businesses around.

in the last month I tested 4 ideas. 1 worked so i'm running with it aka getting a few subscribers every 5 minutes. killed the other 3. it hurts for 10 minutes but that's ego, put it aside and be ruthless about what you actually pursue.***ericlamcrypto7*** 7 months ago

I like the idea #6

So at some point in order to sell before selling you have to show your idea in public.

Let's say you post on indiehackers and have 50-100 subscribers. Would you start a project?

What defines successful idea confirmation- I mean when would you start then?***peakminute*** 8 months ago

Great Ideas. These rules are all golden. I couldn't agree with you more. Also the 12 Marketing Rule by Dan is very helpful. Thanks!***imjohnkoo*** 8 months ago

Less FOMO Foster JOMO! Once you unlock the privilege of enjoying being alone and make it productive, no one can stop you. Also it really is better for your mental health than wasting time with people who are not in the same mindset as you.***onaty*** 8 months ago

#7 is the most important. I fall into this often - you think its productive, you think what you learn will be actionable, but really, you're procrastinating the REAL work.***thomasvillix*** 8 months ago

Uncommon advices but brutally true 😄

Thanks for sharing.***Sam23*** 8 months ago

"Read less" hit hard... Been reading and contacting so many people to understand if my product is a good idea.

This is enough convincing that I need to start actually working on the project. Thanks***tony\_y*** 8 months ago

https://govtjobstake.com***govtjobstake*** 8 months ago

As someone just getting started, these tips are a breath of fresh air! I have to say that personally I am building my first product before a proper product page. But my product is something I intend to build regardless of demand existing so it seems like a waste of time to focus on that at the moment.***alexis\_egf*** 8 months ago

Definitely relate to #7. I've spent too much time working and preparing for a perfect business because I would find a Twitter thread about a certain framework, marking strategy, or course.

Working on becoming more actionable, less prepared, and iterating fast.

Thank you for sharing Dan.***RickyMedG*** 8 months ago

Everyone explain you what to do, but this post exactly tells you what not to do. Thanks @kronop***ji10dra*** 8 months ago

Spotify downloader page, this might come to your mind. This section will explain why to use our Spotify downloader tool. Recall that it’s a simple and easy-to-use tool for downloading your favourite music from Spotify. It not only downloads but converts the Spotify song to MP3. You can even get the ZIP file of the song, whatever it is. These are the primary reasons why you should take advantage of this tool. kindly visit https://spotidown.com/***mrten64*** 8 months ago

#6 really got me... I've planned to finish the demo platform so then i'd start selling it... Amazing article!***joaopedroalves*** 8 months ago

definitely agree with sell before building anything. a very good strategy for idea validation. https://founderscafe.io/post/get-paying-customers-before-building-anything***PinkishCucumber*** 8 months ago

Don't listen to the feedback

-- I think here there are different cases - if you already have customers who want to pay you - have a good will towards you, you can account - not necessarily actionable, but outsiders likely have sum negative effect - overly optimistic or negative, without being any sort of stake holder.

I think it is matter of perspective if there is some more market behind what people are asking for - this is a bullet to put on board, otherwise it is a bulled to put in pile of suggestions, below the board to keep track of.***pavelz*** 8 months ago

Thank you for sharing***lingqingm*** 8 months ago

Thanks for the tips. I really like the #2 and #7. Having the mind to focus on the quality of what your users want and deliver value as soon as possible.***Weng*** 8 months ago

Interesting insights and I agree with all of them especially #7, I think too many people (including myself) feel like there achieving something by engrossing them selves in education, yes it’s good to learn new things but actions speak louder than words we should all aim to get those reps in.

I’d like to add to #6 aswell, I think speed is also important to get ideas out quickly and iterate on them quickly is a great way to see if your product or service is viable and sells. Let me know your thoughts on this

Great post Dan 👍🏻***Jack\_Gaskell8*** 8 months ago

With every new Google update, people say SEO is dead***doomain*** 8 months ago

#6 is #1 for me. In terms of the mindset shift involved.

Thanks for sharing 👍🏽***rudylattae*** 8 months ago

Working on #1 & #7.

Non-users and followers have the most to say about projects. It stings when you get low engagement, but proves an idea is not worth the time.

Love you lost. Will follow.***revampedmkt*** 8 months ago

where do you get your initial ideas from? do you subscribe to sites like trends.co or explodingideas.co to get your initial idea?

curious if these are good tools worth exploring?***ericlamcrypto7*** 8 months ago

still trying to do #6, as a developer, it's hard for me 😂***tamfocus\_*** 8 months ago

I'm on the same boat dude... I got like 90% of my marketplace done but I really know that I should dedicate my time to sell the idea before finish it...***joaopedroalves*** 8 months ago

Very good, but what about the implementation?

Sell before building. How? When no followers, can't post links on groups and subreddits.

How can bootstrapping fresh beginner sell before building even a simplest of MVPs?***Link*** 8 months ago

Sell before building is probably is best one. Or just giving advice on selling in general.

Months before we launched Evoke (AI API for image gen), I was filling product hunt, twitter, reddit, and indiehackers with marketing posts and comments

And it worked out great for launch day, especially when we launched on product hunt!

In addition, this was co-founded too!***RichardGao*** 8 months ago

just curious, you can submit to product hunt without a product?***tamfocus\_*** 8 months ago

I was referring to posting comments***RichardGao*** 8 months ago

The best post I've read on here. Every point is excellent. Thank you for writing it!***firefields*** 8 months ago

All are so good- literally the more I listened to conventional marketing, the less I made. Great thread.***elliottzelinskas*** 8 months ago

Really Nice tips except for the 6 one, I guess for me as a developper. I wanna my app to be a product marketing that mean the product itself will show the value of the app.

Also I can't sell a landing page with nothing after so that why I prefer deploy my app good MVP, do some comunication like launch on Product Hunt, my last app was Beedone rank 12 bring me 150 users, I hope 10 or 20% of them will be active user. 😅***Youcef\_appmaker*** 8 months ago

Font Changer

I hope you guys know about font generators or changers. If not let’s know font generator or changer is a website tool and app available online to change your text to cool fonts.

These font generators have already been added and developed font styles mostly which are highly used and well known. And it‘ll be a fantastic way to create the best and cool text without a single penny. Here we also have the best font generator suggestions for you guys.

https://fontgeneratorfancy.com/font-changer/

https://fontgeneratorfancy.com/facebook-font/

https://show-boxapk.com/***faceboookfont*** 8 months ago

the best advice i have ever read***gabigode*** 8 months ago

#7 is the gold. Spend more time adding value than consuming :)***pracas*** 8 months ago

Totally agree “read less” and just build the damn thing

xie 8 months ago

## Reached $50k ARR ($4180 MRR) in 9.5 mos.

AMA by Bhanu Teja Pachipulusu

Hello everyone,

I launched a product called Feather (feather. so) on Twitter on 18th May 2022, and grew it to $50k ARR in 9.5 months.

Feather is a blogging platform that uses Notion as your CMS. You write all your articles on Notion and Feather automatically publishes them to an SEO-friendly blog.

Right now, Feather has 191 paid customers and has $4180 MRR.

I am mainly getting customers from Twitter, word of mouth, and Google.

AMA! ***Bhanu Teja Pachipulusu*** posted to AMAs on March 6, 2023

Congratulations Bhanu..

No questions, just came here to say that Feather is an amazing product and I am a happy customer.

Onward to $100K ARR 🚀***ayushchat*** 8 months ago

Thank you Ayush 😀***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Congrats, how did you come up with the idea?***simarsingh*** 8 months ago

I was solving my own problem of writing in Notion and then copying it to somewhere else every time it’s time to publish. So I thought to directly use Notion itself as the CMS.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

I'm a big fan of you from Twitter.

Can you tell me more about what are your customer acquisition channels and how you build them?

Thank you!***iandreileo*** 8 months ago

Amazing, congratulations on that milestone! My question is: Did you have a Twitter audience before launching? Or did you build that audience alongside the launch?***FrankJ*** 8 months ago

I quit my job more than 3 years ago. At that time, I didn't have any Twitter audience. But as I built and launched products, I gradually started to get some audience.

By the time I launched Feather (in May 2022), I have 3k+ followers on Twitter.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

How did you manage that?***Santiago*** 8 months ago

how did you get your first users? Did you had strong community? Is this the first product you’re making?***leiferk*** 8 months ago

My initial users are actually WordPress users. I tweeted about Feather like I usually do while I was building it. Some of the WordPress users were replying to my tweets saying that the only thing stopping them from using Feather is the migration process. It takes a lot of time to migrate all their content from WordPress to Notion.

So I told them I would do it for them for free. They agreed. I then spent hours and hours copying stuff from WordPress to Notion, created their blogs, and showed them. They liked it and they converted into a customer.

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This is not my first product. This is my 4th product.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

You did exactly what they call 'do things that don't scale'. That's awesome! Your story is really inspiring.***imjohnkoo*** 8 months ago

What were the last three products about?

So, it took 3 years of full time efforts to get here?***dhruv10*** 8 months ago

I have no questions for you my good sir, only applause 👏***julesmaregiano*** 8 months ago

What is your full tech stack? Thanks***ps32*** 8 months ago

Remix + Cloudflare Workers.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Congrats! I was a little surprised when you wrote you only had 191 paid customers to get there, but it looks like you priced your product really well. You know the value and didn't go cheap in the name of that maybe bringing more customers. This is good to see for me and reinforces charging appropriately for the overall success of your business instead of racing to the bottom of price as a means to compete.

You mentioned most of your customers come from Twitter. Is this you reaching out actively to users based on keywords they may tweet, or something else?***rjmccollam*** 8 months ago

My price was not always like this. I started at very low. I think it was $9/month at the start. I gradually increased price over many months as I kept on improving the product.

In Twitter, I don’t do any outreach, I just tweet about my business and people find out about the product based on my tweets and also my customers tweet about Feather too on their own. So people find out about Feather that way too.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Thanks for the details!***rjmccollam*** 8 months ago

Congratulations and amazing work Bhanu, I have followed your journey on Twitter and I have recommended your product to my friends.***Aloka*** 8 months ago

Congratulations***berkekurnaz*** 8 months ago

Amazing!***Matangub*** 8 months ago

Congrats, man! Keep up the good work.***Victor\_Matheus*** 8 months ago

https://ehsaas8171.com/ehsaas-program-registration/

Good work***inuiog*** 8 months ago

Ehsaas Tracking is a tool to check online Ehsaas Program Status. Check here also : https://ehsaastracking.org/***ebaltiking*** 8 months ago

Congrats. By Twitter what do you mean? Direct messaging or are you running ads?***lukerhenry*** 8 months ago

Neither of them. I just tweet about my business.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

That's great, congratulations. 50k ARR is a very good achievement :)***nazemsen*** 8 months ago

I'm a big fan, Bhanu. Keep on pushing and inspiring.

With this level of consistency, 1 year from now we will see a post "I reached $500k ARR ($41,800 MRR)".

Onwards and upwards!***LaimonasN*** 8 months ago

Haha, that's too far-fetched.

I would be super happy if I can get to $10k MRR by the end of the year.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Did you think about "business side" of product, like economics, marketing budget, etc, or you were totally focused on delivering a product to customer? Or both?

I'm interested in this question, because I work as a product manager, and my problem is focusing on the business side like financial modelling, using product frameworks too much. Just want to know the other side of the building.***Flipkers*** 8 months ago

I usually look at the MRR, monthly churn, monthly revenue, number of trials weekly, monthly visitor -> trial conversion rate, and monthly trial -> paid conversion rate.

These are the metrics that I mostly focus on. I already know what these metrics usually would be. For example, I know off the top of my head that my trial -> paid conversion rate would usually be around 50%. So if on any month, that is significantly lesser or higher than that 50%, I try to reason about it. Similarly I do it for the other mentioned metrics.

Other than this, I just focus on the product and the customers.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Hello @pbteja1998

Congratulations.

I am wondering if you acquired any early users to help you shape your product features. What was your procedure to acquire them?

I am planning to launch my product. But I need some beta users to help me decide which features are useful to create a paid version of it.***\_salman*** 8 months ago

Yeah, I reached out to a few users on Twitter asking them to try the beta. That helped to fix some of the early bugs before launching the product. But once I launched it and got actual customers using the product, they defined the product roadmap. I was able to improve and evolve the product based on their needs.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Congratulations Bhanu! Not much to talk about, but I was there the whole time. So nice to see how things are going.***thilinaguruge*** 8 months ago

Was following on Twitter from the beginning, great to see this***mguin*** 8 months ago

Congratulations***randhirindiedev*** 8 months ago

Congratulations Bhanu! 50K in 9 months is crazy growth. The differentiation play of only focusing on blogs is a live example of how market positioning should be done.***shyamal890*** 8 months ago

Congratulations Bhanu! I would love to know How did you get idea to build feather and are you working as solopreneur in feather?***arpitgoyal*** 8 months ago

I was solving my own problem and luckily it ended up solving the problem of many others. Yeah I’m a solo founder.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Great! we are in same city so would like to meet you in person.***arpitgoyal*** 8 months ago

Congratulations! for your product growth... Keep up your great work i have a question what is your customer churn rate for your product?

What is the ratio of your product customers who shift from free to paid version?***buckyjames*** 8 months ago

It’s between 5-10% churn.

There is no free version in Feather. There is a 7 day free trial and my conversion rate from trial to paid is 40-60%.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Great your churn rate is not so much high but you can try to reduce it. I suggest you try a customer retention tool like Churnfree.com which can help you to retain your customer and reduces the churn rate.***buckyjames*** 8 months ago

Congrats! Very proud. Great design and a beautiful website.***pokakrisztian*** 8 months ago

That's pretty cool! Great job!***mico*** 8 months ago

Congrats! I feel like I remember reading your post about hitting 25k ARR just yesterday!

Your consistency and growth is impressive. Keep it up!!***ryandeebs*** 8 months ago

congratulations bhanu, i recently asked you a few questions in the live chat an your support was next level. No wonder customers love it!***dagorenouf*** 8 months ago

Thank you Dago 😀***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

What was your curve in customer acquisition? How many in 1 month, 2 months, etc***george\_p*** 8 months ago

0 to $1k MRR in 3 months

$1k to $2k MRR in 4.5 months

$2k to $3k MRR in 1 month

$3k to $4k MRR in 3 weeks***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Amazing! Any recommendations on getting my first customer? I’m trying to launch https://deepdivedata.agency***Santiago*** 8 months ago

this is incredible, are you a technical founder and how did you grow your twitter before starting feather?***player1*** 8 months ago

Yeah I’m a technical founder. I grew my Twitter by sharing about the SaaS products I’m working on (including Feather).

It’s not like I was trying to build an audience. But it happened as I was building and sharing about my product.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Hi Bhanu, amazing work. I do wonder. Who designed & built your website?***moyi\_bored\_designer*** 8 months ago

Hey, how did you decide on the pricing of your offer?***almet*** 8 months ago

I didn’t. I started at the low price and gradually increased in through out many months and I’m still experimenting.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Amazing! Keep it up :)***nobutakahemmi*** 8 months ago

This is truly an achievement. I do not want to ask anything. I want to say, "Bravo"👏***netoff*** 8 months ago

Hi Bhanu, its very inspiring to see your journey 🔥

Will you be open to mentor people (like me) who are just starting out on building SaaS products? I know how much valuable your time is, so I would not expect it to come for free.

I am not asking this without a reason. It's been very difficult to do Support work, Marketing, Building new features, Fixing bugs. That too with UI, Backend, Infra issues. So I think getting mentorship from a person who is doing great in all these areas would be really beneficial.***worldofprasanna*** 8 months ago

Trust me when I say this. I’m not doing great. I’m still figuring out all these things. I am not in a position yet where I can mentor someone. I’m just like you still figuring things out. But fortunately things worked out for me until now. But I don’t have some vast knowledge that I can mentor and transfer to someone else.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Sure. I am sure soon you will find a pattern that works for building products and a need to pass on that knowledge.

But anyways it's an awesome product. Keep rocking 🔥***worldofprasanna*** 8 months ago

Hi Bhanu, I've been following you on Twitter since November. It's a great progress you achieved with Feather!

In which month did you get your first paid customer? If you had to start a new project from scratch, how long would you wait to get your first customer?

Which do you think is better? Improving one project until it get's successful or starting many different MVPs and working only on what get's the best results instantly?***AghHelmut*** 8 months ago

I got my first paying customer even before I launched it.

I don’t think there is any right or wrong. Do what works best for you.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

That's great! Yes, every project and founder is different, so there is no right answer to my questions! Thank you!***AghHelmut*** 8 months ago

Very cool!

How do you decide what to focus on right now? Do you have a strategy and focus on a particular thing for like marketing or building new features or do you go with the flow?

I have been following you on twitter and will continue to do so, thanks for building in public.

Wouter***wbruinings*** 8 months ago

No. I don’t have any strategy yet. I just do what I feel like doing that particular day.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Huge congrats! How long did it take you to build the MVP (rough number of hours over what timeframe)?***CharlesCalzia*** 8 months ago

3-4 months. Don’t know the hours. Some days I didn’t work at all and some other days I worked for more than 10 hours.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

These are great numbers, Bhanu!

You've done a fantastic job, keep it up 🚀

My question is:

How much of this goes for the expenses in maintaining the entire setup? ( Don't include marketing or promotions, if there's any expense involved). Breakdown is appreciated if possible :)***basharath*** 8 months ago

If we are talking about just servers and databases, it will be around $500 I think. But then I subscribe to lot of other SaaS too some I use personally, some I might use for Feather. If we include all those costs, it will quickly add up to a significant amount (don’t know the exact figure)***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

So it means, $500/year probably?

I think it's great!***basharath*** 8 months ago

Haha, it’s $500/month***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Oh, this looks more to me.

What all optimizations have you tried to reduce resources?

I think the end pages are static, that can be served from CDN, so how this much?***basharath*** 8 months ago

Congrats!! that's an amazing milestone, my only question is how did you get so many clients?***4lien\_dev*** 8 months ago

That's my question too :)***SheldonHacker*** 8 months ago

Congrats Bhanu!

Feather is really on fire🔥 I would like to listen to the non paid marketing behind the success in such a short time.***denizhd*** 8 months ago

I’m not sure what you mean by that. All my marketing is non paid marketing at the moment.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Yes, I know. I would like to listen that. I built my newest product and I need marketing advices.***denizhd*** 8 months ago

Congratulations on achieving this milestone. I have a couple of questions

Was this your first saas product? How did you figure of the niche? How did you identify the problem and what was the time taken for validating the market fit.

How do you deal with copycat apps which would be similar to yours?

3.How much does buildin public help ?

When do you decide doing it full time vs part time?

Any advice for people who are good technically and starting out in micro saas?***jaykeerti123*** 8 months ago

No it’s not my first SaaS product. It’s my 4th one. I just tried to solve my own problem and it ended up solving the problem for many other people. I did not validate it. I just launched it.

I try to ignore them and turn my focus on to my customers instead.

I decided to go full time even before I had an idea. It took more than 3 years to finally get some traction with one of my products.

“Build it and they will come” will not work. I needed to actively market my product every day to get customers. My customers are my advocates. So I always try to provide the best customer support for everyone. In turn, they will share their experience and promote the product all on their own.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Congratulations on reaching $50k ARR, Bhanu! I'm following your journey from the right beginning and it's really inspiring & motivating!

So my question is,

What has been your biggest challenge while growing Feather to $50k ARR?***code\_rams*** 8 months ago

The biggest challenge has been not having a strategy.

I still do not have a consistent acquisition channel.

What I mean by that is that I cannot yet confidently say that if I do these tasks this month, I will most probably get this result.

I still don’t have that one thing. It’s like it’s happening organically and that’s scary to think how long it will continue to work like that.

That’s why I’m starting to focus on SEO and try to get some more consistent, reliable organic traffic to the website.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

First things first, congratulations on passing a milestone that most entrepreneurs struggle to pass.

Anyone reading this should take note of the fact that, as you put it in a previous reply, you market your product every single day. Marketing is the key to growing any business regardless of how good it is. The world is too noisy for you to succeed without a lot of promotion.

Secondly, to address your acquisition channel problem, let me offer the following advice.

You're having trouble finding acquisition channels for the very simple reason that the only thing you're selling a product.

Why?

Because when the only thing you are selling is your product, the only people that your marketing & sales efforts work on are those who are actively looking to buy the solution that you sell - "active buyers".

The problem is that these "active buyers" are very hard to find. They aren't exactly hanging out in one place - there's no forum/facebook group/subreddit for those looking to buy a tool to help them use notion to publish a blog.

Now, doing SEO is certainly a good strategy to get in front of these "active buyers" because they will be using search engines to find solutions.

However, everybody knows this. It isn't the early 2000s anymore. Ranking for competitive keywords is incredibly difficult. Your competitors are also doing it and, even if you succeed, there's another problem - "active buyers" are only a tiny percentage of your target audience.

The fact that "active buyers" are only a tiny percentage of your total target audience (around 1%) means that you'll hit a revenue ceiling that you won't be able to get past.

And the more entrepreneurs see your success with your product, the quicker you'll hit that ceiling. Why? Because they'll copy your solution and start competing with you for the same small % of active buyers. And the more competitors you have, the smaller the piece of that pie you'll be able to get.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't target active buyers by doing things like SEO, but it means that you should also target those not actively looking to buy your solution.

If you're able to effectively sell to those in your target audience (creators and entrepreneurs it seems like to me?) not actively looking to buy right now then every place you find them hanging out online (or offline) can be an effective acquisition channel.

The question is then, how do you do this?

There's tons of different ways that people have come up with but the one I find most effective is the one that I advocate - selling something more than your product, selling a new belief system. Rather than detail the whole thing here (this reply is already long enough!) I'll just point you towards this website that explains the whole thing and gives different case studies of it in action - www.thebluntmethod.com

Any questions let me know!

Best

Chris***TheBLUNTMethod*** 8 months ago

Congrats bhanu. Can you please share what is your tech stack? Anything you want to share that one should take care of while its rapidly scaling. Thank you.***abhijitastlar*** 8 months ago

My tech stack is Remix + Cloudflare Workers.

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If you are asking me what tech stack to use while building your own product – I would say use something that you are comfortable with. Tech stack wouldn't and shouldn't matter while starting out.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

I'm inspired by you man! Your journey the past 3 months = 🤯

3 questions:

1.) If you had to start over, what would you do differently?

2.) What have been the 2-3 biggest things that contributed to your rapid growth?

3.) Any advice to newbie SaaS founders?***KylePrinsloo*** 8 months ago

One thing I might do differently is trying to launch it as early as possible. I think I took about 3-4 months just in product development. I will see if I reduce it somehow.

Other than that, I think I would do the same things – start with low pricing, get some constant feedback, and gradually improve the product bit by bit – while also increasing the pricing bit by bit.

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I think Social Proof is one of the biggest things that contributed to my growth. If people see that their friends are using the product, then they would be more likely to choose the same product over another. That also gives them the trust that the platform is here to stay for a long time, and is not something that will be closed off in a year or so.

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I don't think I have any advice for anyone. Each person's path, skillset, and conditions are completely different from each other. Seeing something that worked for one person might now work for another person. I think even if I start over and do the same exact things again, I am not 100% confident that I will get the exact same results. So, it's better to find our own path and try different things, rather than just trying to follow something that someone else is doing.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

First off, congrats Bhanu! I've been following your journey on Twitter and know that you've been doing a tremendous job.

I wanted to ask you - How do you approach SEO/Google for your customer acquisition? Do you write a lot of tutorials and guides? Are you also creating programmatic content as well?***piyushrj*** 8 months ago

I am just starting out with SEO now. I may have more after a couple of months. But right now, the visits I am getting from Google are completely organic.

I don't have any particular strategy yet there. I am just starting to write some guides now. So will have to see how that will turn out.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Congrats - I really would like to know about the SEO and marketing strategy.***kodytools*** 8 months ago

SEO is just starting to pick up. I am starting to get a few hundreds of clicks from Google.

I don't have an SEO strategy at the moment. I only have like a handful of blog posts on my website.

I think what worked for my site is having relatively high DA/backlinks.

Feather is a blogging platform and my customers can create their own blog sites with it.

When they create a blog, their blog will have a watermark saying Published with Feather and a link back to my landing page. Of course, people can turn it off anytime they want.

But most of my customers choose to keep it there instead of turning it off – to incentivize it more, I also allowed them to make it as an affiliate link. So if anyone comes to feather by clicking that watermark on their blog, they will get affiliate commission – win win for everyone.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Congrats Bhanu! Do you actually pay out commission or do you offer them as a discount on their future payments?***kyani\_heessels*** 8 months ago

I have a minimum payout threshold of $100.

As soon as a person's affiliate commission reaches that threshold, I pay them out.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

How are you deciding what "blog posts" to write about?***candid\_jan*** 8 months ago

I am still figuring out a process. I’m just starting out at the moment. Will probably have more to say about this on my next milestone update.***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

Nice one and pretty smart move!***kodytools*** 8 months ago

So inspiring, Bhanu! I currently don't have a question. Just wanted to congratulate you on this great achievement! To more MRR and less churn in 2023 and beyond!***valsopi*** 8 months ago

Thank you Val!

Wish you the same too... More MRR and less churn in 2023 😀***pbteja1998*** 8 months ago

This is an awesome idea! Can you post more details about how you come up with the idea and what block you have solved?***JackL424*** 8 months ago

Congrats man! Way to go! Followed your journey and glad you're killing it!!!***romaindewolff*** 8 months ago

Congratulations. Can you tell us a little bit more about how did you go about spreading the word in twitter and how did you encourage WoM?***titansaurabh12*** 8 months ago

Congrat's Bhanu! What was the size of your Twitter audience when you started?***JimDesigns*** 8 months ago

Congrats mate! You inspire me everyday to grow my SaaS www.rolade.io (currently at $500 MRR)

I know it is not a easy road, but it matters! Keep going and wish you all the success!***Alexbarciog*** 8 months ago

Congratulations on reaching the $50k MRR milestone. By all means it is easier said than done! This is inspiring for all of us out here trying to build a business from 0. Any tips on how to drive sales and interactions through twitter?***garom95*** 8 months ago

Congratulations on reaching $50k ARR! That's an impressive achievement in a relatively short amount of time. Here are some questions I have for you:

What was your product or service that helped you achieve this milestone?

What marketing channels did you use to acquire customers?

How did you differentiate your product or service from competitors?

What was the biggest challenge you faced in reaching this milestone?

What advice would you give to someone just starting out in their journey to build a business?

https://packstrack.com/***inuiog*** 8 months ago

Hey Bhanu, first of all congratulations man! This is so inspiring for me

On to the question - I know you are a coder but what advise you'd give a marketer who wants to build products like Feather but knows zilche about code.

How do I approach?***the\_growth\_guy*** 8 months ago

Great!***Teamcode20233*** 8 months ago

That's awesome, congrats! The product looks super polished, how far along were you when you first launched on twitter?***rmolines*** 8 months ago

wow. How many times did you try before this project?***jeff0723*** 8 months ago

Congratulations on the success of your product, Bhanu. It's impressive to see the growth you've achieved in less than a year. I have a few questions for you:

How did you come up with the idea for Feather? Was it inspired by your personal pain point or market demand?

What were some of the key challenges you faced while building and growing Feather, and how did you overcome them?

Thank you for doing this AMA and I wish you continued success with your product!***Thystler*** 8 months ago

That's pretty cool. I'm looking to scale my SaaS https://askmax.xyz***bugtheplanet*** 8 months ago

That's awesome. I'm trying to scale my business as well.***bugtheplanet*** 8 months ago

This looks great! Really great web design!

How did you share this product with others? What's the best place to grow a startup like this? I have been working on Turbolink.io and am wondering where the best place to find potential customers would be.***jrberendt*** 8 months ago

Amazing work man, wow!

I'm in the pbrocess of launching a tool I've built with my buddy over the weekend (resumegen.ai)

I'm trying to get our first users to beta test and improve. I'm not too sure how to get started? I thought Twitter with be interesting. Any tips/ressources on that?

Thanks a lot***murasame*** 8 months ago

Nice! What did you mainly do for marketing?

For Evoke, it's mainly been posting a lot about it on social media for me

And also curious, do you have plans to integrate AI image generation into the app?***RichardGao*** 8 months ago

Congrats Bhanu!

Amazing growth in such a short span of time. How did you go about it? Mind sharing that story?***reclusiveCoder*** 8 months ago

Would love to Ketchup :) https://meetings.hubspot.com/stephane-boghossian***GrootNoCode*** 8 months ago

I never thought it was possible to recover stolen crypto currency due to past experiences trying to recover $268k that was stolen from my usdt w.a.l.l.e.t ; until I read an article about this geek that helped me recover $250k from what I l o s t .. I advise anyone with lost or s t o l e n crypto currency issues to reach him on H a c k w e s t @ w r I t e m e. c o m or Whatsapp +1 4.2.4.3.0.7.2.6.3.8.. Please feel free to give other victims a chance by sharing.

jimmy\_charles 8 months ago

## Reached $6K MRR as a solo dev

by Kyle Nolan

After 22 months, I just reached $6k MRR with ProjectionLab (https://projectionlab.com) 🥳

→ 9 months to get to $1,000

→ 4 months to get to $2,000

→ 7 months to get to$5,000

→ 2 months to get to $6,000

I'm building PL as a side project on nights and weekends. Growth does not look like a hockey stick, but I'm having fun anyway 😀

For solo founders, time is often the biggest constraint. Especially with side projects. In my experience, here are a few things that are consistently worth it:

Engage with users and grow a community

Take the time to craft standout UI/UX

Set realistic strategic goals and stick to them

Post to relevant communities (HN, Reddit, Twitter)

Prioritize ruthlessly and learn when to say "no"

Celebrate the small wins along the way

Take care of yourself

Pay special attention to the last one. Launching and growing a small startup requires consistency and persistence. And luck. And a bunch of other things.

But the point is: it's a marathon. So only burn the candle at both ends when there's a tactical reason. Not all the time.

And don't forget to exercise! What's the point of working towards a better future if you might not be around to enjoy it 🌅

***Kyle Nolan*** posted to Growth on February 17, 2023

Read the headline and through, whoa what am I doing wrong? Then read your timeline and realised I'm just at the beginning.

Really good to see stories that aren't crazy "X MRR in 3 months" etc.***jcmosc*** 9 months ago

Did you have a community before or at the time of your first dollar through Projection Lab?

Btw, Thanks for sharing this and inspiring us***Vansh22*** 8 months ago

Nope, started from zero 😁***knolan*** 8 months ago

Wow, that's awesome. 👏👏👏

From where did you got your first paying client?***Vansh22*** 8 months ago

Loved how easy the sandbox was to try it out! Do you have figures on how many people convert after using the sandbox vs not using the sandbox first?***Dian*** 8 months ago

Yes. And yes. And absolutely 💯***Keriousity*** 8 months ago

Dang - this is a very impressive "nights and weekends" build. Great work! Thanks for sharing your journey.***zeptonaut*** 8 months ago

Thanks! At this point it's been almost two years straight of nearly every night and weekend, so I'm glad it's compounded into something meaningful 😅. Quite a bit of "balance" to sacrifice.***knolan*** 8 months ago

Totally. Well, your attention to detail in the product really shine through. Also, I've worked on enough stuff to know a good product isn't anywhere near sufficient - congrats on pulling all of the pieces together to make something (increasingly) real.***zeptonaut*** 8 months ago

You're spot on about a good product being a necessary but not sufficient condition for growth. Arguably if I was more competent at -- or interested in -- marketing and outreach, PL could already be doing better. At least it's still trending in the right direction... for now... 👀***knolan*** 8 months ago

Honestly a good product is not even necessary for growth.

Take HubSpot when it was a startup - terrible product, massive growth.

It all comes down to good marketing.

And unfortunately, in nearly 20 years of building, marketing & selling software, services and products I've seen tons of great products flop because companies failed to market them correctly.***TheBLUNTMethod*** 8 months ago

Really inspirational! Thanks for sharing :)***cll*** 9 months ago

Congrats dude! Great idea and a well-done execution!

Out of curiosity, how long did it take you to make the first MVP of your app?***excentio*** 9 months ago

About 2-3 months if I recall correctly.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Nice! Thanks for replying and satisfying my curiosity, it sounds like a very reasonable duration for an MVP, not too short and certainly not too long :)***excentio*** 9 months ago

Very impressive site man, and a great success story - i'm yet to be more active on IH and glad this is something I saw today (having spent until 6am building a skeleton for MVP last night) 😂***its\_rowan*** 9 months ago

Love to see it***tertle*** 9 months ago

Congratulations on your success with ProjectionLab! 🎉

Your journey is truly inspiring, and your UX/UI is impressive and so neat. I love it! 😍

Thanks for sharing valuable tips and details about your tech stack.

It's amazing that you were able to create such a feature-rich app alongside your daily job.

Keep up the good work. 🚀

ps: just added you on linkedin but missed click on the content message , sorry for that ;)***JustCodeIt*** 9 months ago

Hey thanks! It's been the result of two years of... obsession 😅. Don't think I could have dedicated all these nights and weekends if it wasn't.***knolan*** 9 months ago

It seems you've discovered the secret to adding extra hours to the day, but don't forget to take a break and recharge your super powers. Even Superman needs a vacation sometimes! 😂***JustCodeIt*** 9 months ago

It's always a pleasure to see a fellow developer succeed in his side project 🙌

But are you planning to take this project to the next level and make it your full-time occupation?***adib\_zouiten*** 9 months ago

There's still a lot of daylight between here and there, but we'll see what the future holds 🤞***knolan*** 9 months ago

Amazing! Congrats on your success. I particularly appreciate your point about prioritizing ruthlessly and saying no. It's so easy to be distracted***davidowasi*** 9 months ago

Congrats on your success! All of your points are great advice and it’s so important to take care of yourself and find balance in your journey. Keep up the great work!***Dfrankle*** 9 months ago

Really beautiful interface, awesome work! We've always had a financial advisor, and while they've had similar tools offered through the investing services they're tied to, the tools look horribly difficult to navigate compared to this one (and I'm not even sure we can independently access them).

Did you have any expertise in this field before starting your project? Was this solely a "scratch your own itch" sort of endeavor, or did you spend time with validation before setting out?***iamjem*** 9 months ago

Thanks so much! Here are a few links with more of the backstory:

https://thefishow.com/kyle

https://www.physicianonfire.com/projection-lab

https://www.indiehackers.com/post/building-marketing-kyle-nolan-of-projectionlab-5k-mo-on-focusing-on-product-over-marketing-3b38edfe22***knolan*** 9 months ago

Lol I am old. Like truly a dinosaur, maybe whatever came before dinosaurs...

I am, therefore, ridiculously impressed.

Lol

I am more of a learner than a doer on my weekends.

Last few months have been focused on payment processing, pci and emv compliance. ( long story as to why)

It was a bit of a dance to find a "beginners" entry point that wasn't SELLING me processing..... but worth it.

2years of learning and exploring has gotten me very far, but I feel decades behind you!***Keriousity*** 8 months ago

Curiously, learning for the sake of learning has never worked for me. It rarely holds my attention for longer than a few hrs here or there. But if I'm building something with a distinct vision / end-state in mind, learning whatever is necessary to get there happens naturally.***knolan*** 8 months ago

I always start with a task completion goal but go beyond getting the task done because context is compulsively interesting. I also was behind the tech learning curve--i was a cook for 15 years ( i may have said that already) but barely knew how to use my phone for email. There was a lot of "wait what? that's a thing? " then I would have roll back to the origin of the thing -- and then see how a segment was using it ect.

my learning for learning sake was more about culture immersion, building a on-line business in general . Lately-I have been trying to learn some programming stuff and THAT needs a vision/ end-state, which I don't quite have yet.***Keriousity*** 8 months ago

and I was working for a fintech start-up and they are a little uhhh, let's delicately say-over their skiis - and the compliance, payments needed to be investigated. At first I just wanted to help improve things- then realized there were some real problems with the integrity, so went deeper to make sure I wasn't mistaken. If I was going to call them out, I didn't want to be wrong!***Keriousity*** 8 months ago

Good advice especially on the last one. Way too many people only focus on a side hustle and never pay attention to their health. I did this and got diabetes and high blood pressure. Now I focus on my side business and working out now and was able revererse my diabetes. 💪***Rubenjr005*** 9 months ago

Glad to hear you were able to turn it around, man! For a while, my blood pressure was starting to tick up as well. Putting an exercise bike in next to my desk helped level it back out.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congratulations! Love your advice in the end. Do you have advice on how to engage/share your product in communities without sounding too salesy or spammy?***fawzi*** 9 months ago

ngl, it can be tricky. Sometimes more of an art than a science 😅. For starters, look for communities that don't have an explicit ban on self-promotion. Beyond that, try to contribute and add real value to conversations; occasionally an opportunity to mention your solution may come up naturally.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congratulations! It’s great to see how you have more than doubled your MRR each few months.

I really love your bullet points, specially those last ones that are so often overlooked when giving advice. In the end, we are all doing this because of love, for others but also for us.***swordaniel*** 9 months ago

This is awesome! That landing page is super clean. Mind If I ask what you used to build it?***eddyM*** 9 months ago

I'm using Vue.js, Vuetify, Chart.js, Firebase, Paddle, and GCP. It's actually all one web app right now, with webpack code splitting.***knolan*** 9 months ago

How's your experience with Paddle been? From what I hear, it seems that the tax compliance is a huge benefit, but other than that, the developer experience and tooling seems to fall short of Stripe's.***stevenkkim*** 9 months ago

Yep, that's spot on! The idea of dealing with sales and VAT compliance on my own sounded like a nightmare (do other indie hackers actually manage that effectively?), so Paddle seemed like the obvious choice.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Thanks for the reply! I think most indiehackers with Stripe just kick the can down the road b/c you don't have to worry about tax in most places until you reach a certain revenue threshold.

Congrats on your milestone! Hope the MRR keeps on climbing!***stevenkkim*** 9 months ago

...but imagine having to track all those rules and thresholds separately for every location, and knowing that as soon as one pops you're in trouble 😬

To me, that just sounded untenable.***knolan*** 9 months ago

I believe that Stripe has the ability to keep track of state sales tax and VAT amounts owed and thresholds for you, but you are still responsible for registering and filing taxes yourself. (See step #2 and #4 here: https://stripe.com/tax) So probably not untenable, but still probably somewhat of a pain.***stevenkkim*** 8 months ago

I looked into that briefly, but it seemed like each state had its own registration process and requirements to keep track of... and that's just the US! I could be wrong, but it seemed like a lot of work to do it right and be globally fully compliant.***knolan*** 8 months ago

Yeah I think you're right. The only other consideration I can think of is that by the time a business has to worry about sales tax, it will probably have enough revenue to pay an accountant to handle that stuff. For example, a bunch of states have a threshold of $100,000, so by the time a business is doing $100,000 in one state, they probably can hire someone to handle the taxes. Not saying this is a good solution. To be honest, I'm surprised that Stripe seems to be the de facto solution for indiehackers despite the tax implications.***stevenkkim*** 8 months ago

Congrats!

The point about UX/UI is dead right, and I love PL's UI btw. Have you designed it yourself or hired a freelancer to do that?

Also, what tech stack have you used on the frontend, both the app the the landing page?***tomaszgorol*** 9 months ago

Thanks Tomasz! Haven't outsourced anything, it's just me 🙂.

I'm using Vue.js, Vuetify, Chart.js, Firebase, Paddle, and GCP. It's actually all one web app right now, with webpack code splitting.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congrats Kyle! Love to see it can be done solo. Good luck going forward and growing even more. PL isn't up my alley, but I'm sure my girlfriend is going to love it haha***jaybeegit*** 9 months ago

Thanks man! It's been a lot to take on, but it's a blast to work on and I've learned a lot. The world does need better long-term planning tools.***knolan*** 9 months ago

"The world needs long term planning tools."

In so many ways***Keriousity*** 8 months ago

Fully agree. I so far manage with spreadsheets but I think this is an interesting market.***slamet*** 8 months ago

Congratulations! I've been looking for the exact app recently. 🔥***desrev3r*** 9 months ago

Thanks! If you have any questions, suggestions, or new feature ideas, feel free to reach out any time.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Great work. I agree especially about your point with UI/UX. I’m kind of new to web app development. Do you have any shortcuts that you use to keep a quality UI/UX easy to adopt and maintain? I’m using a theme right now and that’s been a huge help. I’m wondering if there’s anything I’m missing out on though.***jkjkjk*** 9 months ago

Using a modern web development framework with a good material UI library can be helpful. I use Vue.js and Vuetify.***knolan*** 9 months ago

That is one neat app! I can see why it has done well.***Jon12345*** 9 months ago

Thanks Jon! It's been a huge undertaking as a solo developer (and side project). The tool has come a long way since that first time I posted it to HN a couple years ago.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congrats. Your product is insanely cool! It will help a lot of people.

The demo is a nice touch with pre baked scenarios. Shows the value straight away.

Hope it keeps growing...***andrew\_tav*** 9 months ago

hey, thanks Andrew! I always like when products have sandboxes you can hop into, so of course I had to build one 😁***knolan*** 9 months ago

I had a look at the landing page. Amazing work!***RamboCambo*** 8 months ago

Awesome congrats!!!***paretopreneur*** 8 months ago

Great figures and encouraging insights. Would like to know how you built your community.***ValAI*** 8 months ago

Is this your first project? :) btw. great progress, keep going***DevUps*** 8 months ago

Great result what is your business customer churn rate?***buckyjames*** 8 months ago

How do you post to relevant communities without getting banned? I am constantly getting by the spam bot.***staticmaker2022*** 8 months ago

Well, you do still have to follow the rules of the communities you engage with 😛***knolan*** 8 months ago

Congratulations on achieving this milestone as well as thank you for sharing your experience***roh31*** 8 months ago

This is awesome! Love the dedication over that 22 month period, can't've been easy. Where you say,

"But the point is: it's a marathon. So only burn the candle at both ends when there's a tactical reason. Not all the time.">

Did you structure your time management at all, like once every two weeks on a strict schedule, or just whenever you had the motivation?***moturgunov*** 9 months ago

Congradulations! Your product looks great. It is very encouraging to see solo devs becoming successful with their products.***jrberendt*** 9 months ago

Thanks so much for posting. It really helps folks like me who are just getting started on this chapter of life and need to figure out what to prioritize.

The general wisdom is that consumer apps can be a difficult hill to climb. Is the bulk of your business with consumers, or does more revenue come from professional advisors.***kixxauth*** 9 months ago

Sure thing! And it's mostly B2C actually.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congratulations - that's a great milestone***rentpeek*** 9 months ago

Congratulations. Persistent does pay off. It would be great if you can share your marketing plan.***nomad\_life*** 9 months ago

Shared a few thoughts on that here: https://www.indiehackers.com/post/building-marketing-kyle-nolan-of-projectionlab-5k-mo-on-focusing-on-product-over-marketing-3b38edfe22***knolan*** 9 months ago

The first 10K are the hardest! Wondering what you did between 2K and 5K to drive sales?***florentinahysenaj*** 9 months ago

Mostly just kept building actually :)

Some of the early adopters have gradually helped spread the word within the FI community, and the occasional tweet/mention from bloggers/influencers in that space has helped a little as well.

I'm sure there's a lot more I should be doing, but there are a limited number of hours in the day 🥲***knolan*** 9 months ago

What kind of tech stack are you using in your project?

Looks awesome. Gr8 job sir! :)***programistafrontend*** 9 months ago

I'm using Vue.js, Vuetify, Chart.js, Firebase, Paddle, and GCP.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Very cool How has your experience been with growth?***lepaulb*** 9 months ago

Congrats man! What communities do you engage with on Reddit?***MehdiRifai*** 9 months ago

How are you able to bring consistent traffic to your site & onboard new users every day? Do you run any paid ads?***sathesh95*** 9 months ago

So far haven't done any ads. Shared a bit on my (arguably imbalanced) approach to building vs marketing here: https://www.indiehackers.com/post/building-marketing-kyle-nolan-of-projectionlab-5k-mo-on-focusing-on-product-over-marketing-3b38edfe22***knolan*** 9 months ago

I love this. Congratulations!

As a developer that spends most of their time on the Frontend I absolutely love the design of this, well done.

What were some of the biggest technical problems that you faced during development? How did you land on your current price points?***PROSP3C\_DEV*** 9 months ago

Really love this product! Congrats Kyle!!***terrylennon*** 9 months ago

Congratulations!***hadidco*** 9 months ago

This is absolutely amazing!

Do you have a designer team to design this type of outstanding design?***hadidco*** 9 months ago

Congrats, looks pretty cool. One question though, how did you validate this idea in the first place ?***nathan1212*** 9 months ago

I built the first version because I wanted a tool like this myself. After a couple months, I posted it to a few places, and was pleasantly surprised by some great feedback.***knolan*** 9 months ago

That's awesome! Congrats :)

What were some of your favorite small wins?***chazelton331*** 9 months ago

A couple meaningful ones from earlier in the journey:

Making that first $1

Reaching 100 paid users***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congratulations. Your post is so inspirational. And I could not agree more with everything you said.***netoff*** 9 months ago

Your product is actually interesting! Well done!

I used it and I liked it!***ahmotameni*** 9 months ago

Great job ! I’m a solo dev too and will benefit from your advice.

I have a suite of iOS apps and my website is nothing special, since I rely on AppStore advertising and landing pages.***ultrajet*** 9 months ago

Congrats! Design is super clean and I feel convinced to try it out, by the placement of things like "No ads", "no calls", etc.

Very targeted, but executed well. Curious how many revisions you went thru on home page and how much design background you have? Looks great!***BradleyBernard*** 9 months ago

Thanks! No formal design background. I'm just not content making things that don't look good 😁. This is probably the 5th or 6th home page redesign. Might do it again in a month or two to try to improve web vitals score and create alternate landing pages each targeted a little differently.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Really inspiring!! Your landing page is really cool :)***kuala*** 9 months ago

Thanks Neel!***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congrats, Kyle! What has been your main/best marketing channel?***jevon800*** 9 months ago

Mainly just posting to places like HN and Reddit occasionally, plus word-of-mouth.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Awesome job! Do you have any tips for the community part? Useful places, methods etc? Community is something I personally struggle with.***designaas*** 9 months ago

Creating a discord server is one easy way to get started. Direct people to it for support queries / feedback, create a variety of other channels, and with any luck you'll see membership grow over time as your project gets more exposure. Quite similar to collecting emails for a newsletter.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Done ✅ I've created a discord server and added a link to the page for https://roastd.io

Also received advice in a separate thread to start a mailing list and offer out a free guide to people so I've just set all that up too. Thanks!***designaas*** 9 months ago

Wow, congrats! What would be your advice for someone just starting out, with only ideas and 0$ revenue?***alextechie*** 9 months ago

Focus on a problem you understand deeply and are passionate about solving, so that you'll have the persistence to really follow through. Also validate the idea as early as possible.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Congrats! That was way quicker then my project is going on. What is the HN community you were talking about?***FLUXparticleCOM*** 9 months ago

Hacker News. They can be a tough crowd sometimes, but if you manage to reach the front page, be prepared for a massive traffic spike.***knolan*** 9 months ago

Nice, congrats!

Love that you're doing Reddit as well, it's still super underrated IMO. Just need to find relevant subreddits, threads and comments to engage in.

I've recently been using Surfkey.io by @JohanCutych for this, might be useful for you.***aleks\_m*** 9 months ago

This comment was deleted 4 months ago.

DeletedUser 9 months ago

1

Huh, this is the first time I've seen someone taking shots at WebP as a format. Any links to resources on what the established best practice is now?***knolan*** 9 months ago

This comment was deleted 4 months ago.

DeletedUser 9 months ago

2

Based on my experience, the problem isn't the fact that he used WebP so much as that the quality for the WebP compression is set too low. I"m not sure what it's at, but 36kB for an 1160x940px image probably just isn't enough bytes to get the job done. Not sure what the quality is set to.

I really prefer to use stuff like imgix for this (Cloudfront I think also has a competitor) where you can simply tune the quality param as needed and also make a request to a single URL and have the correct image format (AVIF preferred) based on the iamge format rather than having to fuss with any of this stuff yourself.

***Knolan*** 9 months ago

## GPT-3 Chrome Extension for Twitter

How I made a GPT-3 Chrome Extension for Twitter and earned $1143 in 2 weeks

by Sergey Bunas

Hey! My name is Sergey Bunas, and in this article I will tell about my experience of building a side-project that was created in 1 day, went viral on Twitter and earned $1143 in 2 weeks.

Replai.so is a GPT-3 Chrome browser extension that generates human-like Twitter replies in seconds to help users grow their audience

Replai's interface + example of a reply in a "Joke" toneReplai's interface + example of a reply in "Joke" tone

Idea

My fellow hustler friend had experience in creating courses on the growing an audience on Twitter, he knew what hurts the people trying to grow their audience on Twitter from 0.

Pain: One of the main ways to grow your audience on Twitter is to reply to tweets from more famous people. In order for this method to bring results, certain conditions must be met:

Consistency - audience growth on Twitter is a long game, it is very important to respond to at least 5-10 tweets every day.

Speed - you need to be among the first to respond to a tweet, otherwise your answer will drown and no one will notice it.

Creativity - the answer should be in the context of a discussion, also it should contain an emotion.

Solution: With Replai.so, you can generate human-like replies to tweets with a single button.

We use GPT-3 to reply to tweets, and with the help of the Chrome extension we embed it into the Twitter page, reducing friction (no need to go to another site, copy-paste the Tweet and reply)

Code

I've created the first version of the extension in 4 hours.

I immediately submitted it to the Chrome Web Store for review. After 3 days, our extension was approved and published to the public store.

Chrome web store page

The extension has two main parts:

Extension Frontend

Single javascript file that contains logic of: detecting wether it's the Twitter page, inserting buttons into the Tweeter text field, when you click on the button we send the original tweet (need to find it in the page) and tone of response to the server, insert the response from the server into the text field (emulating paste event).

Backend

Simple node.js server hosted on heroku which contains: logic for creating GPT-3 prompts depending on the tone in which you want to reply, REST calls to the OpenAI GPT-3 API, API keys, analytics, payment verification.

The first version of the product did not have a paywall and a limit on the number of replays, we wanted to test the hypothesis as quickly as possible and let users touch the product.

Viral Launch

When the extension became available in the store, my friend wrote a tweet with an example of using the extension, the tweet went viral and gained 95k views, 140 retweets and attracted the first 400-500 users to us.

Tweet

We continued to write under the hashtag #buildinpublic about the progress of the product, about experience, insights and mistakes. These tweets gained views, increased awareness, and later word of mouth appeared.

We was featured in various Twitter/AI/Productivity collections. And received great comments from our users

Tweet in which we're featured in collections

Tweet in which people are talking about us

After 4 days, we saw that the bills for requests in OpenAI reached $6 dollars a day, we had 500 people download our extension at that point. We decided to create a pay-wall and to be quick with the payments we decided to use Gumroad. We created a landing page using site-builder and added payments to the extension

Pricing

Pricing with different reply limits.

2 weeks passed after the time that we've added payments. In 2 weeks we reached the following milestones:

Paying customers = 29

MRR = $291

Revenue = $1,143

Followers on Twitter = 643

Conclusion

ChatGPT/GPT-3 provides significant benefits: it's easy to integrate, it's cheap, and it creates amazing value for customers (if done right).

Chrome Extension provides embedding into the user's already developed habits, allowing you to significantly increase retention.

By combining these technologies, you will have fantastic opportunities to create new products!

P.S

On my Twitter I will be posting updates on my indie-hacker's journey, so if you're interested you can subscribe :)

https://twitter.com/sergeybunas

***Sergey Bunas*** posted to Building in Public on Feb 1, 2023

Incoming hater ;)

Don't you feel like this tool is going to make the internet a worse place? How will you feel as a Twitter user if all the Tweets you see are vapid AI-written tweets rather than real opinions written by real people?

I'm not trying to diminish your achievement (congrats on such a quick turnaround!), but I think it's worth discussing.***bensibley*** 9 months ago

Nah, that's not hatin' but pointing us to the elephant in the quickly expanding room. I always thought one of the tenants of #buildinpublic was to encourage human discussions and discovery, the keyword being "human". If half the people we're replying to are bots, we're closer to living in a simulation than we thought 😅***tohodo*** 9 months ago

One day social media will be one AI talking to another... I'm pretty sure that's how the world ends.***tscionti*** 9 months ago

I recently read about DoNotPay (https://donotpay.com/) which is doing just that but for good it seems! (at least for now) It's training and releasing AI to chat with other AI in order to get out of paying superfluous fees (e.g. bank overdraft, random cell phone charges, etc.)***rdanbaker*** 9 months ago

Now that is something I can get behind!***tscionti*** 9 months ago

How do you know the tweets or tweet replies you see today are not AI generated? :)***ran*** 9 months ago

Lol that's fair, but it's certainly not normalized yet. There's lots of room for growth in terms of AI vs human-generated content.***bensibley*** 9 months ago

Yeah, it's a big topic regarding generative models in general.

Right now I see this as a nice tool that helps people who do not have good writing skills (software developers, design people, and other people whose main job is not to write & create text) to solve "white-sheet problems" you could edit the reply, add your own thoughts and ideas but "wording" would be much easier.

And that's just a part of progress in my opinion, there are problems that need to be solved with these types of tools, and when the output of the tools will start bothering people/companies they will start to fight against that: creating models that could spot generative texts/images, ban the users who are doing that and so on.

That's really a big topic, what are your thoughts on this one?***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Across different fields, I see a recurring theme that AI is great for inspiration or "getting the ball rolling." That makes sense to me, and I've used AI tools myself in this capacity.

What I worry about is how it will affect discoverability. If there is a massive rise in unedited AI content, then people will have to wade through that to find stuff real people wrote. I don't think sites like Twitter will be able to hide or remove the AI content without also limiting exposure to content or accounts they deem "low quality," which is probably going to affect anyone who isn't already established, thus making it even harder to stand out.

Anyway, this is all theoretical stuff, but that's where I'm coming from. Thanks for entertaining the discussion :)***bensibley*** 9 months ago

What is your profit on that? GPT-3 isn’t cheap.***FLUXparticleCOM*** 9 months ago

So 1 reply costs us about $0,005.

In the free plan, there are 20 replies. = $0,1

We have:

$7/mo for 150 replies = $0,75

$15/mo for 600 = $3

$39/mo for 1500 = $7

so we're not loosing money right now***serjobas*** 9 months ago

what are your other expenses? (e.g. gumroad & heroku) and how do they affect your expenses beyond the unit economics?***rdanbaker*** 9 months ago

gumroad takes 10%

heroku costs $7 per month***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Inspiring! Congratulations!***rafaelqfigueiredo*** 9 months ago

Thank you!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Wow! Impressive story! Wish you luck with it.***ivanklimchuk*** 9 months ago

Thank you Ivan!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Congrats... Believe me or not, I was literally thinking about it a week back, but since I was already occupied with a project... I did not proceed!***kodytools*** 9 months ago

Thanks!

Oh really? How did you come up with this idea?***serjobas*** 9 months ago

I got into the movement of Build in public and posting updates about my project on twitter... also communicating with others.. It was pretty annoying to write response by hand... so literally thought AI can do that job with a click of button. Since I am also a chrome extension developer, I thought I can definitely put my hands on it :)***kodytools*** 9 months ago

This comment was deleted 4 months ago.

DeletedUser 9 months ago

3

Actually, I am building Kody Tools... so that is more important for me right now.***kodytools*** 9 months ago

Wow, that's incredible! It's a testament to the power of quick execution and hard work!***Janabh*** 9 months ago

wow, that is really cool and inspiring***DanX*** 9 months ago

Nice idea***Abhi007*** 9 months ago

Wow, that's a great marge of the technology and the specific need. Will try it today!***alex1759*** 9 months ago

What a simple but inventive solution to a real-world problem. You have inspired me with how you went about validating your idea and seeing people find it useful.***mujuni88*** 9 months ago

glad to hear that! wish you luck with your next product :)***serjobas*** 9 months ago

great idea combining simple technologies brings power thats a super cool***mikasa\_ackerman*** 9 months ago

Thank you so much :)***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Cool idea! Combining simple technologies brings power.***hackerpie*** 9 months ago

Hey Sergey, how many of initial that 500 users subscribed? Great story btw!***HackerIndie2023*** 9 months ago

about 15-20 of them***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Congrats to you.***smartgirlcredit*** 9 months ago

Thanks!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Congrats! Do you know if there were there any other existing solutions for this already?***globetro*** 9 months ago

wow thats really good!***0xconvergence*** 9 months ago

Thank you!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Nice work riding the AI wave!***romaindewolff*** 9 months ago

Just a heads up:

https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=34583932***sharemywin*** 9 months ago

Wow, interesting, thanks for sharing this. Will pay attention***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Nice one!***perspectalog*** 9 months ago

Wow! Congrats!***lucasdarocha*** 9 months ago

thank you :)***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Wow, it's awesome!

Congrats!***SergeyShcheglov*** 9 months ago

thanks!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Amazing!

What's your goal in $?)***haserk*** 9 months ago

Ramen profitability is the next goal!

But if to be honest, it was just a small fun project which got some "virality" on Twitter and made me some $$$.

Not really sure what to do next, since I have other businesses to do.

I'm thinking about selling it to somebody who's interested in the space and could scale it.***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Pretty great to see. Building something in this space***ericfriedman*** 9 months ago

Share what you're building, maybe we could exchange ideas!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Its a work in progress today, but we are building a chrome extension for sales outreach that finds, writes, and provides copy for SDRs and BDRs called www.snippets.ai***ericfriedman*** 9 months ago

Congrats, what you do is amazing.

How do you find customers?***indiehackerha*** 9 months ago

Our only customer channel was Twitter, we use #buildinpublic to tell more about our progress and our takeaways. People tend to like it and find it useful so they try it out and use the extension. If they find value in it then they purchase a subscription to more replies.***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Congrats! Did you try to post it on some subreddits as well? It can work wonders for organic traffic***flaviolivolsi*** 9 months ago

Actually, nope, my experience with Reddit was awful. I've posted my product a year ago and immediately got banned and my karma went to huge —

any subreddits that you could recommend?***serjobas*** 9 months ago

I had quite some success on r/internetisbeautiful and r/sideproject. Reddit has a very demanding crowd. Something that worked for me:

be active in the communities, because redditors will check your profile and see whether you're just there to promote your product or to partecipate to the community

don't just promote your product but offer some value in your post, it shouldn't feel like you're just trying to advertise

be as trasparent as you can and be open to questions/feedback***flaviolivolsi*** 9 months ago

Congrats! Been following on twitter and enjoying seeing your progress for this one. And definitely agree on the easy to integrate part.

Also working on an AI tool myself Evoke, but revenue has been a lot slower with that one lol***RichardGao*** 9 months ago

Thank you Richard!

Nice product, it seems like your niche is smaller then ours (potentially bigger checks), maybe try to find channels that fit your product?***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Awesome story, congrats!***jaredtyler*** 9 months ago

Thank you!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

I would like to use it to talk to my stepdad lol***djelnar*** 9 months ago

:)***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Really really great idea!***lccrsk*** 7 months ago

Awesome, works pretty cool. what are your plans for the product? Want to chat?***sunrise2*** 7 months ago

Hi, we love this content! We are currently running a #newsletter specialized in #ArtificialInteligence named #GenAI. Can we feature this in our upcoming edition and give you credit and a link back to your profile? Reply using @goodbitsio and #GenAl if you’d like us to do so.***Goodbits\_io*** 9 months ago

hey, that would be great***serjobas*** 9 months ago

nice. I also use a private version of something like this - i built that for myself.

This was expected. Good work.***usamaejaz*** 9 months ago

hey. Congrats for this product. I am looking to build a similar project for a different platform and wanted to ask:

Is this not a prohibited use case by the openai API?

Deceiving or manipulating users

Includes automated phone calls that sound human, a romantic chatbot that emotionally manipulates end-users, automated systems (including conversational AI and chatbots) that don’t disclose that they are an AI system, or products that simulate another person without their explicit consent.

Arent people thinking that they are tweeting with some users? I know it is not automated or that it doesn't simulate another person but wanted to ask your view on this.***olgn777*** 9 months ago

Inspiring!! Ty***RippedRich*** 9 months ago

Cool story!***Corvette830*** 9 months ago

Cool !

Would be amazing if you would write more about how you coded the extension. Your tech stack - front end and back end. How you learned about coding Chrome extensions.***Bootstrap8*** 9 months ago

Congrats...***nostradamus*** 9 months ago

Congrats... Believe it or not, I was actually considering it a week ago, but since I was already working on a project, I decided against it<a href="https://mybankinginformation.com/does-fresh-market-take-ebt-2/">.</a>***henrycavill*** 9 months ago

Best idea, I appreciate your success in very short time.***Adnanumar*** 9 months ago

Hi Sergey,

First congrats on your launch!

How was the process of getting your GPT3 usage approved by OpenAI?***nemonicon*** 9 months ago

Congratulation I use this for my site too http://cracksbuster.unaux.com/***Chris\_betz*** 9 months ago

Nice inspiring journey!***dipbhi*** 9 months ago

I’m about to use this tool to reply on indie hackers enough in order to get verified.***Kiser*** 9 months ago

That was interesting! I have learned 2 things that I didn't know before! Thanks for sharing!***ahmotameni*** 9 months ago

Wow that is just amazing.

What about adding it into Gmail too?***shunya*** 9 months ago

Congrats on the achievement Sergey! I wonder if you could share the process of integrating GumRoad with the chrome extension. Mainly about how you share the user details (paid/free, monthly\_generations) with the extension service workers.***SNRU\_VEVO*** 9 months ago

Wow this is so neat!!!***kuala*** 9 months ago

I think this is great use of chat GPT. And idea for extension is awesome. Keep up the great work !***markoem*** 9 months ago

Thanks!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

An actual valuable product made with AI, awesome to see. And well executed!***tigerteamx*** 9 months ago

thank you!***serjobas*** 9 months ago

shipping speed is amazing...did you make chrome extension or app before?***insighter050*** 9 months ago

chrome extension, not sure which app are you talking about***serjobas*** 9 months ago

Wow.......***Winsay14*** 9 months ago

Very cool! Congrats on such a quick turnaround. I recently heard that the Twitter API is going to start costing money, does that affect you? (https://developer.twitter.com/en/products/twitter-api) Or are you getting around that by messing with the webpage directly from the browser extension code?***rdanbaker*** 9 months ago

We're not using Twitter API. Chrome Extensions let you embed in the page directly and modify it, or do any sort of stuff with javascript. Embedding buttons into twitter UI and getting original tweets in our case***serjobas*** 9 months ago

How can we use technology in banking?

Image result for how can we use banking in games

Thanks to AI, it is possible to conduct real-time data analysis from a large volume of data sets and provide customised solutions to banking customers. With powerful AI tools, banks can make informed decisions faster by using predictive analysis, which is at the core of AI and ML.

https://mybankinginformation.com/how-to-downgrade-amex-platinum-card/***alexa11*** 9 months ago

This comment was deleted 9 months ago.

mikasa\_ackerman 9 months ago

2

This comment was deleted 4 months ago.

DeletedUser 9 months ago

3

It uses GPT-3, not chatgpt

ChatGPT does not have an API yet.

RichardGao 9 months ago

## Going #1 on Reddit

I went #1 on Reddit multiple times.. here's how

by ericlamcrypto

Hi IH,

So yesterday I launched my free google chrome extension ReaderMax.com

I posted about it here, here, and here.

I went #1 trending on both subreddit pages which each have over 100,000 members.

Here's how I did it...

Create lead magnet

A couple years ago I took an online course from a guy Josh Snow. He created snow teeth whitening, a high end teeth whitening D2C brand that was endorsed by the Kardashians and other big celebrities.

One thing that always stood out to me in his course was a hack that he used to use to get people to engage with his products.

He would create a Facebook ad that would tap into a common dream that people would have, the dream that resonated the most was one about having your teeth fall out while sleeping. This is apparently a common dream and a bit shocking to be honest. He wrote an article something along the lines of "What it means if you dream about your teeth falling out". There was a shocking image that was included in the ad of teeth falling out. It was a scroll stopper.

Interested people would stop scrolling in shock and read the text, if they related to it (meaning they had that dream or were interested), they clicked the link.

The link took them to the teeth whitening website where they would read an article about what it means to have that dream. At the end it came around to insecurity about teeth and suggested the reader try teeth whitening, then they would be recommended products with lots of testimonials.

This worked for him and I always thought it was genius.

In this case I wrote an article "I built an AI chrome extension to 10x your reading in 2 days... here's how"

The headline was apparently captivating and readers clicked it to hear more.

Be indirect

In the article I described the process of building the chrome extension in practical terms so that anyone can apply the same methods and create their own.

I also included roadblocks encountered so that it wasn't all rainbows and roses, I gave more of a practical reality of the process. For example I had to update files that I didn't know were deprecated.

At the end of the day, I was able to link to the product to show the result but the real point of the story was to give value to the reader; here's how to create an AI chrome extension quickly. They can apply this to their own life.

But if they're interested in the product I built, they can check that out too.

This is important because your Reddit post will get taken down if it's an ad. You must create value through your post.

Scatter your bets

I posted 3x on Reddit. My posts on r/business\_ideas and r/artificialinteligence went #1 on trending but I posted in r/startups and the mods took my post down and told me they wanted to ban me. Is what it is, I know next time not to post in r/startups or if I want to, use a different more refined strategy. Live and learn I guess.

Ultimately there's no way to know if posts will do well on Reddit, and the process is filled with uncertainty.

The best way to go about it is to try and create the best/most captivating article possible with good value and a super catchy title. From there it's a dice roll though. I've had posts flop. I've had posts for other products i've made go super viral.

All you can do is try your best and then the rest is up to the internet, which can be super fickle.

Feedback

hopefully this was helpful. If you liked the article please leave a comment or like it so others will see it!

Also, feel free to comment below if you'd like me to dive in deeper on any questions you may have!

***Ericlamcrypto*** on February 14, 2023

And he used the same strategy on indiehackers 🤣😂***Saaswriter*** 9 months ago

;)***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Reddit is really insane! I've seen going viral on a subreddit bring 100k+ viewers at a time. If you're interested in discovering more subreddits, here is a list 13 of them where you can talk about your software/tech product: https://launchpedia.co/places-to-promote-your-startup/?\_launch\_places\_mobile\_category=reddit***sathesh95*** 9 months ago

Thanks for sharing - this is helpful :)***max\_linus*** 9 months ago

Thanks max. I'm glad it was useful.***sathesh95*** 9 months ago

thank you so much for sharing this. going to use this list.

super appreciated***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

I'm glad to hear that eric 🤗 Happy to help!!***sathesh95*** 9 months ago

Love this! I recommend posting to r/sideproject and r/saas too. Both very friendly subreddits for builders.

And if you want to leverage Reddit even further I really recommend Surfkey.io by @JohanCutych***aleks\_m*** 9 months ago

wow, I just looked at Surfkey. How have I not learned about it sooner? Looks super relevant!***yulia\_mamonova*** 9 months ago

woah!!! This is so useful thank you for sharing Surfkey. I just set up an account this is an awesome tool. thank you!

I just joined r/sideproject and r/saas will see what happens there!***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Something else to be aware of on reddit is not to sleep on comments!

In a really popular post, you can ride the wave from a comment. And they're much less likely to get banned as well. That was how I built a large amount of our customer base for Evoke***RichardGao*** 9 months ago

That’s a really good tip :)***cll*** 9 months ago

great tip. how many paying customers do you guys have out of curiosity? did u do free tier first or jump into paid plan?***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Please create a non-free product and then publish a post about it on Reddit. It would be much more interesting to hear about such your experience because Reddit is super-sensitive to non-free products.***SeaCat*** 9 months ago

to this point you could implement a free offer or something free in your strategy to get around this. it's all strategy at the end of the day. some companies are #1, some go nowhere. thoughtful strategy is key.***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

I super agree with that :) They torch people (trying to showcase their product, even if it is a helpful product) for fun and take pleasure in watching them burn.***techPackets*** 9 months ago

The only drawback of reddit that they have pretty stupid mods.***kodytools*** 9 months ago

I actually wrote a guide detailing how I like to find customers on Reddit.

TL;DR:

Find relevant subreddits (this website is not in the guide yet, but is super useful)

Use Postpone.app to post at the optimal time

Use image posts where you can

Engage with people in the comments***amosbastian*** 9 months ago

great strategy. this website you linked is really helpful. will be using this. just signed up for postpone as well.***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

It's good advice, thanks***aheath*** 9 months ago

thanks for sharing your useful information.***buckyjames*** 9 months ago

yup. glad you found it useful***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

interesting. why did the mods take down the post on one subreddit and leave it on another? any insight there?***interestedhacker*** 9 months ago

Different subreddit, different rules and mods. Some are more lenient basically.***aleks\_m*** 9 months ago

the rules are different in all the subreddits. I would imagine it unfortunately violated the rules in one of the communities, but didn't in the others. some of the rules can be relatively subjective though so it can be tough to navigate tbh, i will just post and see what happens if that's the case. i try to comply as much as possible tho.***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Is this worth doing in subreddits that prohibit any links of any kind in posts or comments? If so, how do you make it work?***mizkirsten*** 8 months ago

Good stuff! I also recommend jumping into relevant conversations, providing real value, offer help and plugging your product when it makes sense.

It's less "viral" but repeatable, and you can get niched users this way.

We set up reddit keyword alerts around our problem space and do around 5 comments a day resulting in 10-20 signups a day.***JohanCutych*** 9 months ago

i used this yesterday. did you make surfkey?***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Nice! Yeah! How did it went?***JohanCutych*** 9 months ago

i like it. i keep getting emails though on updated keywords. it would be great if they'd stop. other than that i love it***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

You mean that you get an email for a keyword that you already saw/answered to? They should stack into threads under the first notification. Seems like a bug.***JohanCutych*** 9 months ago

i'm not sure i just kept getting email notifications for the first 2 days on my phone with updated keywords. i had been just deleting the emails cause I checked out the keywords when I initially used the product wasn't looking for updates. it seemed to happen every hour or so. i checked out the site and it said by default i was signed up for hourly email notifications. when i tried to stop it the site kept freezing so not sure if it stopped or not although im not getting notifications anymore so i'm assuming it did.***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

this isnt saying much, but d2c is a known bad business model😭***build\_sleep\_repeat*** 9 months ago

Congratulations on launching your extension! Your approach looks solid and reasonable. It's also great to hear that you shared roadblocks encountered in the process, as this can help other readers relate and empathize with your journey.

My question for you is: what marketing strategies do you plan to use going forward to continue to promote your Google Chrome extension and grow your user base?***alex1759*** 9 months ago

Hey @ericlamcrypto7, do you use any kind of post scheduling tool for Reddit? Or is there any you recommend?***HackerIndie2023*** 9 months ago

it was off the cuff to be honest. I decided to post it at around 5pm PST on Monday, didn't put much thought into the time, maybe I should have but wasn't a thought to be honest.***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Yeah, that's good. However, I am having a hard time finding any Reddit management tool.***HackerIndie2023*** 9 months ago

Postpone.app like this?***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Yeah. Looked at it before. But I was looking for free one with limited features. BTW, thanks for recommending!***HackerIndie2023*** 9 months ago

You have shared an interesting marketing strategy, I'm gonna try it out.

Yeah on Reddit I was able to get great reactions about 5-6 times mainly on /webdev with my projects.

The idea is simple, I use to post a title saying the usage of a tool with a video.***basharath*** 9 months ago

for webdev can you include links? what violations do you need to be aware of in that one?***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

You can include the links in the comments. The post should not look like a spam.***basharath*** 9 months ago

Thank you for sharing the insights! can you please tell me the time that you have use for reddit posting @ericlamcrypto7***erichui*** 9 months ago

I posted them at like 5pm PST on Monday. around there.***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

Ok thank you @ericlamcrypto7***erichui*** 9 months ago

Thanks for the insight! I really think a good lead magnet can pay off and kickstart a project - it takes some good ideas though to come up with a story that is not too "click-baity" but still gets peoples' interest.

And reddit can be show stopper on one day, or a stepping stone the other - you really never know :D***battlestations*** 9 months ago

i've had other projects where the post got 0 interaction no matter how hard I try. I think a piece that made this work especially well was that it's in the AI category which has a lot of hype around it right now.***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

That's certainly true - trends are something reddit goes really hot. And Memes of course :D***battlestations*** 9 months ago

Thanks for the info. Grateful to have you share your experiences.***dwhitena*** 9 months ago

hope it was helpful!***ericlamcrypto7*** 9 months ago

How many reddit groups would you suggest to post in?***sleepwarrior75*** 9 months ago

as many that fit your post as possible. typically i'll post 1 or 2 as tests in a couple subreddits then if they do well scale it up into more subreddits

ericlamcrypto7 9 months ago