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How I Started A Writing School That Generates \$10K/Month With Minimal Marketing Spend



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Published: March 31st, 2023

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SAVE



Valentin Decker

Founder, **Sauce Writing**

\$10K

REVENUE/MO



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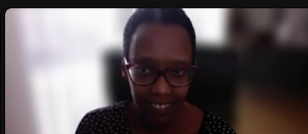
EMPLOYEES

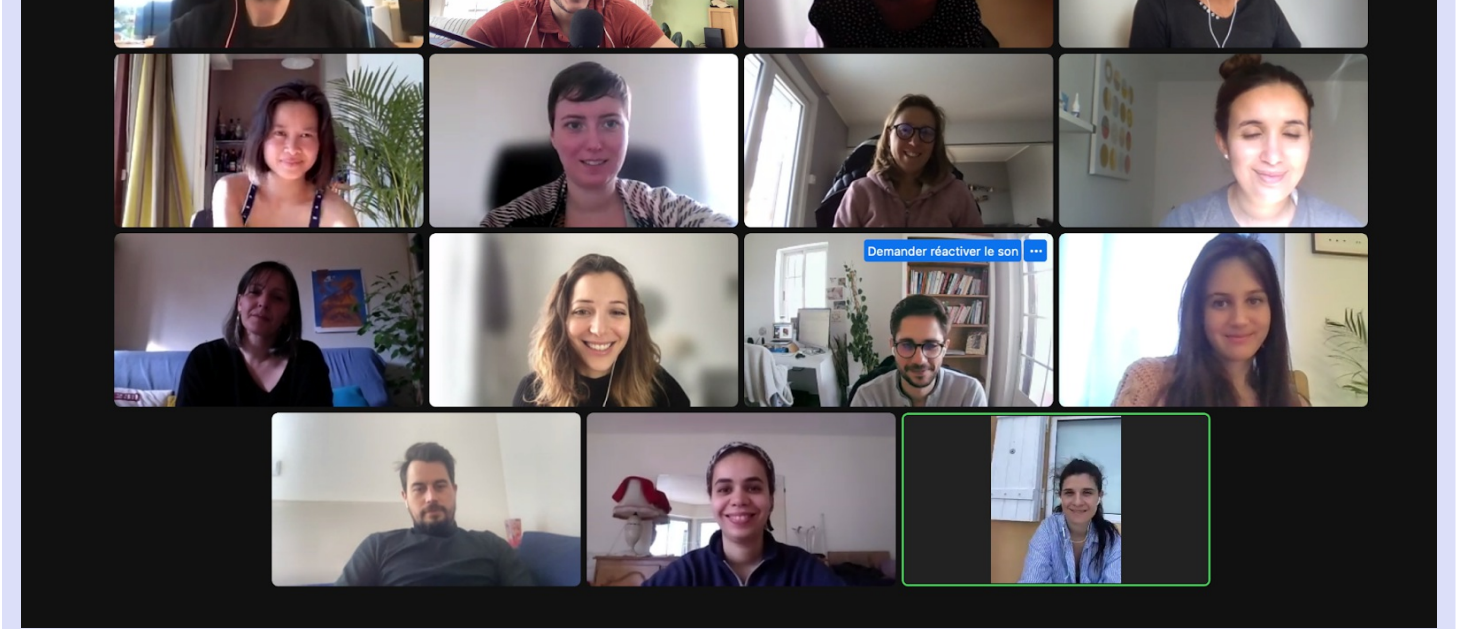
Hello! Who are you and what business did you start?

My Name is Valentin Decker, I am 30 this year and started **Sauce Writing** just before the pandemic, in 2020.

Sauce Writing is an online writing school that helps professionals accelerate their careers through online writing, on the French market. I host online bootcamps almost every month.

A few figures about the business: Sauce Writing helps 100+ students every year, and will do between 120K€ and 150K€ in revenue in 2023 with an emailing list of 5K people.





What's your backstory and how did you come up with the idea?

I published my first articles on the internet on Medium in 2016. At that time, I had no idea of the power of writing and what this discipline would bring to my life. You can still see my [old articles here](#). I wrote about every topic that captured my curiosity : readings, entrepreneurship, marketing, etc.

I write just to better retain my readings and share my thoughts. Gradually, I got caught up in the game. My articles started to be read and people contacted me to congratulate me. Even more crazy: I am offered calls and coffee to talk. Some people find my articles inspiring and want to meet me.

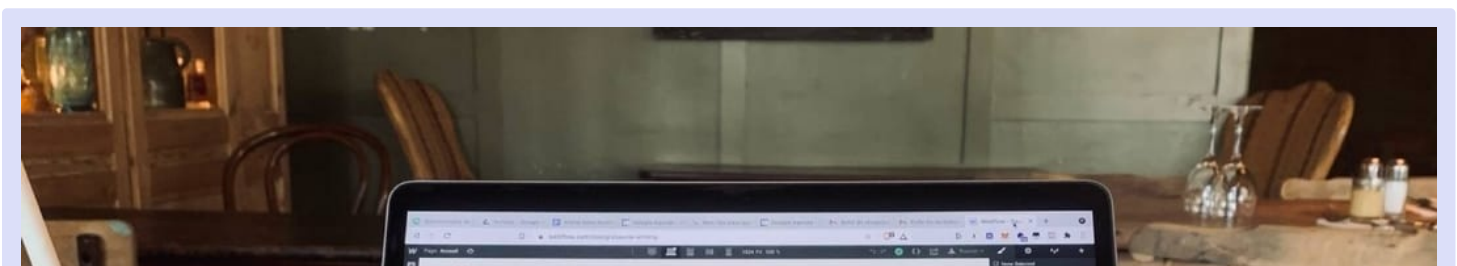
I fully realized the potential of writing when I landed my first paid job in the Marketing team of a Parisian startup, after my studies. My mission was to write and do copywriting all day.

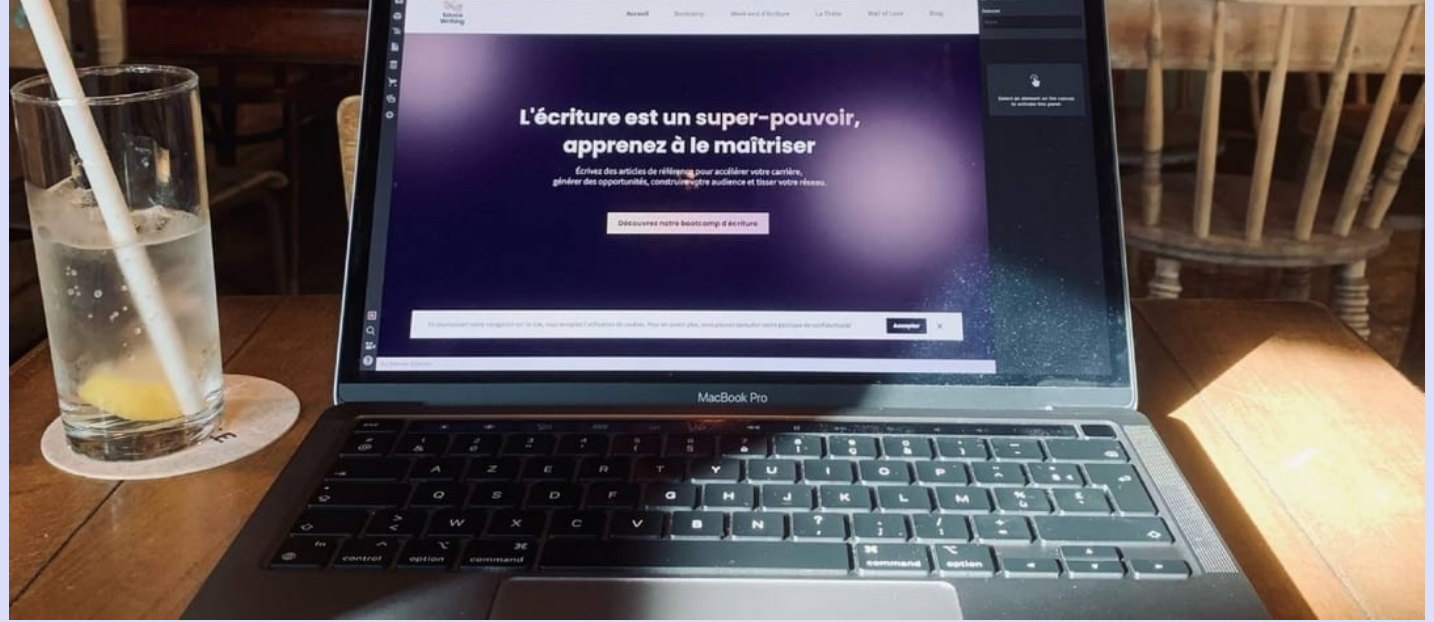
What made the difference in my recruitment? The many articles I had published online, made me credible and relevant for this position. I was the ideal candidate.

During my years as an employee, from 2017 to 2019, I sharpened my weapons. I confronted my writing with the reality of a growing business, received decisive feedback, and learned how to use writing for marketing purposes.

In parallel, the personal blog I continue to feed allows me to attract more than 50,000 visitors each year and to gather an audience of people who appreciate my work.

In 2020, when I quit my job, I already have a decent online following (several thousands of emails in my newsletter) and people that liked my writing. This is when I decided to launch my writing school.





Take us through the process of building the first version of your product.

I started with a very basic Ghost website. I had a blog, a few pages that presented my vision on online writing (which I called a “thesis”), and signup buttons to my email list everywhere.

From the beginning, I launched all kinds of products (with sales emails), asked people to pay for them, and run these programs for a few months.

I remember the first thing I sold: a 10-day online program to learn how to write and structure a great article, with 4 live sessions. The price was 47€ with 5 available spots. I hosted this program every month for 6 months, raising the price by 50€ every time.

Then, I tried other formats of courses: recorded videos (MOOC), private coaching, paid community, etc. I tested value propositions, tested my prices, and improved my pedagogy in real conditions.

My goal was to find the right balance between the value I can bring to the students, the margin of the product, the possibility to create systems, and the ease in terms of marketing launch.

For example, I discovered that it's really hard to rely only on evergreen products. People need specific reasons to buy what you offer. If it's always available, they don't make the leap.

The more I kept going and testing, the more I understood what worked. I was always talking to my audience: on social media, via emails, and during my courses (there is always some kind of live experience). It helped me a lot to understand their needs, problems, and situations. And, finally, craft every iteration of my products.

I think it's the key element of success for any kind of business: offering what people want. And not what YOU want, as a founder. I know it seems obvious, but trust me, it's not. Entrepreneurs often launch a product because it fits their worldview and what they think is right. I know it because it's what I did, in the beginning, with previous projects.

And then, when things are not working as well as they should be, you start to question yourself and your approach. You start to realize that you must listen to your customers. And take it to heart.

“ I have created a lot of content, which has allowed me to build a great brand and a different writing approach than what is seen everywhere.

In 2021, I launched a new iteration of my training programs: a 6-week online bootcamp, during which everything takes place live. The format was well received and solved the problems I was encountering with marketing.

The fact that there is a starting date and a limited number of spots creates healthy scarcity and urgency. People have a real incentive to sign up, and this allows me to properly calibrate my marketing launches in my calendar.

Describe the process of launching the business.

When I launched Sauce Writing, I had a pretty clear idea of what needed to be done to succeed. I used all the assets and leverage I created during the past years.

I communicated on every possible platform: Twitter, LinkedIn, my Medium account, and, of course, my email list. My biggest asset was the email list I was slowly building since 2016. I accumulated a bit more than a thousand emails from people that enjoyed my work. The tactics I used were very simple: publish a new article every week and ask people to sign up for my newsletter at the bottom of every content.

So when I launched Sauce Writing, my new project, they naturally wanted to learn more about it. They naturally wanted to buy my courses and see what I had to offer.

I then confronted this with the reality of a business with a lot of iteration.

“ It is important to be very careful in investing your energy in the right place and always question your worldview to make the right decisions.

With each new iteration, I tried to go further and increase my prices. I tried to listen to my students to understand what they were expecting. Some programs were more popular than others, but they were all rich in teachings.

Since launch, what has worked to attract and retain customers?

In a coaching/courses business like this, the acquisition is essential. I must constantly find new students who will take my courses.

The previous work on building my audience has helped me a lot in this regard. I was able to rely on my email list to attract sign-ups.

And this work must be done permanently.

Today, my two main acquisition channels are SEO and LinkedIn. I try to be as regular as possible in producing content on these channels.

For SEO, I knew the basics, but I wanted to go further. I took a private coach that helped to

create my strategy and teach me how to do it well. Today, I try to post 4 new articles every month. I optimize them with a tool called YourTextGuru and try to organize my content in topic clusters. You can see what it looks like on [my writing guide page](#). Every article is linked to a section related to its category. (more on my SEO analytics in the section below.)

On LinkedIn, the strategy is simple: publish something almost every day. The more I post, the more eyeballs I get and the more people discover my work. It's pretty straightforward. But I like to say that the strategy doesn't have to be complex. It's the execution that needs to be fierce.

On LinkedIn, I try the post 3 kinds of publications:

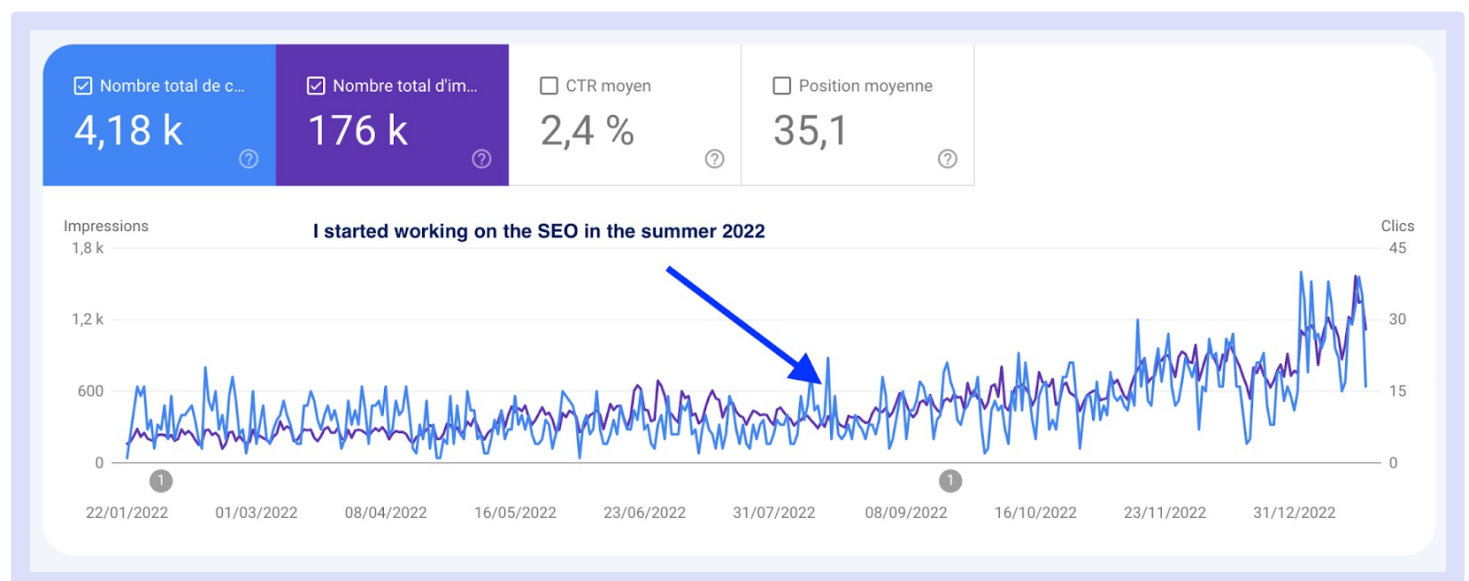
- Top of funnel: I talk about broad subjects that will get me discovered by new people. Entrepreneurship, marketing, personal development, etc.
- Middle of the funnel: these posts are a little bit more specific about why people should write on the Internet, start a blog, etc.
- Bottom of the funnel: here, I am more specific about writing and content creation. I try to give practical and tactical advice to help people improve their skills.

So far, I haven't invested in online paid advertising (I did a small inconclusive test yet). But it's one of the next projects I'd like to undertake.

How are you doing today and what does the future look like?

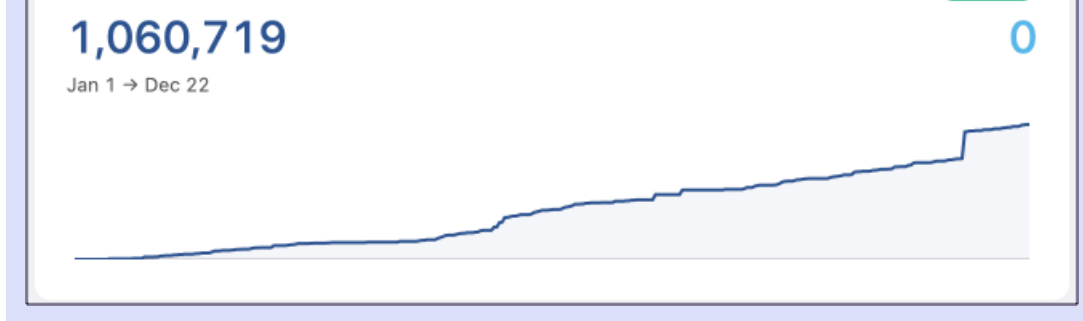
Right now, I'm fortunate to have a marketing system that costs me practically nothing. I don't spend anything on advertising. I only invest in growing my website's SEO. I have an intern for that I pay 1,300€ a month and various SEO tools that I pay for.

The traffic on my site isn't incredible. Until now, I've been pretty good at converting, but I'm working to improve lead acquisition. My goal for the coming year is to grow my website's traffic to collect more qualified emails.



The objective is clearly to keep on focusing on SEO and to intensify my efforts on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is one of the channels that generate the most traffic for me today.





I generated over 1 million impressions of my posts in 2022.

Here is my plan regarding my Marketing for the future:

- Keep being consistent on LinkedIn and try to post almost every day (following the strategy I explained earlier).
- Keep publishing blog articles every week for SEO. I hired a freelancer to help me write them.
- Start doing Ads (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Google). I think there is a huge opportunity to accelerate my growth with this channel. I just need to take some time to do it right and create marketing funnels. I plan to be helped by a coach to accelerate my learning curve in this subject.

Through starting the business, have you learned anything particularly helpful or advantageous?

My main mistake was not investing in SEO sooner. I regret it because I would have gone much faster and generated compound interest for my marketing. I am making up for this mistake today to have a stable and repeatable acquisition channel.

Despite this, I have created a lot of content, which has allowed me to build a great brand and a different writing approach than what is seen everywhere. Even though I don't have a big acquisition channel yet, I was able to create a competitive advantage through my branding and the quality of my content (not optimized for SEO). Ultimately, it serves my SEO efforts well today because it attracted many interesting backlinks.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

The first version of my website was made with [Ghost](#). It was a basic blog with a few extra pages. In 2021, I invested in a [Webflow](#) website and new branding to have something more professional and memorable.

My tool stack is very simple because I don't have any technical skills. I do everything with no code.

I manage my email list with [MailerLite](#), I organize myself with [Notion](#), I communicate on [Slack](#), and I use tools from the Google Suite. To deliver my courses, I use [Zoom](#) and host the replays on [SchoolMaker](#). It's minimalist and it works very well.

What have been the most influential books, podcasts, or other resources?

My favorite podcast: MyFirstMillion. It gives me lots of business ideas and insights about various industries.

I also loved [So Good They Can't Ignore You by Cal Newport](#). It's a great book that helped me approach my career and my craft (writing).

Advice for other entrepreneurs who want to get started or are just starting out?

I have two tips that I try to always keep in mind.

Don't focus on your competitors. A business dies because its execution is not good and because the founder is not focused enough. Not because of its competitors.

It's especially true for a solopreneur.

Always look for actions with higher leverage and ROI. It is important to be very careful in investing your energy in the right place and always question your worldview to make the right decisions.

Are you looking to hire for certain positions right now?

Maybe an SEO specialist for the french market. Someone willing to write great articles, optimized for search results.

Where can we go to learn more?

The easiest way to find out more about [Sauce Writing](#) is on my website. I'm also very active on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

If you have any questions or comments, drop a comment below!



Valentin Decker, Founder of Sauce Writing



[Pat Walls](#), Founder of Starter Story

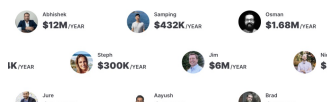
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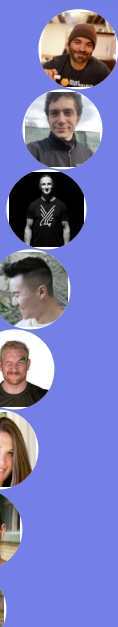
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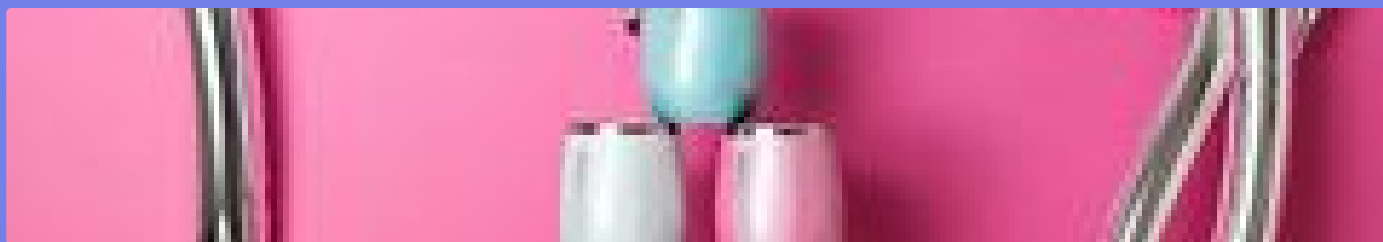
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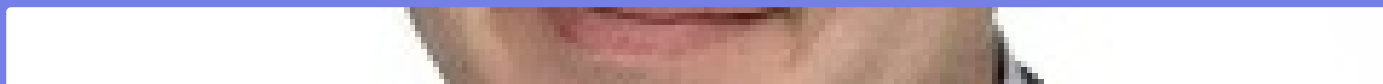
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Scott

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Chad

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Garrett

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Resources to keep you building



Abhishek

\$12M/YEAR

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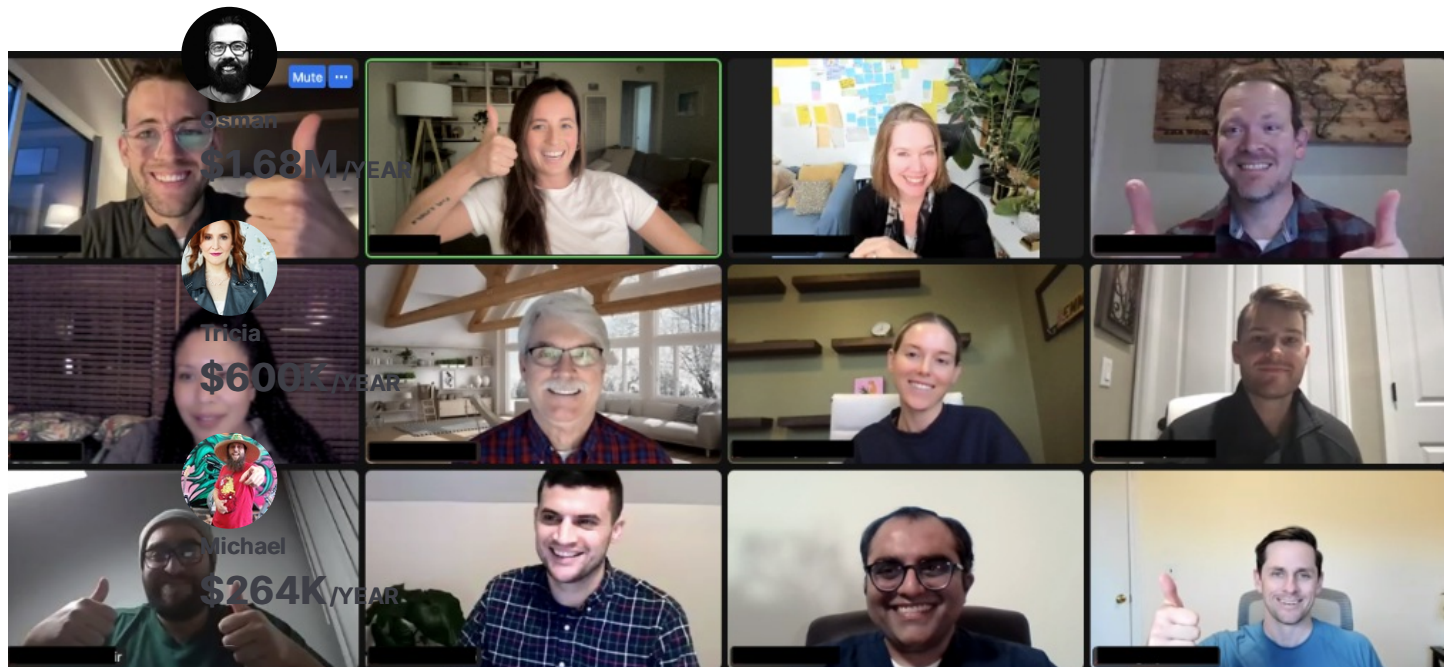


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Trent Baren

Instagram

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\$1.62M/YEAR

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