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How I Built And Grew A Telegram Bot With 1M Users



Niki Kravchuk

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BUSINESS

TOOLS

SAVE



Niki Kravchuk

Founder, **AirTrackBot**

\$7K

REVENUE/MO



1

FOUNDERS

0

EMPLOYEES

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

My name is Niki Kravchuk, and I'm an indie founder creating several travel startups, including Telegram chatbots [AirTrack](#), [HotelBot](#) as well as [Manyflights](#) an email subscription service that sends out only the best flight deals.

Today, I'm going to talk about my product called [AirTrack](#). It is a Telegram chatbot designed to search for cheap flights and track their prices. With over 1,000,000 users worldwide, the bot generates \$7,000 per month.

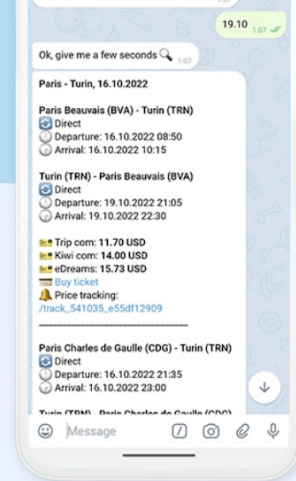


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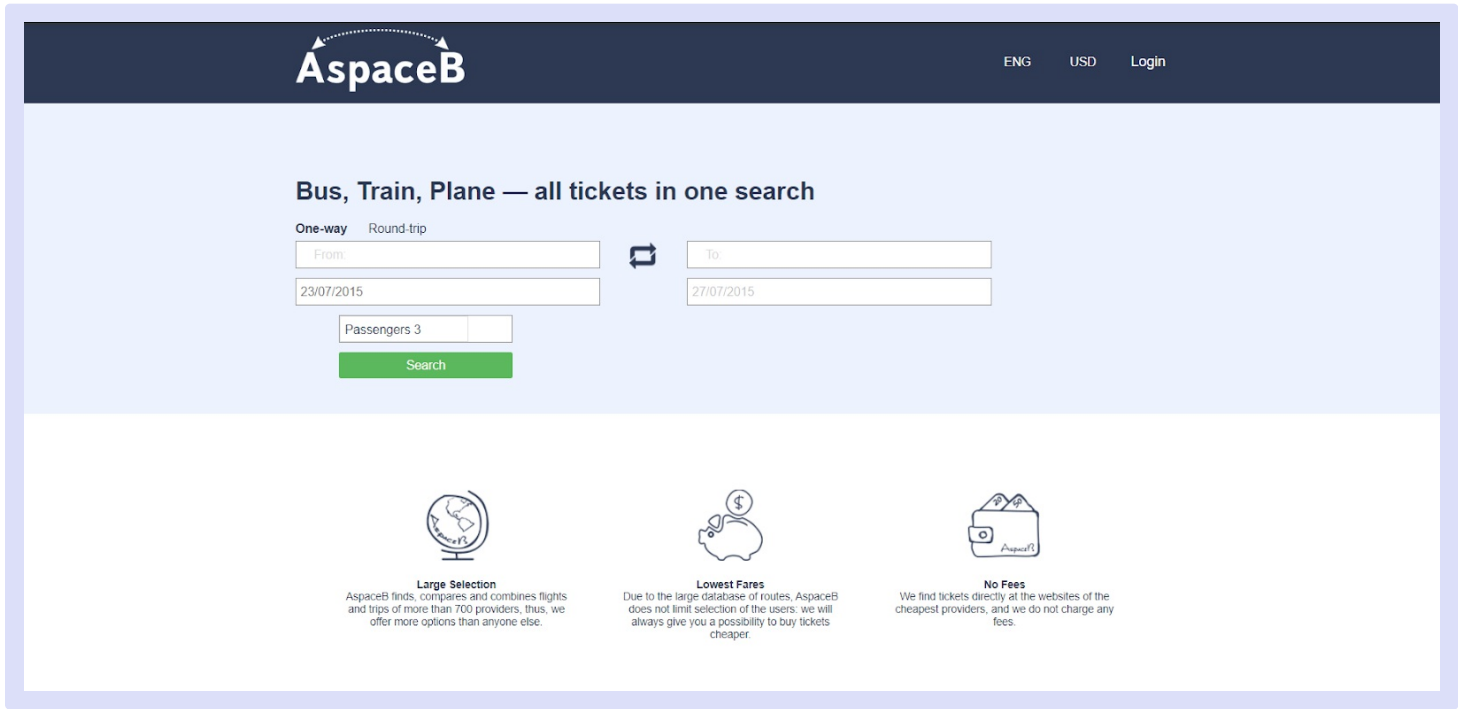
As seen in:



“ Find a problem and a solution. Build and ship your product quickly, even if the first version is not perfect. Avoid adding unnecessary features. Work closely with your users to gather feedback and build a product that people love. Their input is invaluable in creating a successful product.

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

As an indie founder, I've been creating startups since 2013. One of my early startups was a multimodal travel search engine. It allowed combining multiple carriers, such as buses, trains, planes, or car-sharing, helping to figure out options to get between two points.



Unfortunately, at that time, I lacked the knowledge and resources to build a good product. In the end, I ended up somewhere between the idea of creating something great and a poor and useless thing that I received as an outcome.

Then I tried to create a search engine for sports events, which also did not become successful. After spending one and a half years on it, I gained invaluable experience, no matter how cliché it may sound.

may sound.

After experiencing several failures, I turned my attention to the rapidly growing chatbot industry in 2017. I saw great promise in this area.

Every Christmas I used to fly from Kyiv to Budapest. However, the cost of airfare was not always affordable, and I often found myself waiting for prices to drop. To stay updated, I had to manually check airline websites daily, which was a tedious and time-consuming process.

This is when the idea struck me - I decided to create a chatbot that could automatically track flight prices and send me notifications on Telegram when prices change. I was confident that many people like me could benefit from this. After a month of development, I released the first iteration of the product.

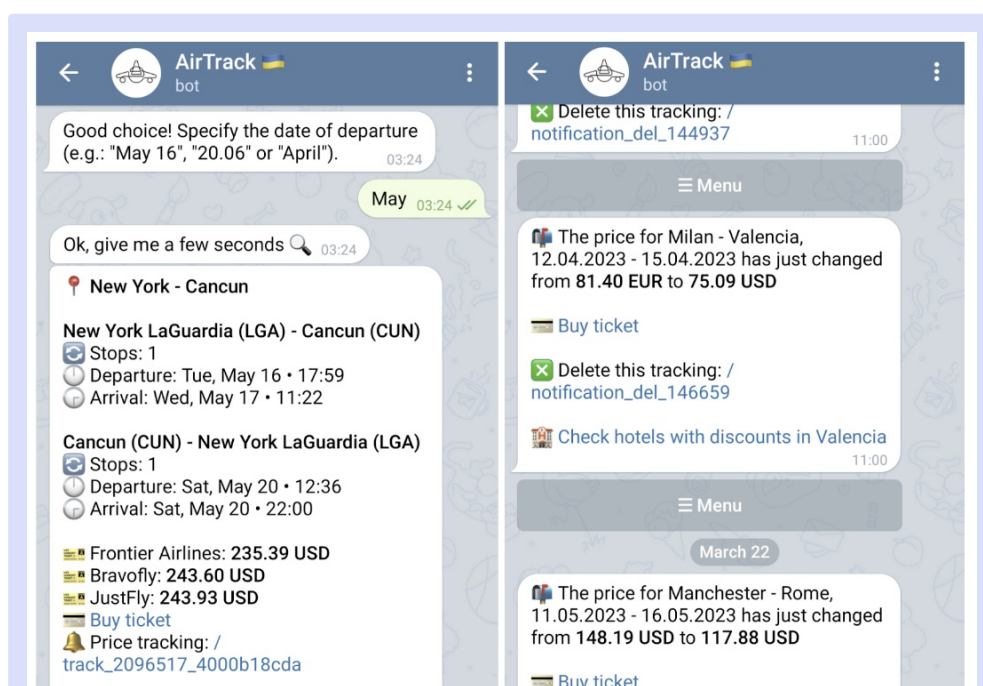
Take us through the process of building the first version of your product.

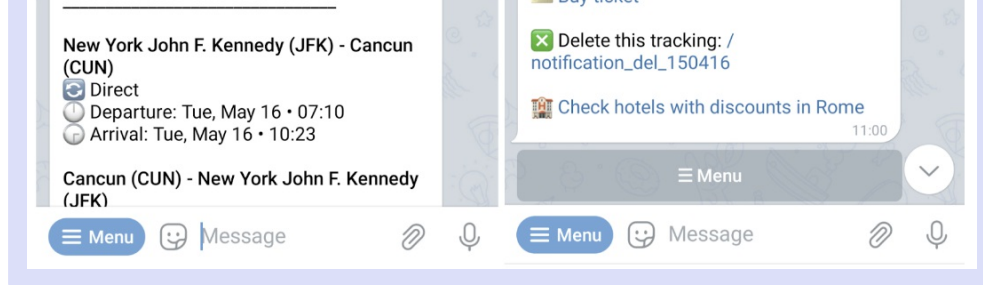
First, I was thinking of starting with a local version of the bot to find and track flights carried out by the two largest European low-cost companies — Wizzair and Ryanair. Since neither of the companies had a public API, I used the Kiwi.com API, to which I had access after a previously successfully failed project (above-mentioned multimodal travel search engine).

The approach proved to be even more positive, as the Kiwi flight database allowed me to immediately create a global product that became useful to users from all over the world.

When I began building my product, I drew on my past failures as a valuable source of experience. It was essential to launch the product as quickly as possible to validate the idea and obtain initial results.

As Reid Hoffman famously said, "If you're not embarrassed by the first version of your product, you've launched too late." This statement rings true! The initial version of the bot was far from perfect, as it was a simple Telegram bot with limited functionality, lacking features such as a roundtrip search option and currency selection, etc. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, we were still able to successfully capture the attention of potential users and generate interest in the product.





Immediately after the launch, the bot went viral in Ukraine. We got dozens of mentions in mainstream media. In particular, AirTrack was mentioned by the largest Ukrainian TV channel during prime time. Then I realized that I had created a product that will be useful for many people. And the most important thing - the bot helped me to book a cheap flight to Budapest for my Christmas vacation :)

Describe the process of launching the business.

After receiving positive feedback from our testers, I was confident that there were no major obstacles to prevent me from launching to the public. Before the official launch, I strategically selected two main channels to attract users: chatbot catalogs and press coverage.

First of all, I placed AirTrack in popular bots catalogs. It was completely free and gave me about 50 users daily. A few days after the public launch, I got nearly 300 subscribers, and it seemed like a cool result.

As the topic of chatbots was trending at the time, I decided to reach specialized media outlets that covered chatbot-related topics.

Before I got expelled from the university, I studied journalism and worked in some media outlets. I had some knowledge of finding an approach for journalists and how to pitch a product so they would be interested in writing about it.

Then I sent a press release to tech media and was featured in some of them. It caused a chain

When I sent a press release to tech media and was featured in some of them. It caused a chain reaction and some mainstream online newspapers caught up with the news, and we hit the mark of 10,000 users during the first week.

Soon I discovered platforms like Product Hunt, Reddit, Betalist, Indie Hackers, and Hacker News. Each of them is a great opportunity to reach a different type of audience. Nevertheless, each platform is specific and needs a unique strategy to launch a product.

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

The channels I previously mentioned were instrumental in driving organic growth for AirTrack. As people began to talk about and recommend AirTrack to others, interest in our bot naturally grew, leading to increased Google searches. Today, organic growth remains our primary source of traffic, consistently bringing in 70-90k new users per month. The power of word of mouth is undeniable.

I am continuously developing the chatbot functionality, taking into account users' feedback, and giving the users what they are asking for. Telegram allows us to send subscribers notifications and I alert users about updates. It has a very good impact on user retention.

Additionally, the user-friendly interface of Telegram makes it easy to share information with your contacts, which is one of the reasons why the word-of-mouth approach works well for us. If a user finds a good flight deal through our bot, they're more likely to share it with their friends.

Moreover, Telegram enables the addition of bots to groups, which can have tens of thousands of active users. As a result, AirTrack is regularly added to different groups, allowing users to search for tickets collectively, which provides us with high traffic.

On a personal note, I had an interesting experience in 2020 when I traveled to Mexico and met an individual at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol who told me about AirTrack. He was quite surprised when I revealed that I was the person behind the creation of AirTrack. And I recorded this video:

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

Currently, AirTrack has over 1,000,000 subscribers and more than 450,000 monthly flight searches. We send over 1,500,000 price alerts monthly and currently earn around \$7,000 in revenue. Last year, I received five offers to buy the product, but honestly, they were not serious enough to consider.

The product is now regularly featured in popular tech media, blogs ([MUO](#), [ShowMeTech](#), [TuttoAndroid](#)) and [YouTube channels](#). I am thrilled that my hard work is paying off and that we are receiving recognition from reputable sources.

In the coming months, my focus will be on user retention and improving the conversion rate. Additionally, I plan to localize the product for new markets, as I have experienced significant growth in Africa and the Middle East.

Moreover, I am exploring the possibility of selling sponsorship slots as an additional revenue stream. I believe this could be mutually beneficial for both sides.

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

As a young entrepreneur, I was not prepared for the challenging situations that can arise, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Until March 2020, everything had been going well - the product was growing, revenue was increasing, and I had many ideas for scaling and developing AirTrack. However, when the pandemic hit, everything changed dramatically. The product's performance declined significantly, and I lost 90% of my revenue compared to pre-pandemic numbers.

I realized that I was not flexible enough to adapt to the new conditions and take advantage of the opportunities that arose during the crisis. In retrospect, I regret that I missed the chance to scale the product and monetize it fully when the travel industry was at its peak. Nevertheless, I have learned valuable lessons from this experience, and I am now better prepared to handle unpredictable circumstances in the future.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

I have been using [Trello](#) to manage my project workflow. For payment processing, I use [Paddle](#). To run my company, I use [Xolo Leap](#), which has made running a business much easier and saved me from unnecessary headaches.

Currently, I am fully satisfied with how everything is working. However, I am always open to exploring new tools and technologies that may improve my workflow and help me achieve even better results.

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

I am incredibly grateful for the inspiration I found within the indie maker's community. Initially, I was sure that VC funding was the only way to build a successful startup. However, I discovered the concept of bootstrapping and realized it was exactly what I needed. I'm following the journeys of self-funded entrepreneurs like [Marc Köhlbrugge](#), [Pieter Levels](#), [Andriy Azimov](#) and more nice guys, who have inspired me greatly.

I would highly recommend two books that have helped me immensely on my journey as an indie entrepreneur: [MAKE - The Indie Maker Handbook](#), written by serial indie entrepreneur Pieter Levels, and the [Productized Service Book](#) by ManyPixels founder Robin Vander Heyden.

I have great admiration for Ivan Kutsir as a solo founder. His journey of building an advanced photo editor called Photopea has been truly exceptional. I find his story incredibly inspiring and recommend following his journey, which can be further explored through [his podcast](#).

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

Find a problem and a solution. Build and ship your product quickly, even if the first version is not perfect. Avoid adding unnecessary features. Work closely with your users to gather feedback and build a product that people love. Their input is invaluable in creating a successful product.

Where can we go to learn more?

Please, follow me on [Twitter](#) and [Product Hunt](#).



Niki Kravchuk, Founder of AirTrackBot



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

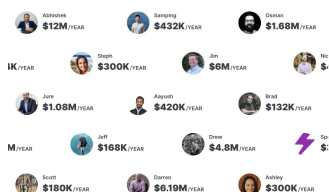
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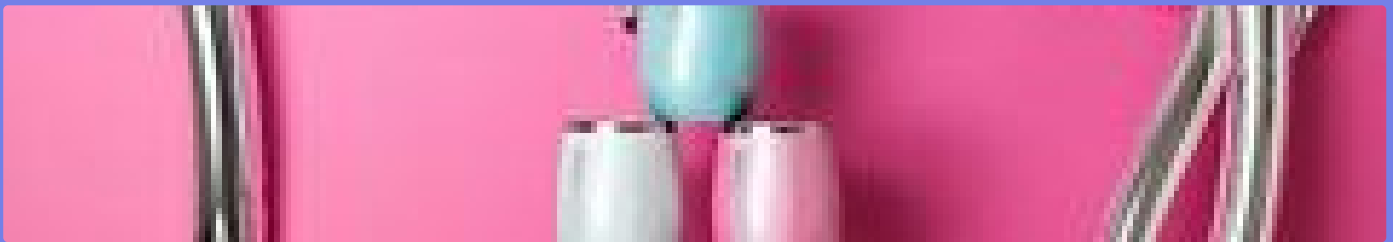
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It's about taking action every day.

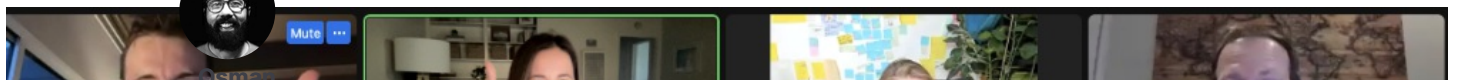


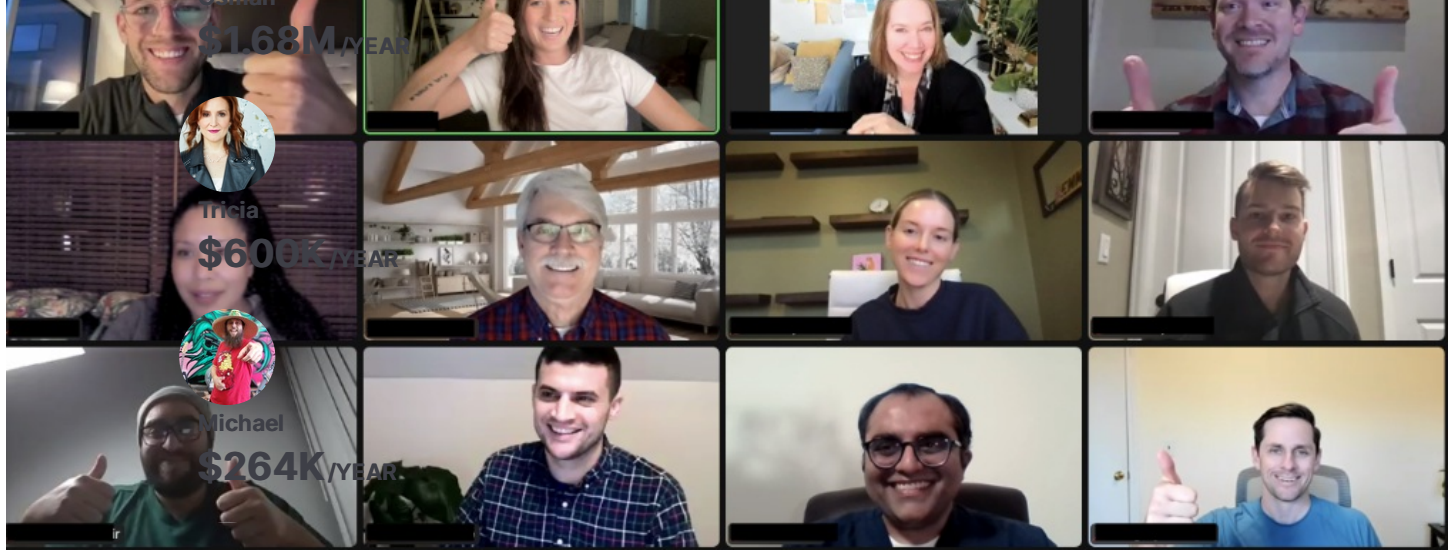
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