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# How I Started A \$10K/Month Business Selling DIY Web Design And Marketing Courses



Shannon Mattern



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**ABOUT**

BUSINESS

TOOLS

BOOKS

UPDATES

SAVE



Shannon Mattern

Founder, **Web Designer Academy**

\$42K

REVENUE/MO



1

FOUNDERS

2

EMPLOYEES

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

Hey there! I'm [Shannon Mattern](#) and I've helped over 15,000 new online business owners learn how to build their websites and market themselves online (even if they're not a techie and are starting from zero).

Five years ago I created an online video tutorial series called the [Free 5 Day Website Challenge](#) which walks new entrepreneurs step by step through building a website for their online business with WordPress.

The Free 5 Day Website Challenge is unlike any other WordPress training or tutorial online because it shows the exact step-by-step process I used to design and build websites for my 1:1 clients. No other free training out there is as comprehensive as what I created for my

community to help them get their businesses up and running online!

Back in 2015, I started at \$0 and 0 website traffic, and now my business is making \$10,000 month and growing.

My revenue comes from affiliate commissions from products and services I teach inside my free DIY web design training, and sales of my two signature courses: one that teaches ad-free, algorithm-proof online marketing strategies and the other that teaches web designers how to market themselves online, get clients, charge what their worth and not let their clients take over their lives!

And every month on my podcast I break down exactly [how much money I make](#), how I make it and what my expenses are - because I believe it's important to show the whole picture of what the opportunities and the costs are to run an online business!



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

One day back in 2014, I was sitting in my beige, windowless office under fluorescent lights for the 2555th day in a row, finishing up a financial report that I dreaded doing every month, when I overheard this conversation outside my office door:

*"Have you ever had 7-UP salad? It's got lemon Jell-O, lime Jell-O, marshmallows..."*

And I literally started to have a panic attack.

*"OMG, I cannot DO this for the rest of my life!!! I'm 35 years old! Is this really all there is? Is this why I got good grades and went to college and got a good corporate job??? This is not what I'm meant to do with my life and I feel like my soul is dying..."*

I felt trapped. I wanted freedom.

And I felt so guilty about not being happy.

At the time I was making nearly six figures - and I felt like I should just be satisfied with what I had because so many others aren't as fortunate. But I just couldn't shake the feeling that I was meant to do something more.

The one thing I loved about my job when I wasn't drowning in spreadsheets was web design. I could get lost in time when it came to solving our business problems with WordPress.

So I decided to start a freelance web design business on the side. No one was calling it a side hustle back then.

My very first client was a vendor I'd been working with for a while at my day job. One day he called me up and asked me who built our website.

"Me," I replied.

"Want to do some freelance work for me on the side?" he asked.

I said yes, and then when I told that story to a friend, he said his dad needed someone for their website. I got my second client.

Then I met a girl at the gym who asked me what I did for a living. "Marketing and IT," I said. "Oh, and I do some freelance web design on the side." I got my third client.

I started building websites for these small local businesses and entrepreneurs while still working full time. My goal was to make enough money to replace my day job income so that I could be my own boss. And so I spent every single evening after work and all day on the weekends working on client websites.

And I quickly burnt myself out.

I wasn't charging enough (*thanks, imposter syndrome*). I didn't have good processes or boundaries in place. I calculated that I was making about \$4 an hour from my side hustle, 75 cents less than I'd made at my very first job in high school.

"This isn't worth it..." I thought. "I'm going to wrap up these projects and just forget about owning my own business."

And I truly almost gave up.

Then one day I was sitting in rush hour traffic *again* on my way to work listening to a random business podcast, and this guy was talking about how he earns money by showing people how to set up web hosting... but they didn't pay him to show them how to do it, the web hosting company paid him when people purchased the web hosting he recommended and showed them how to set up.

That guy is Pat Flynn of the Smart Passive Income Podcast.

It was one of those record-scratch moments.

*"Wait, so instead of building websites for people, I can teach them for free how to do it themselves, and when they buy the things they'll have to buy anyway to build their site, I'll make money from those companies?!?! No wonder there are so many "how to build a website" tutorials out there! I can make a way better tutorial, and give it away for free and still make money!"*

And so I immediately got to work and recorded the tutorials that would become the very first **Free 5 Day Website Challenge**.

But these weren't gonna be anything like the other WordPress tutorials out there. I'd taught myself WordPress over the previous 10 years in my marketing and IT roles at my day jobs at a law firm and a non-profit.

Back then there were two ways to learn:

- Trial and error
- WordPress forums are full of dudes who were more interested in proving how much smarter they were than everyone else than actually helping people.

I'd make the mistake from time to time of asking a question in a WordPress forum, and instead of getting an answer, I'd be told why my question was stupid.

When I think back on it now, no wonder I had such doubts about the value of my skillset and didn't charge nearly enough. I probably internalized those comments more than I realized...

And since I didn't want to be called "stupid" for asking questions, I decided I'd just figured it all out on my own.

I ended up building a continuing education website that still generates over \$15K a month in revenue for my former employer – so I guess I wasn't totally worthless when it came to building websites!

So when I decided I'd teach people how to DIY with WordPress (instead of doing it for them), I put in place some core values that had my past experiences in mind:

- There will be a safe space for people who are not techie to learn so that they aren't torn apart online when they ask questions.
- No jargon, no trying to explain how it all works behind the scenes. No one cares. They're not trying to be a web developer, they're just trying to get their website up so they can move on to getting clients and making money.
- There are NO stupid questions.
- There are several key things that online business owners need to have set up on their website to be successful beyond just the design. Teach them how to do it all in one place. Don't make them figure it all out themselves.
- When someone asks a question, answer it with the exact steps they need to take to do what they're trying to do. Don't just tell them what to do, tell them how to do it too because chances are they won't know how to do it.

Three years and lots of mistakes later, I was FINALLY earning enough money from affiliate

commissions, courses + 1:1 client work to replace my 6-figure day job salary.

I quit my day job on January 2, 2018, and I now teach entrepreneurs how to DIY their websites and market themselves online full time.

And while I no longer work with 1:1 web design clients, I teach web designers how to market themselves online, get clients and complete projects (without losing their minds!)

If this girl from Columbus, Ohio can do it, anyone can do it.

## **Take us through the process of designing, prototyping, and manufacturing your first product.**

When I made the decision to teach people how to DIY, my first step was to research all the affiliate opportunities available.

I was totally new to affiliate marketing, and I was shocked at how many of the products and services I was already buying and using to build websites for my clients had affiliate programs. I signed up for all of them.

My next step was to figure out what kind of website I'd teach people to build. And I decided to teach them how to build the same kind of website I'd personally need to grow my own business online - a website that positioned me as an expert and built my email list.

I didn't have anything to sell at the time, but I knew that an email list of people who signed up for my free DIY web design training would be critical to selling anything else I created in the future.

And I also decided that I wanted to help people just like me: women who were in day jobs they wanted to escape, didn't have a lot of extra time to mess around with the tech except maybe an hour a day on their lunch break and didn't have anyone else serving and supporting them with the tech side of their business.

So I outlined my training, got all my affiliate links set up, and then I spent who knows how many hours recording it and editing it and re-recording it, trying to remove every *"um, like, and ah"* from it and make it perfect and professional.

My plan was to create hidden 5 pages on my website, added an hour-long training video to each page with affiliate links to the things I was teaching how to set up in the training, and set up an email opt-in sequence that dripped the link to each day's training out over 5 days.

And I knew it wouldn't cost me much to get the training up and running. And I had money that I'd earned from those 1:1 web design projects so I didn't even have to tap into my personal funds.

I had the tools I needed to design a logo, and I had my sister-in-law take a few photos of me with her fancy camera for the website.

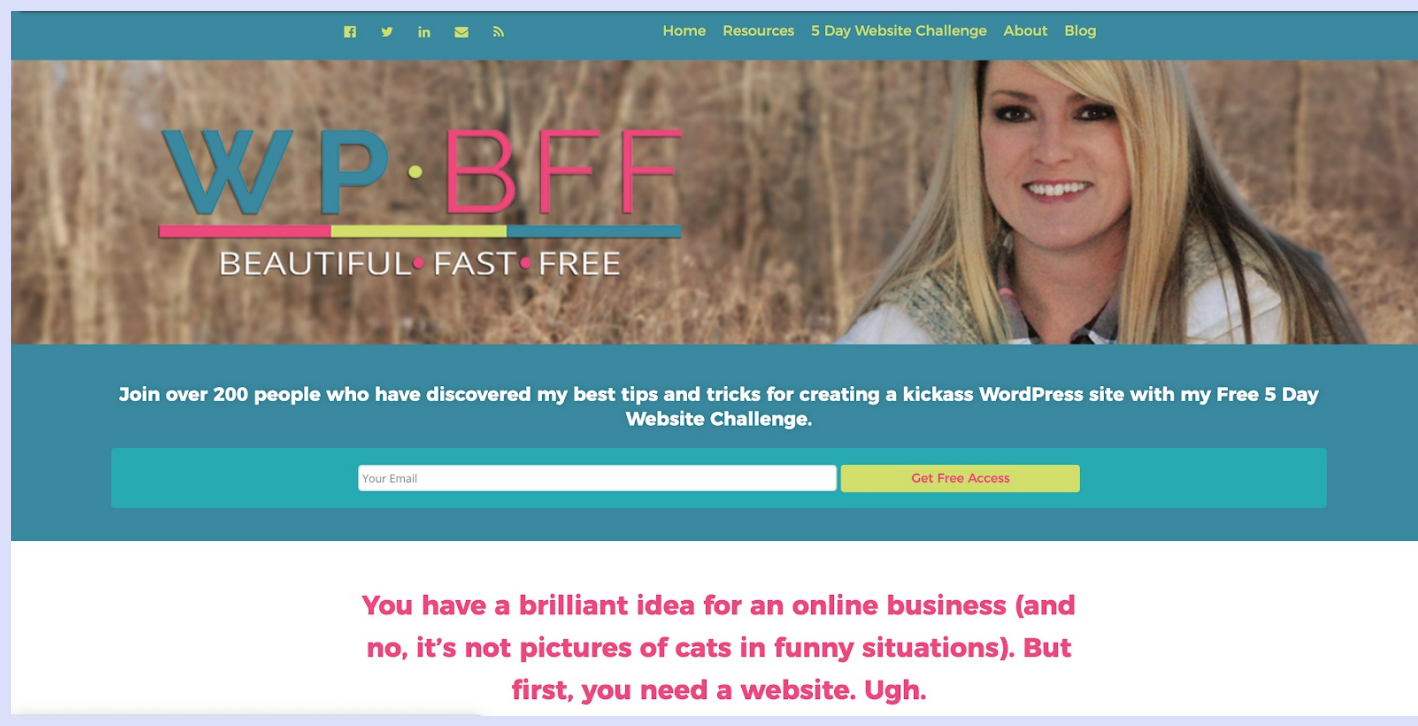
I was going to teach a free WordPress theme, so all I needed to buy was web hosting, a way to create the videos, and the other products I was teaching and recommending inside my training:

- Web hosting: \$60
- Camtasia (video editing + screen recording): \$97
- Email Service Provider (\$10/month)
- Optin Form Plugin (\$69)
- Branding Course (\$199)

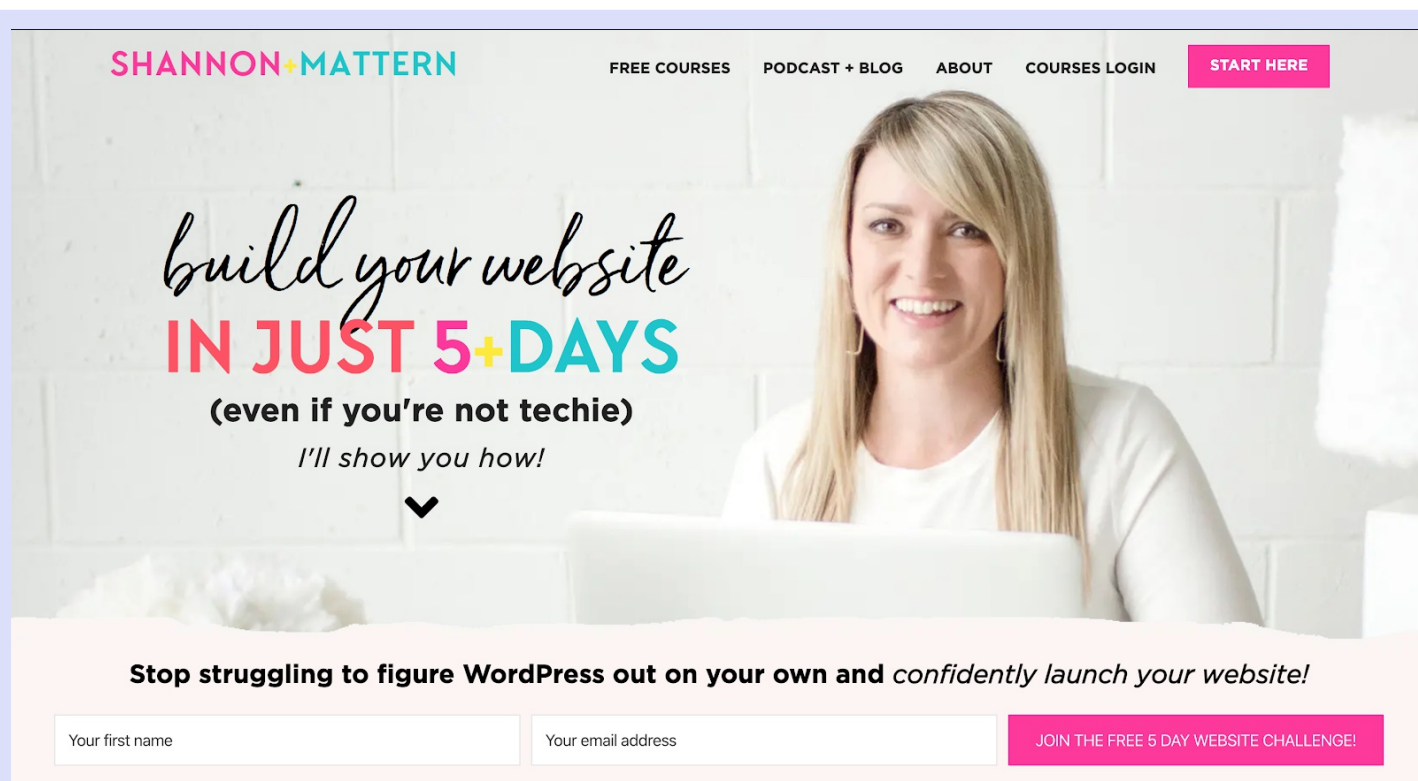
**Total startup cost: \$435**

This is what my website looked like back in 2015. (*I can't even believe that this website made me any money!*)

But it just goes to show that waiting for everything to be perfect or spending tons of money upfront isn't always necessary when you solve a big pain point for a very specific audience!



*My website in March 2015*





## Describe the process of launching the business.

I didn't "launch" because I had no one to launch to!

Looking back, I really had no clue what I was doing because my very next thought after I finished the training and built the website was, *"Shoot, how am I gonna even get people to sign up for this thing? There's no way I'm gonna crack even page 5 search engine results for 'WordPress tutorials...'"*

So I Googled "how to build an email list" and came across a free training that had a Facebook Group full of other entrepreneurs building their email lists.

There was a thread where you could post a link to your "lead magnet" and I was like, *"Well, I guess my web design course is\* my lead magnet...\*"* and so I posted:

*"Build your website on your lunch hour in just 5 days (even if you're not a techie). Sign up for the Free 5 Day Website Challenge today!"*

And about an hour later, I got an email notification that someone had subscribed.

A little bit later, I got an email that I'd earned an affiliate commission for web hosting.

And then another notice of an affiliate commission for a branding course I recommended.

I'd made \$145 dollars just two hours after sharing my free training!

And at that moment, I knew I'd landed on the thing that would lead me to quit my day job. I just needed to do more of what I was doing.

In my first 6 months, my strategy was almost exclusively posting my training and answering questions in Facebook groups for entrepreneurs.

A word about the training quickly spread because people couldn't believe that I was giving away the full process without the bait and switch of *"I've taken you to a critical point in the process, now you have to buy the course if you want to finish."*

In the first 6 months, I went from 0-650 subscribers and \$0 to \$5000 total revenue from affiliate sales (so close to \$1000/month).

By the end of year 1, my side hustle brought in \$18,500 with 1200 email subscribers - all bootstrapped from the money I earned from providing 1:1 services with zero outside investment and no debt (which is how I still operate).

Then something interesting happened.

People who had signed up for my free training started asking me to be their web designer.

“ Be open to possibilities and keep your eye out for the clues on which direction to go. Those clues don't come from working in a vacuum alone, they come from trying things and getting feedback, making

alone, they come from trying things and getting feedback, making adjustments and trying again.

And I couldn't understand why. I'd think *"I'm teaching you, for free, how to do the exact same process you want to pay me to do for you. This does not make sense."*

And I actually turned people down, because I didn't want to experience that same burnout I'd experienced when I'd tried 1:1 web design the first time. I still didn't realize that I had a process problem, not a "cheap and overly demanding client" problem.

Instead of picking up on the clue those requests were giving me, I decided that I was going to make a paid course.

This course was going to teach people how to set up all the tech they needed to set up to execute popular marketing strategies, like launch funnels and sales funnels.

I decided to teach that next because that's what everyone in all the Facebook groups was asking about. They'd taken these free or paid training about how to explode their sales, and they needed to build the systems to do it.

So again, I got to work, made the course and launched it to my email list.

And it resulted in 0 sales.

I couldn't believe it. I just *knew* my marketing tech course what they needed next if they were going to monetize!

Instead of realizing that I should have validated my idea first with my email list and sold it before I ever built it, I decided I must not know enough and spent a few thousand dollars on courses that gave me a lot of marketing and sales tactics that I kept trying to implement without success.

So I decided to hire a business coach to help me figure out how to sell better.

And it was in that very first 20-minute consultation with her that I figured out that my problem wasn't not knowing how to make an offer, it was that I wasn't conveying the true value of my training because I didn't value my own skillset because I'd learned everything I knew on my own for free.

It truly was a pivotal moment in my business.

Then we got to work on a day job exit strategy which included taking on 1:1 clients again with an entirely new approach and system, and validating and refining my offers for my courses and training.

I reached a point where I was bringing in \$5K a month consistently from my side hustle, but it wasn't enough to replace my salary yet. I'd been promoted, and I knew I needed to hit that \$10K revenue mark a few times to feel confident enough to leave the "golden handcuffs" of my day job behind.

And in 2017, I did just that.



I put my day job on notice that I'd be leaving on January 2, 2018 - which would put me at 10 years at the company so I'd walk away with a payout of 10 years of unused sick time, a fully vested 401(k) and another year of profit sharing.

I could have left months earlier, but why leave all that money on the table?

Here's what the journey looked like in terms of revenue, expenses, profit, and email list subscribers:

Year	Revenue (before taxes + expenses)	Profit Margin	Email List Subscribers
1st 6 months of biz	<b>\$4878</b> (1:1 client work, affiliate revenue from my Shareworthy Freebie)	?	650
2015	<b>\$18,640</b> (1:1 client work, affiliate revenue from my Shareworthy Freebie)	?	1200
2016	<b>\$57,877</b> (1:1 client work, affiliate revenue from my Shareworthy Freebie + courses)	?	5,000
2017	<b>\$73,512</b> (Quit my day job! 1:1 client work, affiliate revenue from my Shareworthy Freebie + courses)	?	5,600
2018	<b>\$111,000</b> (50% 1:1, 50% Passive)	59%	1,600
2019	<b>\$127,208</b> (30% 1:1, 70% Passive)	72%	3,300

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

Going from an employee-mindset to an entrepreneur-mindset has been a fascinating journey.

The two most important things I learned is illustrated by these numbers:

1. You don't need a huge email list to make a living online.
2. When you expect instant results from your marketing strategies, get impatient and jump from thing to thing to thing, you will slow your growth down tremendously.

In 2017, I'd put my notice in at my day job and immediately started operating out of fear. I started chasing online marketing tactics that promised to explode my traffic overnight. My email list barely grew and my revenue increase was almost all 1:1 clients, which required more and more of my time.

Then in 2018, as a result of the new GDPR regulations, I did a re-engagement campaign with my email list that resulted in 1600 people opting to stay in, and cutting 4000 that ignored it.

I nurtured the heck out of those 1600 people. And thank goodness they did, because while I was off chasing the flashy tactics, they were doing my marketing for me.

Eventually, I figured out that it wasn't social media or SEO strategy that was working for me, it was building relationships with my audience and with people that have already built an audience full of my ideal customer.

It was the high-quality piece of free content that I'd created that people loved to share with other people that was bringing me the majority of my traffic and subscribers and customers.

And that's exactly what's working for me now. Relationships. Collaborations. Providing massively value to my audience so that they want to either become a customer or bring me, my next customer.

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

I just closed 2019 with total revenue of \$127,000.

I stopped working with 1:1 web design clients in August of 2019 to focus exclusively on scalable revenue sources.

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If you're interested in the full breakdown of my numbers, [check out my latest income report here](#) - in it, there's a link to a Google Doc that breaks down exactly where my money comes from and what my exact expenses on every tool that I use.

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

If I could distill all of the lessons I learned down to just a few pieces of advice, they would be:

- **Have streams of traffic to your website that don't 100% rely on paid advertising or social**

media algorithms.

- **Don't hire a web designer before you've ever validated your business idea.** DIY is fine to start. Hire one once you've validated your business model and your customer journey - and then make sure you hire someone who is not only a skilled designer but also understands business and the opportunities available to you that you might not be aware of.
- **Creating content is not marketing.** Having a nice website is not marketing. Marketing requires a lot of action. Spend more of your time on marketing than on creating and perfecting.
- **Pay yourself a consistent paycheck first, before anything else.** If you can't afford your paycheck and your expenses, cut your expenses. You gotta take care of yourself first.

## What platform/tools do you use for your business?

Here's a list of all the tools I use in my business - and if you want free tutorials on the web design + email marketing setup, I have those too!

You can check them out [on my website](#) and click on the Start Here button.

- Website: [Self-Hosted WordPress](#)
- Hosting: [Bluehost WP Pro](#)
- Theme: [Elementor Pro](#)
- Email Marketing: [ConvertKit](#) (*I transitioned away from Infusionsoft in 2018*)
- Online Course Plugin: [AccessAlly](#)
- Meetings, Coaching + Guest Podcast Recordings: [Zoom](#)
- Webinars + Live Trainings: [EasyWebinar](#)
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- Podcast Editing: [Audacity](#) + GarageBand, [Auphonic](#)
- Podcast Hosting: [LibSyn](#)

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

- [Smart Passive Income with Pat Flynn](#) - it's where I learned about the concept of affiliate marketing and how to do it with the heart of a teacher. If you want to learn how to create a sustainable online business, Pat's your guy!
- [Online Marketing Made Easy with Amy Porterfield](#) - all the marketing strategies you could ever need for growing your business online.
- [Pep Talks for Side Hustlers](#) - my own podcast all about transitioning from side hustle to self-employed. It truly has been the most transformative experience to get to talk to over a hundred successful entrepreneurs making anywhere from \$50K to multiple 7-figures for a

hundred successful entrepreneurs making anywhere from \$50K to multiple 7 figures for a whole hour, get to hear their story and ask them anything I want about how they did it.



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

If you are just starting out, the number one piece of advice I can give is to not quit.

Things are not going to go as you expect. And they might not happen as fast as you want them to.

Don't quit.

Be open to possibilities and keep your eye out for the clues on which direction to go. Those clues don't come from working in a vacuum alone, they come from trying things and getting feedback, making adjustments and trying again.

There's nothing more freeing than not being beholden to an employer to make a living.

## **Are you looking to hire for certain positions right now?**

I don't intend to hire in the near future. I've given myself the challenge to see how big I can grow my business under the constraint of working 40 hours a week, maintaining one part-time team member (my right-hand woman) and no paid advertising.

I want to be an example of what's possible when you keep it simple, provide massive value and have great systems in place.

# Where can we go to learn more?

- [Website](#)
- [Podcast](#)
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If you have any questions or comments, drop a comment below!



Shannon Mattern, Founder of Web Designer Academy

## Web Designer Academy has provided an update on their business!

17 days ago, we followed up with Web Designer Academy to see [how they've been doing](#) since we published this article.

About 1 year ago, we followed up with Web Designer Academy to see [how they've been doing](#) since we published this article.

About 2 years ago, we followed up with Web Designer Academy to see [how they've been doing](#) since we published this article.



**Pat Walls**, Founder of Starter Story

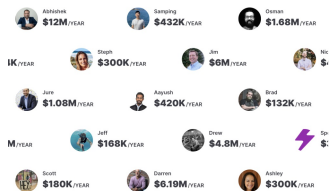
## Want to find more ideas that make money?

Hey! 📧 I'm Pat Walls, the founder of Starter Story.

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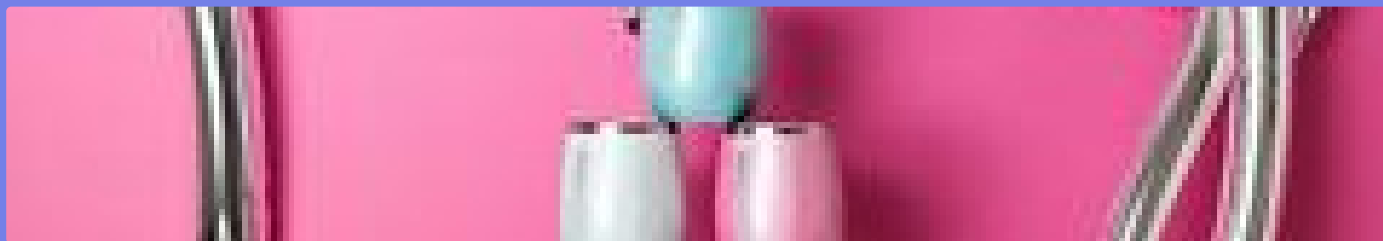
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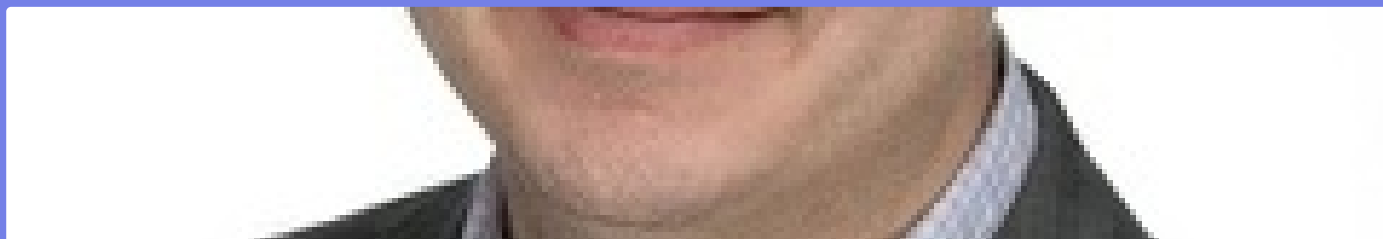
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Chad

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Garrett

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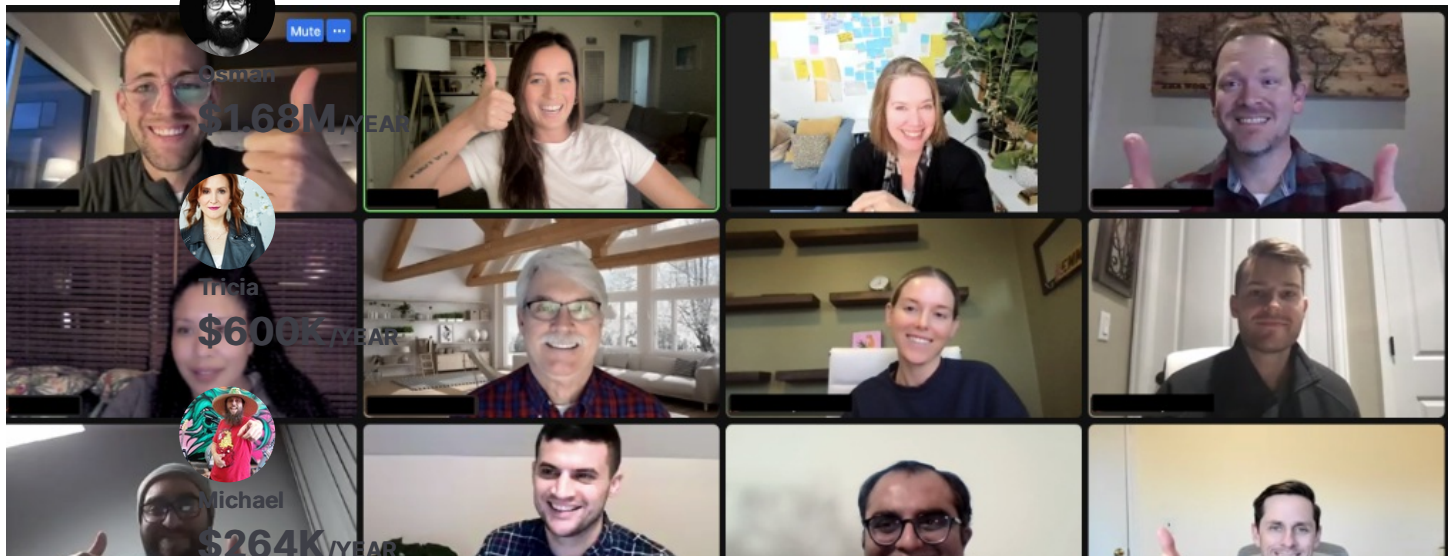
Tricia

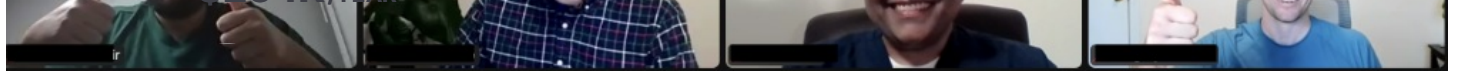
**\$1.68M**/YEAR



Michael

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**Rand Fishkin**

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Love Starter Story's transparency.



**Johne Vang**



You can't find this information anywhere else.



**Trent Baren**

Instagram

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**Bilal Budhani**

Entrepreneur

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