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How Justin Welsh Built A \$2M Solopreneur Empire



Justin Welsh • Published: April 12th, 2023

ABOUT BUSINESS TOOLS

SAVE



Justin Welsh
Founder, Justin Welsh



\$175K
REVENUE/MO

1
FOUNDERS

0
EMPLOYEES



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

I'm a writer and solopreneur, building a portfolio of one-person internet businesses via social media.

I recently passed \$2M in annual revenue.

My core business is a knowledge business, where I create knowledge products that help other solopreneurs and entrepreneurs leverage social media to build their one-person businesses online.

I built this business to be lifestyle-first, meaning it's highly automated and has no full-time employees, just a part-time VA. My business is fueled by my social media following. I have 380K followers on LinkedIn and 330K followers on Twitter. And I also write a newsletter with 80K weekly readers. It's called The Saturday Solopreneur.

I have several different products and services, but my flagship products are two digital courses that help solopreneurs and entrepreneurs understand how to use social media to grow their businesses.

The first product, The LinkedIn Operating System, is a 2-hour digital course that teaches people how to leverage the power of LinkedIn to build an audience of customers for their business. It has over 11K students enrolled, and it's widely considered to be the most helpful LinkedIn course on the market. This course is priced at \$150, and generates, on average, around \$80K in monthly revenue.

My second product is The Content Operating System. That course takes students behind the scenes of my content creation process. I share the exact system I use to write a weekly newsletter and 6-12 high-quality pieces of social media content, in just a few hours. I have over 4,500 students enrolled in this course, and it's also priced at \$150. It generates an average of \$45K in monthly revenue.

engagements.

All in all, my business did a little more than \$1.7M in 2022, and I expect it to do closer to \$2.5M in 2023.



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

Back in 2019, I was the SVP of Sales at a fast-growing startup in LA called PatientPop. I had spent the last four years growing the business from zero revenue to over \$50M in ARR. But, there was a massive problem. I was burning out, big time.

Starting in early 2018, the job of running a \$50M department and a team of 150+ was causing incredible stress in my life. So I medicated that

In December 2018, I had a massive panic attack at home in Culver City. I was losing my shit just in time for the holidays. It was a full-on breakdown with hallucinations, screaming, and the works. I thought I was dying, and my wife called 911.

The next day, I decided it was time for a change. And the first thing I did was tell my CEO that I wanted to step down. He asked me to stick around until August, and I agreed.

I started taking care of myself, lost a ton of weight, and decided that I was going to strike out on my own. I thought I'd build a consulting business and get it ready for when I stepped down in August.

The bad news was I didn't know where the customers would come from. The good news was I had seven months to figure that out.

“ There's a laundry list of things I'm not very good at, but I make up for my shortcomings with a heavy bias toward action.



So I decided to start writing about my journey building PatientPop on LinkedIn, the social platform where my prospective customers were hanging out.

Back then, LinkedIn wasn't a platform where people shared advice or thought leadership. So my content stuck out like a sore thumb...in a good way.

Over the next seven months, I built a small following of 20K people. I paid a web design company \$20K to build me a nice website on Squarespace. And then on August 1st, I launched my consulting business.

Then, as my LinkedIn audience grew, something strange happened.

I began to notice a trend in my private messages on LinkedIn. Instead of seeing tech CEOs asking me about sales and marketing, I was getting something else.

People wanted to know how I learned to write content, how I was growing my following, and how I was turning those followers into customers.

I leaned into the signal.

In 2020, I released my first digital course about LinkedIn, called The LinkedIn Playbook. I priced it at \$50, not knowing what to expect. And I sold about 1,500 copies in a year.

Making \$75K on digital products certainly wasn't the same as my comfy exec salary. But it sure opened my eyes to the possibilities of using social media. I realized the world was my oyster.

And on top of that, I was getting encouraging feedback from my customers. People were watching the course, putting it into action, and landing customers for their businesses and side hustles!

As my consulting business grew, I started getting more interested in using social media, and less interested in coaching founders on sales and marketing.

The messages requesting social media guidance, new courses, and coaching were more than I could keep up with.

So in late 2020, I doubled down on my LinkedIn activity, started publishing on Twitter, and grew my total social following past 300K.

This set me up to launch my flagship courses in late 2021.

whats, whys, and hows of solopreneurship.

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

When I decided to build my first flagship course, The LinkedIn Operating System, my goal was to bring a unique and different business model to the course space. Instead of following “best practices”, I created a hypothesis-based model.

Hypothesis 1: If I wanted the course to be self-serve, it couldn't be high-ticket

People underestimate the need for social capital and a hands-on business model to support high-ticket course sales.

I didn't want to hire sellers, or “closers.”

And I didn't want to spend time convincing customers the course was right for them.

So rather than price the course at \$1,500 or \$1,997, I priced it at \$150.

This price point seemed low enough to make it a “quasi-impulse” buy for people, and high enough that I could build some real revenue if it got some traction out in the market.

Hypothesis 2: The shorter the course, the more likely someone would be to finish it

Before I built my course, I purchased other courses from creators, to see what the typical experience was like. Most courses were 6+ hours, and I struggled to find time to commit to them.

The opening act would “wow” the audience.

And the intermission would be a short break where I did 2 things:

1. Sold the heck out of the 2nd half of the course, to encourage people to keep going.
2. Told people how they could become affiliates and start earning money.

The average online course completion rate is 13.8%.

Mine is above 45%.

Hypothesis 3: Production value (especially at a low price point) was meaningless

I’m a guy from the Midwest who grew up in a small farm town with four thousand people.

The idea of renting a private plane or skyscraper office to look cooler or richer than I was seemed ridiculous. Leaning on a Lambo is the cringiest thing I’ve ever seen people do.

I just wanted to keep it simple. Nothing sexy. No funny business. Just me sitting in my office on Zoom, recording my knowledge through Google Slides. To this day, I shoot every single lesson in one take with no editing.

Nobody ever bought a book and said, “The cover was gorgeous, but the book was terrible. 5 stars.”

Why are waste time and energy making the course as beautiful as possible when the information was the important part? So, I didn’t.

Describe the process of launching the business.



In July of 2021, I pre-sold the idea of the course 30 days before I planned to take it live.

I built a simple landing page on [Carrd](#) that told people what would be inside the product. It took me a few hours to put it together, but I had become good at using Carrd by that time. I still recommend Carrd to anyone who wants to launch a nice landing page fast, with minimal investment.

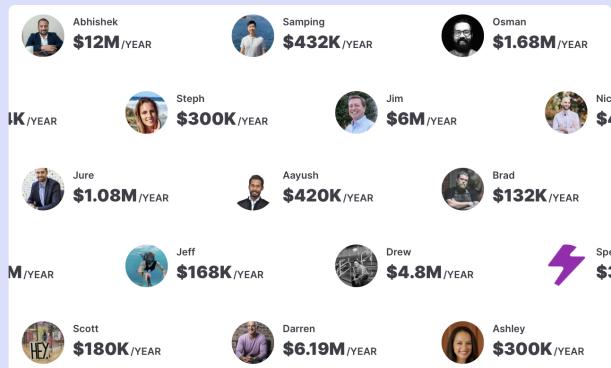
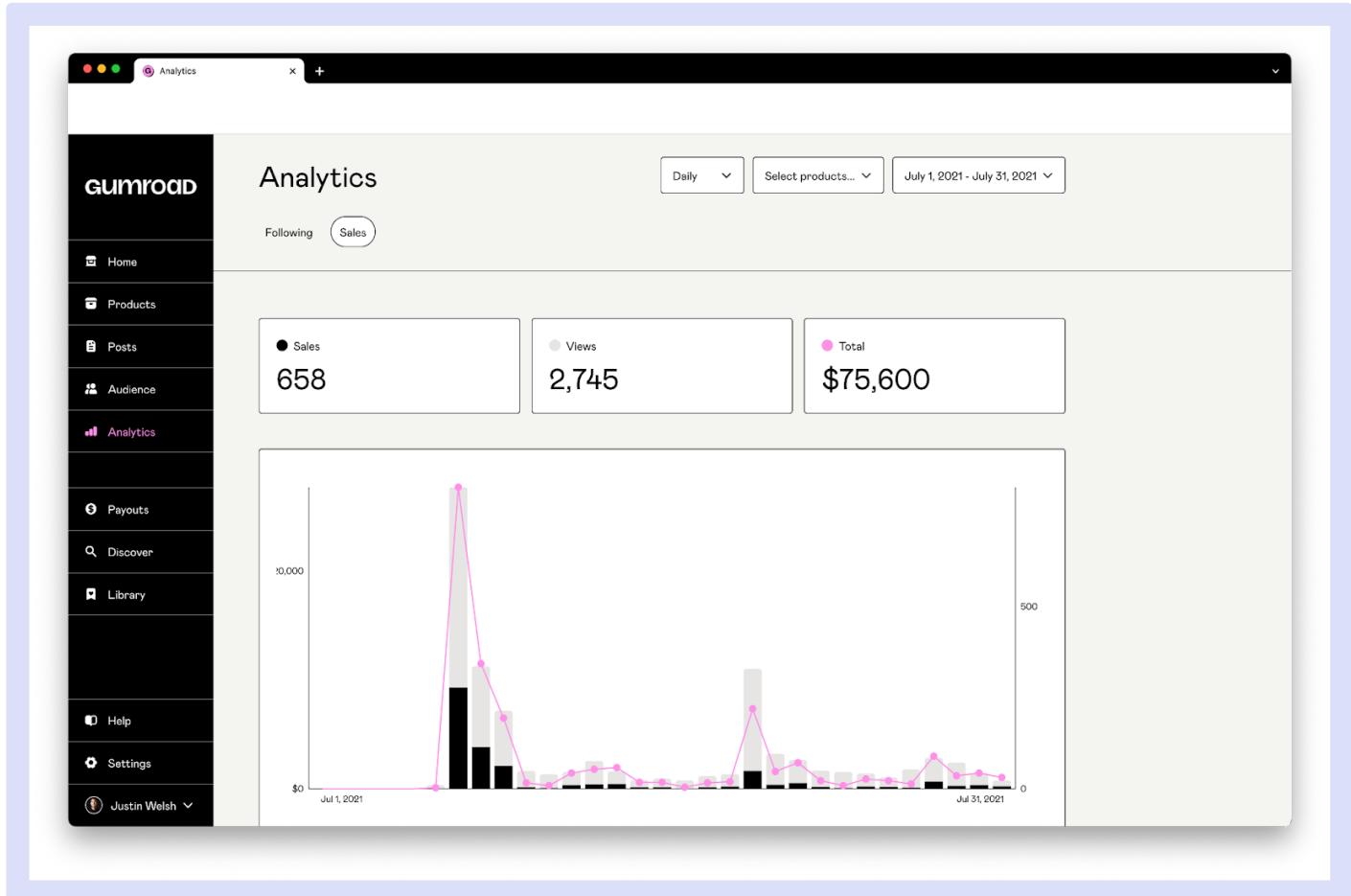
The screenshot shows a Carrd landing page titled "The Operating System". At the top, there's a navigation bar with links to "Testimonials", "What's Inside?", "FAQs", and "Login". Below the navigation, there's a large image of a book cover for "The Operating System" by Justin Welsh. To the right of the book, the text reads "Learn to grow & monetize your [LinkedIn](#) audience." Below this, a subtext states "How I've used LinkedIn to go from zero to over 150K followers and over \$1.7M in income with zero ads." A button labeled "Unlock lifetime access for \$150" is visible. Further down, there's a 5-star rating with "4.98/5 (from 3,000+ students)". A bold statement "I don't brag. My 3,000+ students do." is followed by a row of student testimonials with small profile pictures and names: "by Justin Welsh", "Armando Sallavanti", "Ernie Svenson", "Javier Perez Viu", and "Hope Lawrence".

To presell the product, I sent an email to 4K people. (I hadn't put much effort into building an email list at that point.) And I posted about it on LinkedIn 3 times.

[1st LinkedIn post](#)

[2nd LinkedIn post](#)

After making \$75K on my first course back in 2020, I made \$75K on this course during launch month.



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“ There are 4.9B internet-connected people in this world. Can you find a few thousand who are on a similar journey as you, but a few years behind you? That’s your ideal customer and your target.



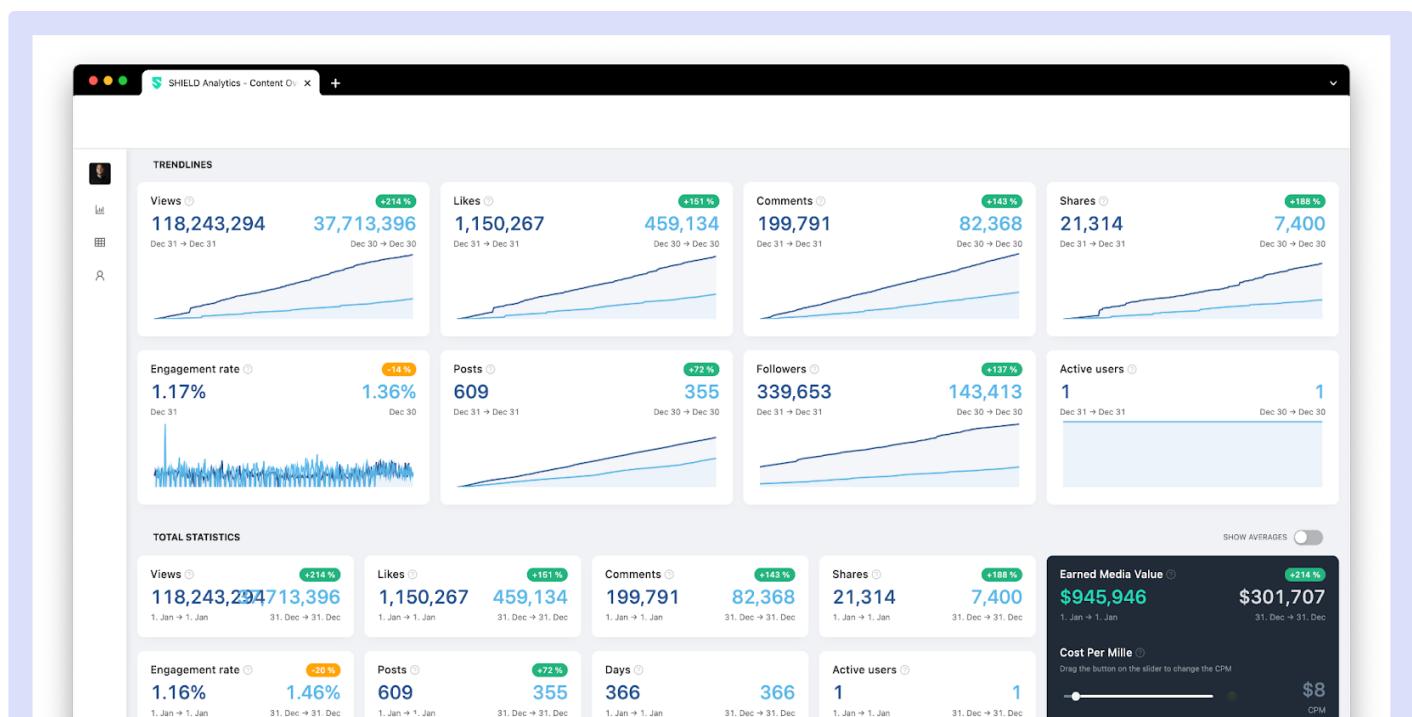
Since I don’t make much revenue from subscriptions (less than 10%), I don’t need to retain customers. But I do need to attract customers daily.

To do that, I’ve invested in four strategies that have helped me grow this business YoY.

Strategy 1: Grow LinkedIn Traffic

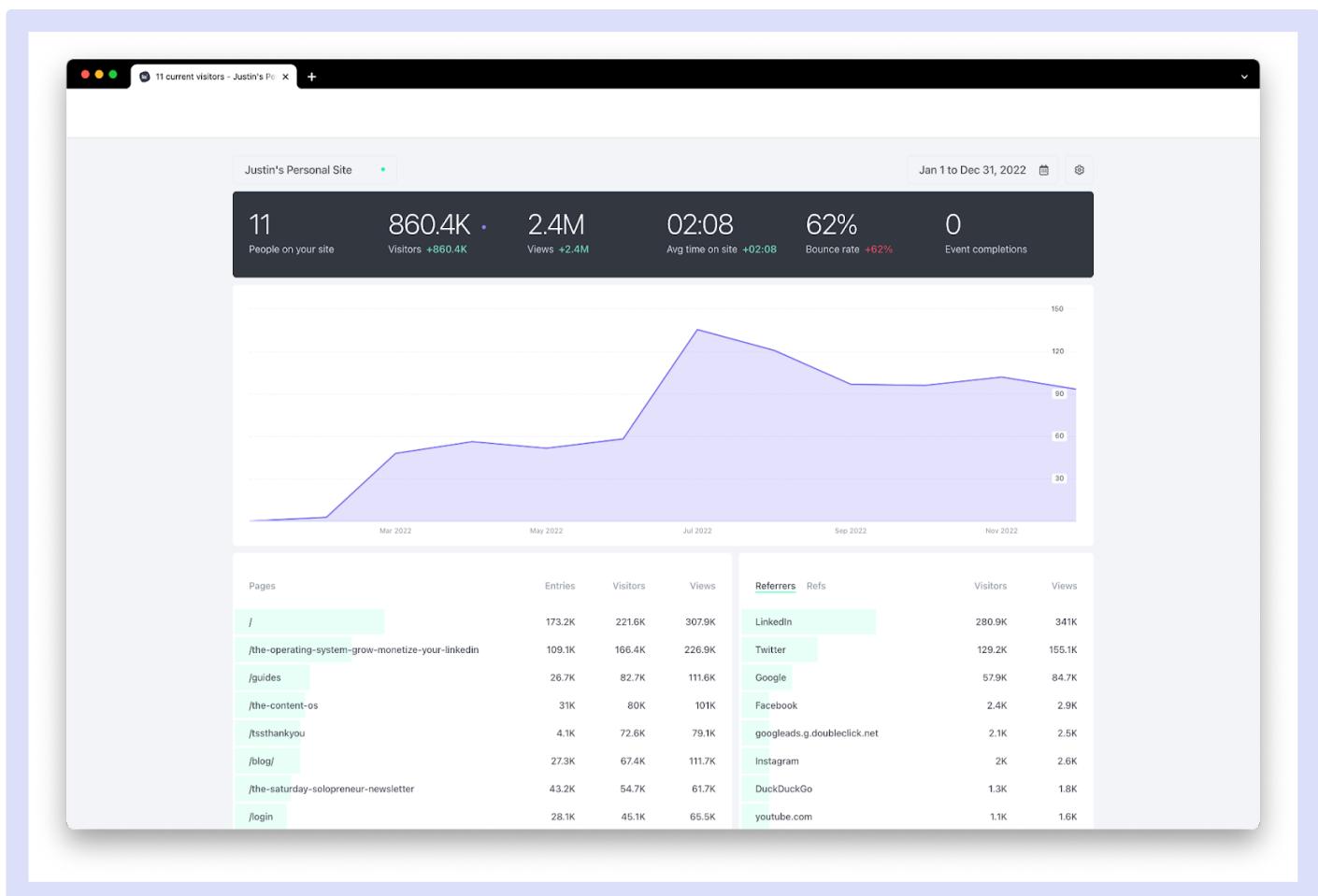
Up until 2022, I shared one piece of unique content daily on LinkedIn each weekday. That meant posting 260 times per year. During the back half of 2022, I moved to 2x per day, 7 days a week, which meant posting over 600 times.

And the more I posted, the better my results were.



Here's what happened to me on LinkedIn in 2022:

- **LinkedIn Impressions:** 118,243,294
- **LinkedIn engagement:** 1,150,267
- **LinkedIn comments:** 199,791
- **Website visits:** 280,900



Strategy 2: Grow Twitter Traffic

In October 2021, I decided to add Twitter to the mix. I've now posted over 500 days in a row and grown my following from 8K to 325K in 16 months.

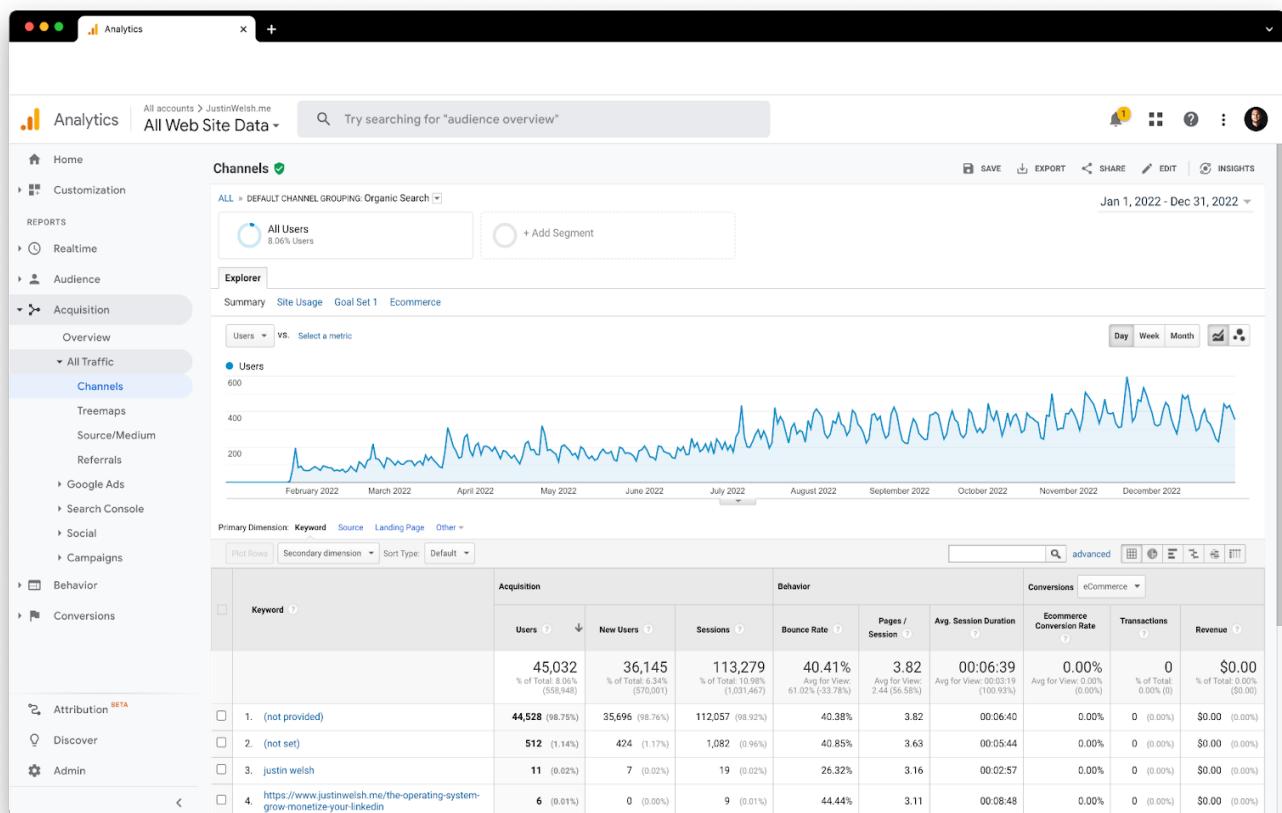
Twitter doesn't track analytics as effectively as LinkedIn. But a manual export shows that I did 198,410,000 impressions on Twitter in 2022.



In January 2022, I moved my website off of Carrd and onto a platform called Kajabi. And I hired my friend Brendan Hufford to do some simple technical SEO and redirects for the move.

Finally having a multi-page website platform was a **HUGE** shift in my strategy.

I started producing free articles, guides, and a weekly newsletter that has over 60 issues to date. Organic traffic went from being negligible to driving over 45K new website visitors in 2022.



Strategy 4: Grow Word-of-Mouth Traffic

With over 11K students in my course, I've enrolled a lot of them into my affiliate program.



well so far.

As of today, my affiliates are responsible for 1,570+ conversions at an ARPU of \$130.25, which accounts for over \$200K in top-line revenue.

The screenshot shows the Kajabi admin dashboard for user Justin Welsh. The left sidebar includes links for Dashboard, Products, Sales (Offers, Coupons, Payments, Affiliates), Website, Marketing, Contacts, and Analytics. The main content area is titled 'Affiliates' and displays four key metrics in boxes: Clicks (63.3 K), Form Submissions (1.52 K), Conversions (1.57 K), and Conversion Rate (2%). Below these are two links: 'Affiliate Signup Link' (https://www.justinwelsh.me/affiliate_users/sign_up) and 'Affiliate Login Link' (https://www.justinwelsh.me/affiliate_users/sign_in). A yellow 'Heads Up!' box contains a maintenance notice: 'Wistia will be undergoing maintenance on March 02, at 7pm PST and will last approximately 15 minutes. During this time, video embeds'. At the bottom of the page are links for Kajabi Partners, Settings, and Help & Feedback.

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

Right now my business is in a healthy place. After \$1.7M in top-line revenue in 2022, I have a path toward \$2.5M for 2023.

My business was highly profitable, with margins of around 95% in 2022. But I expect those margins to fall a bit in 2023 (closer to 91% or 92%) as I invest heavily into my business.

While I don't foresee spending any money on paid advertisements, I will invest in the following:

I also plan on expanding from LinkedIn and Twitter into Instagram and potentially YouTube as I build out a new studio office.

A lot of this investment is focused on taking my messaging nationwide and potentially global through my first book, which I plan to start writing in 2023 for a 2024 or 2025 release.

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

The most helpful thing I've learned about building a business is to simply start. There's a laundry list of things I'm not very good at, but I make up for my shortcomings with a heavy bias toward action.

To me, there's no better way to learn than to try, fail, pivot, try again, and keep going. You just can't learn to be an entrepreneur by reading a book or asking people questions. Eventually, you have to take action and grow from your mistakes.

Another helpful tip I've learned is to follow your gut instinct.

Thousands of people have told me I'm going about this the "wrong way" and that I could be "bigger and better" if I went after high-ticket sales.

But I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in continuing to follow my way of building this business, which has worked out pretty well so far. I ignore the noise I get from people with strong opinions and not much experience.

Lastly, I'd encourage anyone who wants to start building something of their own to surround themselves with other motivated builders.

rooting for my success and don't see this journey as a zero-sum game.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

My business runs pretty leanly right now:

- **Website, CRM, Email & Course Hosting:** [Kajabi](#)
- **LinkedIn Publishing:** [Taplio](#)
- **Twitter Publishing:** [Hypefury](#)
- **Web Analytics:** [Fathom Analytics](#)
- **Brainstorming/Docs:** [Notion](#) & [Google Drive](#)
- **LinkedIn Analytics:** [Shield](#)
- **Testimonial Software:** [Testimonial.to](#)
- **Integrations:** [Zapier](#)

In 2023, I plan on using more high-performance point solutions, so I plan to move to [Webflow](#) for my website and [ConvertKit](#) for my email marketing and newsletter.



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I don't read a lot of business books or listen to any podcasts. But I'd say the book that helped me ultimately quit my job and take a chance on myself was *When To Jump*, by Mike Lewis.

I'm a big fan of lifestyle improvement, so I enjoy reading books on minimalism such as *Goodbye, Things* by Fumio Sasaki, and books on enjoying your finances, like *Die With Zero* by Bill Perkins.

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

My advice for anyone starting is to keep it simple. You don't have to have all of the answers or some 5 or 10-year business plan when you start. You don't have to have the perfect logo or fancy business cards either.

If you want to build a knowledge business like mine, keep these three tips in the front of your mind at all times:

- Improve yourself
- Take a ton of notes
- Share every single day

There are 4.9B internet-connected people in this world. Can you find a few thousand who are on a similar journey as you, but a few years behind you? That's your ideal customer and your target.

Where can we go to learn more?

- [Website](#)
- [Newsletter](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)

-  Justin Welsh, Founder of Justin Welsh

 Pat Walls, Founder of Starter Story

Want to find more ideas that make money?

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

Get our 5-minute email newsletter packed with business ideas and money-making opportunities, backed by real-life case studies.

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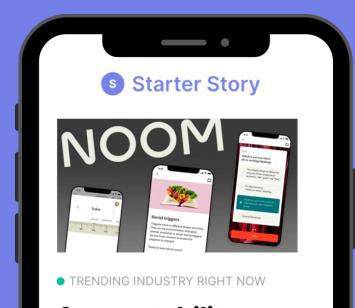
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 Dylan

I Grew A Drinkware Brand To \$1.1M/Month At 23 Years Old



Drinkware brand

\$12M / month

 Chris

How I Started An SEO Agency For Lawyers Generating \$3.6M/Year



Seo agency **\$10M / month**

 Matt

How I Started An \$8M/Year Stock Market Research Website



Finance blog

\$2.13M / month

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Michael
\$1.08M /YEAR



Scott
\$300K /YEAR



ric
60K /YEAR

Nick
\$1.2M /YEAR

Kelli
\$144K /YEAR



Brandon
\$6M /YEAR



Dustin
\$2.76M /YEAR



 **2B /YEAR**

 Chase
\$99.6M /YEAR

Pat
\$7.2M /YEAR



Evan
\$180K /YEAR



Frank
\$156K /YEAR



building

Building a business is not a game of luck.

It's about taking action every day.

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Everything you get



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Don't take our word for it



Sam Parr
My First Million

I love this website.



Trent Baren
Instagram

So much valuable information.



Jenn Leach
Millennial Nextdoor

I made over \$5,000 from my Starter Story membership in a week!



Rand Fishkin
Moz / SparkToro

Love Starter Story's transparency.



Bilal Budhani
Entrepreneur

I was hooked on Starter Story as soon as I discovered it. Resonated with me right off the bat.



Austin Rief
Morning Brew

What Pat Walls has built with Starter Story is awesome. I love getting their emails.



John Vang
Be The Match

You can't find this information anywhere else.



Brett Lindenberg
FoodTruckEmpire.com

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