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How I Started a Remote and IRL Coworking Community for Indie Founders [\$48K/Year]



Charlie Ward



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ABOUT

BUSINESS

BOOKS

SAVE



Charlie Ward

Founder, **Ramen Club**

\$4K

REVENUE/MO



1

FOUNDERS

0

EMPLOYEES

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

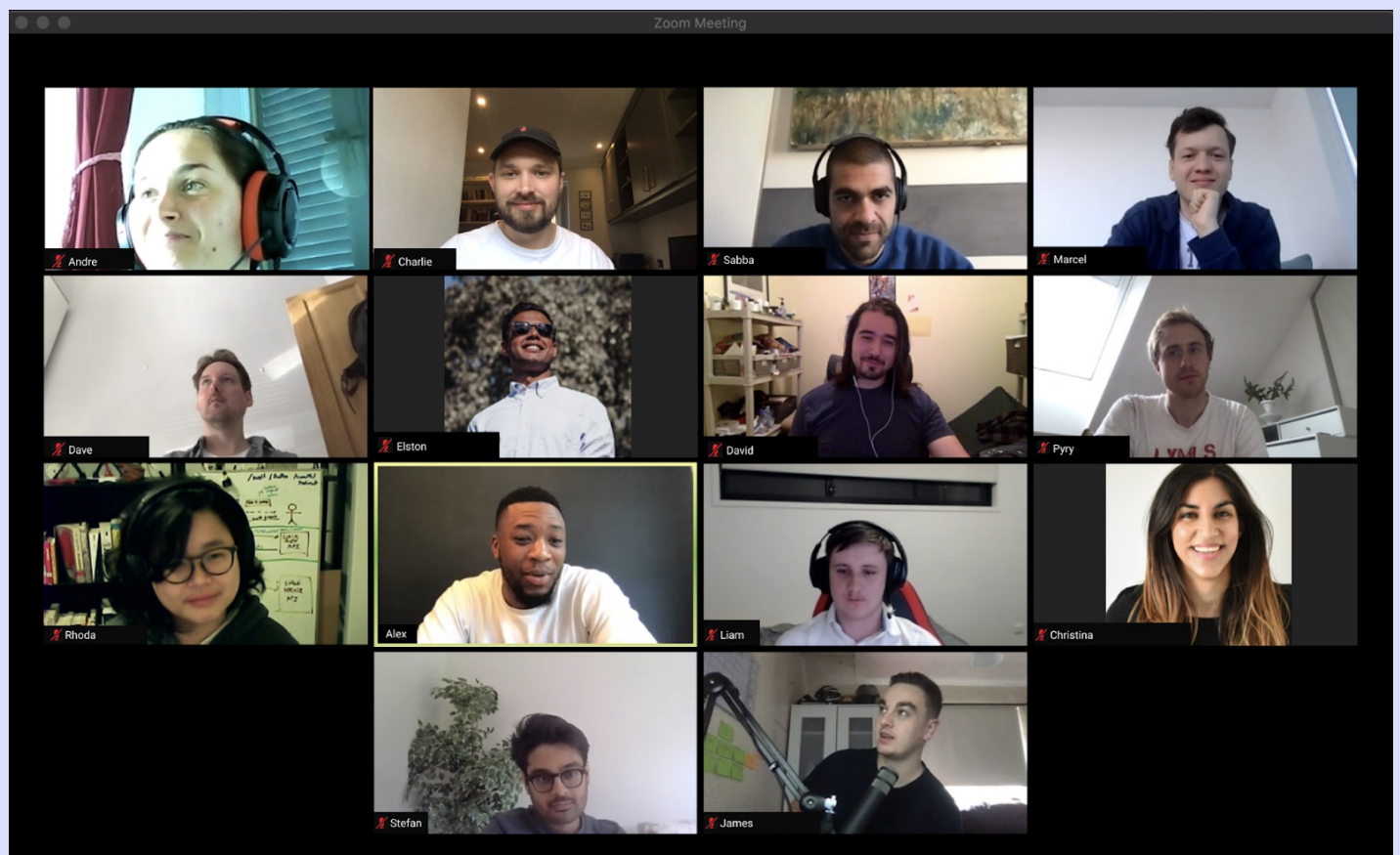
Hey - my name is Charlie Ward, and I'm the founder of [Ramen Club](#).

Ramen Club is the 100+ strong founder community, content & tools getting bootstrappers to ramen profitable, and beyond. Our Slack community helps members meet through co-working, stay accountable with masterminds, build their network, learn from in-house mentors and save with 100+ great discounts. We've also recently started creating content to help founders (such as on [ramen profitability](#)), and are launching Studio Ramen, a product studio to make free tools for founders, amongst other things. Ultimately we want to make the solopreneur journey more successful, more fun, and less lonely.

Success stories include helping members like Philip Baretto ([Tiiny Host](#)) go from \$0 to \$4,000 MRR, Andy Cloke ([Data Fetcher](#)) from \$0 to \$7k MRR, Sabba Keynejad ([VEED](#)) to over \$10m ARR, and many more.

ARK, and many more.

We're at \$3,800 MRR as of May '22, with 35% MoM revenue growth between April and now. (Until recently we were known as 'Weekend Club', I broke the pivot down in [this](#) tweetstorm).



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

I didn't know I wanted to be an entrepreneur until my mid to late 20s. Before landing on something that worked, I'd tried a popup fried chicken shop, a flamingo pool float brand, a co-working space (for an agency I worked at), kids yoga mats, a marketplace for offline advertising, and a few more things. While these didn't all necessarily 'fail' (most of them made money), they didn't go anywhere.

Ramen Club was different and happened pretty organically - launching in October 2019. But the story starts a year before that. I'd recently quit the advertising industry (I used to be a creative agency suit/account man - think Pete Campbell in Mad Men) to jump into tech, starting as a Product Manager at an energy company. I went down the Product Hunt rabbit hole and stumbled upon Indie Hackers, which was exactly what I'd been looking for without even realizing it.

I wanted to meet other Indie Hackers IRL, so started a meetup called IndieBeers in October 2018, where we get together at the pub once a month to talk about our projects - it's still going now (and is now part of **Indie London**, which we merged it with).

Increasingly I heard the same feedback: "It's cool to meet up over drinks, but I want to hack on my side projects with people here as well." (Shoutout to Yommy, Gbade & Wilhelm for the push here)!

So after collecting ~30 email sign-ups to help validate the idea, we launched a 1-day test event

at a local co-working space. 20 people came to try our Saturday format - which was a 10 am standup, 1 pm lunch, and 5 pm share what you got done/demo session. It was super fun! After launching a subscription afterward, we were on \$500 MRR within a month.

“ Early-stage solopreneurs/teams should be spending $\frac{1}{3}$ of their working time on building, talking to users, and marketing apiece.

In contrast to previous businesses I'd tried, this came together pretty quickly and naturally. I didn't have formal community-building experience but had started to learn the ropes from hosting the IndieBeers meetup.

In March 2020 when COVID hit, and we moved fully online, I suddenly realized I was an 'online community builder', which I hadn't considered until then! I'd continue to manage Ramen Club in the evenings and weekends, outside my day job - and iterating on the experience to where it is today.

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

Our initial 'product' was more of an experience or service. Starting from the prompt of 'we want to hack on our projects together, outside of working hours' - the original Ramen Club IRL experience came from some Twitter DMs back and forth with Wilhelm Klopp, one of our longtime members (and founder of the awesome [Simple Poll](#)).

It seems like an obvious format now, but there were a lot of decisions that had to be made: Saturday or Sunday? Co-working space or coffee shop? How long should it be? What happens when you're there? How big should the venue be? How often? Where in London? Slack or Discord?

It was pretty cheap to start - just a Mailchimp account, Carrd page, and printing off some flyers. I funded it using the money I was making freelancing at the time.

Over a few days we ironed things out, and launched the pilot version event:

- **10 am** start arriving at the space
- **11 am** standup - share what you're working on today
- **1 pm** grab lunch together
- **5 pm** demo what you built

Naturally, things evolved! After we went fully remote in March 2020 (due to COVID lockdowns), we experimented with lots of new things that we still have today:

- Shorter, more focused co-working sessions
- Guest Q&As
- Masterminds
- Discounts
- Weekday events
- New time zone events

- Member directory
- Member led events
- Expert in-house mentors (growth, finance & validation)
- Workshops

All of the above directly or indirectly came from member feedback - and I expect this to continue in the future.





Describe the process of launching the business.

The launch was a two-step exercise. First to see if I could get enough interest to attend a free test event, and second to see if those people would pay to keep coming to future ones.

1) Free test event

I wanted to see if we could get at least 20 email sign-ups for our event - so created a simple landing page on [Carrd](#) with Mailchimp sign-up form. Then I posted this on the [IndieBeers](#) newsletter (~150 subscribers back then) and my Twitter account (~1k followers at the time). Then, at the next IndieBeers IRL event, I handed out a few business cards I'd made to promote the event.

All this yielded about 30 email sign-ups, which was good enough for me to organize the event. At that point, I then reached out to some co-working spaces and found the Ministry of Startups (which is no longer with us, unfortunately). Shoutout to Ben for hooking us up!

There was also a simple Carrd website where people signed up: I believe the original headline was 'Work IRL with other Indie Hackers'... very simple.

Once I had all the details in places such as date, location, and format, I individually messaged everyone with the details, confirmed their attendance, and added them to a Google Calendar event. All systems go!

2) Paid subscription

The event itself went well, and we had around 20 people who showed up that day. Many of them are still members and my friends. But afterward, I sent a survey out to everyone to figure out how much they enjoyed it, how often they would come, how much they'd pay per month (for that frequency), what they enjoyed about the experience, and how they'd improve it.

After analyzing 18 responses, I knew that most attendees enjoyed and would pay enough to make it a sustainable business, plus how to improve the experience.

I then got Stripe up and running, and messaged everyone who attended and had enough sign-ups to reach \$500 MRR within a couple of weeks. Suddenly it became real.

After that launch, I was still working full-time, so would organize it on evenings and weekends. While I needed to use my salary to pay for some things, we didn't have many costs back then, so I could mostly re-invest our subscription revenue on improving the service.

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

I'll split this into getting our first 20 members, going from 20 to 100+, and how we have retained them as well.

1) Getting our first 20 members

This was mostly from friends and people in my network generally. From my community efforts

this was mostly from friends and people in my network generally. From my community efforts running IndieBeers, I knew a good few London Indie Hackers who would find Ramen Club interesting and reached out to them personally and via my newsletter/Twitter. These were who came to our pilot event which meant us gaining over 20 sign-ups in the first month.

If you don't have a network relevant to your type of product, I still recommend a degree of scrappiness early on - manually recruiting people where necessary. This also helps you understand at a deeper level who finds it most interesting, and what kind of messaging works best. This will help you later on for marketing at a greater scale.

2) Growing from 20 to 100+

Once you've done a bunch of sales, you're armed with the knowledge to do marketing. This is where new members have come from since our first 20:

- **Indie London:** I manage a London, UK-based community called Indie London. This is the #1 Indie Hackers community in the country, with ~800 members in Slack and on our newsletter. This plus the in-person events is a good continuous source of growth. I try not to push it too hard, and just build real relationships that may lead to them checking out Ramen Club.
- **Sponsorship:** I've sponsored the [Indie Bites](#) podcast a few times before - which is a great awareness piece for my audience. It's hard to quantify the exact impact, but anecdotally people have told me they heard about us there.
- **Product Hunt:** Product Hunt is very relevant for us, I'd say our three launches have directly led to 25+ sign-ups.
- **Indie Hackers:** I've been reasonably active on Indie Hackers, so we seem to get a good stream of visits from there.
- **Podcasts:** I've gone on a few people's podcasts before, such as with [Nathan Latka](#), [Indie Bites](#), and [Growth Today](#). This is a good, high-impact means of driving awareness.
- **Word of mouth:** If you create a nice experience, your members will tell others about it.
- **Twitter:** I currently have ~3.5k followers, mainly in the maker/indie hacker world. So this is a good, cheap way of getting new members.
- **SEO:** To be honest, we haven't been great at this so far. But I plan for it to be a big source in the future.

Our landing page has around a 1% conversion rate to paying members. We use a 30-day money-back guarantee to de-risk signing up - which we find is more effective than free trials. I'm hoping we can maintain this conversion rate in the next year, and also dramatically increase our traffic via original content.

Also, here's our Google Analytics breakdown:

	18,782 % of Total: 100.00% (18,782)
1. (direct) / (none)	5,966 (31.18%)

2.	google / organic	3,421 (17.88%)
3.	t.co / referral	2,815 (14.71%)
4.	indiehackers.com / referral	2,317 (12.11%)
5.	producthunt.com / referral	1,524 (7.97%)
6.	kaizenflow.co / referral	385 (2.01%)
7.	bottraffic057.xyz / referral	371 (1.94%)
8.	reddit.com / referral	343 (1.79%)
9.	indiendn.com / referral	260 (1.36%)
10.	linkedin.com / referral	158 (0.83%)

Source: Google Analytics, May 2022

1. Retaining members

Our retention has been good so far, with just a 7% average monthly churn rate in the past year. In communities, generally speaking, people will stay with you as long as they build some genuine relationships with other members, the service is valuable and the community's purpose is still relevant to them.

This is why a focus during onboarding is to figure out what members are working on, the stage they're at with their business, and what their goals are: such as their ramen profitable target (e.g. \$5,000 monthly revenue). This allows me to set them up in a mastermind with people relevant to them, to give them the best possible chance of building long-lasting relationships.

When people leave, it's usually as if they're no longer building a project or taking a break. There's not a lot you can do about that, it's just part of the game.

Importantly, I speak to members often to understand their needs and how we can improve the service. In the past year we've added, mostly at the request of our members:

- Member led events
- Lots of new Slack channels
- Saturday co-working in a new time zone (Americas)
- Weekday co-working sessions for full-time founders
- Revamped our whole onboarding process/landing page
- Masterminds to build deeper connections with similar members
- In-person (IRL) events, in London for now, but expanding soon
- Fractional advisors in finance, growth, and validation
- Lots of new partnerships/discounts such as [Mentorcruise](#), [Unicorn](#), [Embarque](#), and much more

If you stay still, other communities might overtake you, you improve or you die.

At @weekendclubdn, @charlierward sends each new member a swag pack which includes a handwritten note, coasters, stickers, and a drink voucher for his other community @IndieBeers! 🍺

Extra work for sure, but that personal touch certainly makes new members feel welcome!



5:46 PM · Feb 24, 2020 · Twitter Web App

1 Retweet 1 Quote Tweet 7 Likes



Charlie Ward (weekendclub.co)
@charlierward

.@weekendclubHQ welcome packs en route to their new homes 📦



2:13 PM · Jan 25, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

View Tweet activity

15 Likes

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

At the time of writing (May 2022) we're at \$3,800 MRR (Monthly Recurring Revenue), with ~50% profit margins. I expect this margin to increase as we grow, as most of our costs are fixed. I currently pay myself via contracting rather than Ramen Club directly. Our revenue grew 35% between April and May, so we're trying to keep that up for the rest of the year.

Looking at our funnel, currently, 1% of those who visit our website become paying members, and on average had a 7% churn rate in the past year - which is pretty healthy in our industry. Of course, we can always do better and are looking for ways to improve both metrics.

“ Don't pay too much attention to competitors. Constantly keeping up to speed with everyone else can be bad for your mental health, and hinder your creativity

Most of our costs go towards paying our members to run events, which not only helps us to scale but also means we harness the many talents of our most engaged Ramens. For example, our Saturday co-working hosts Richa Prasad ([Coach Viva](#)), James McKinven ([Indie Bites](#)), Abhishek Kumar ([Intellectual Software](#)), Michael Christofides ([pgMustard](#)) & Ben Yorke ([Phrasing](#)) are in my opinion, better at hosting than I am, and bring a diversity of ideas and viewpoints I'd struggle to match by myself.

In terms of our future, our goal in 2022 is to reach \$10k MRR, the point where I could certainly go full-time on it (I live in London, UK, which makes life expensive). This sounds like a lot, but if we can maintain a 14% MoM net growth rate, we should hit that by December.

To be blunt - the way we get there is by SEO and content creation. We have barely scratched the surface here so far, so I believe there are lots of opportunities to grow by leveraging the stories and insights of our fantastic members.

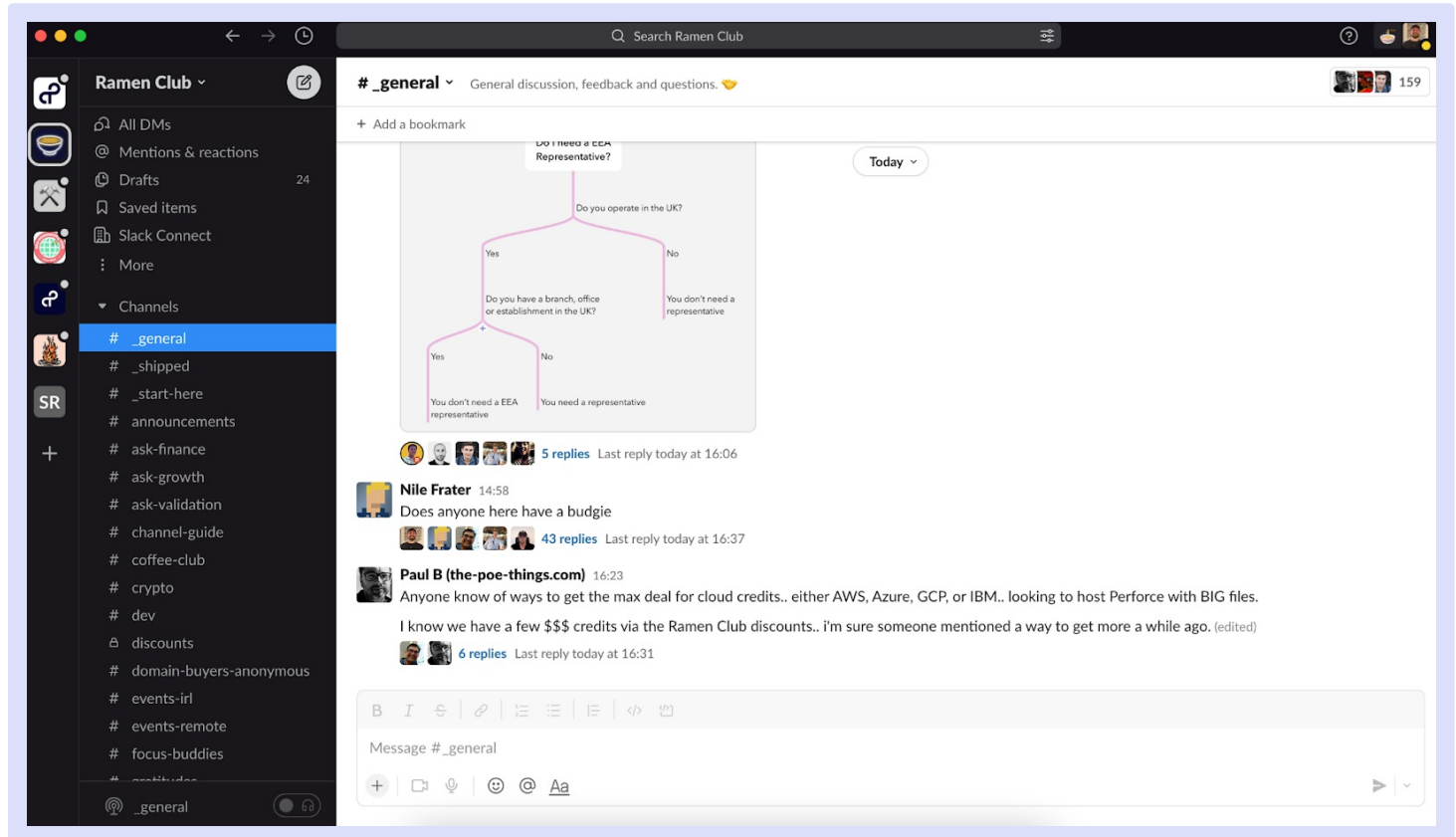
I'm conscious to also keep track of metrics directly aligning with our members' success too, such as how we get more to their 'ramen profitable' figure - the point at which they can survive on their project(s) without a job to supplement things.

MRR ⓘ 20.7%

£3,095.24

£2,562.95





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

I've learned a few broad lessons over the last couple of years:

The first is the importance of adaptability - without this we'd now be dead. Going into lockdowns in 2020, then out again in 2021 meant we had to pivot slightly both times. But even better is anticipation. While we couldn't have anticipated the 2020 lockdowns, we certainly could've predicted them easing in the summer of 2021, and the possible impact on our member behavior (understandably - wanting to spend less time online and more outdoors).

Second, don't pay too much attention to competitors. Constantly keeping up to speed with everyone else can be bad for your mental health, and hinder your creativity. While it can be helpful to occasionally and deliberately see what they're up to, you're often better off by muting them, focusing on your customers, and delighting them. Competitors are a sign that you're in a good market - embrace them rather than let them bother you.

The third is to stick to your main mission. Mine is to create the world's best subscription for founders to reach ramen profitable and beyond, and the best way is to focus on the Ramen Club mission. Don't let other distractions pull you away from this mission. With

Club community. But I've struggled with distractions along the way. With success comes random opportunities, and the tricky thing is deciding which are worth pursuing and which to ignore. Focus on the opportunities that help with your main mission - if it doesn't, avoid them.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

Here are some of our favorite tools:

- **Landing page:** [Webflow](#) is our website builder, then we use [Crisp Chat](#) for inquiries (it's like a cheaper Intercom).
- **Analytics:** Google Analytics on our website, then [Orbit](#) & [Commsor](#) for community analytics in Slack.
- **Payments:** We accept subscription payments via [Stripe](#).
- **Surveys:** Once users sign-up, they are redirected to a [Tally Form](#) to fill in some important details, and they receive the Slack invitation at the end.
- **Member Directory/Documentation:** For this we just use [Notion](#). I know there are fancy solutions to this, but it's easy to use, cheap and everyone understands it.
- **Communication:** [Slack](#) is our go-to, as our audience is most familiar with it, and we started there. I find more forum/async tools to have lower engagement. Here we use apps like [Simple Poll](#) and [Woolfie](#) (both built by our members).
- **Video calls:** [Zoom](#) is our current solution, but we're also experimenting with [Around](#) for group co-working.
- **Automation:** [Tray.io](#) is super flexible/powerful and helps us automate things e.g. when a new customer signs up in Stripe, I get a Slack notification letting me know.
- **Virtual assistant:** Certain actions are better done by real humans, and we use the awesome [Lydia Melvin](#) here.
- **Email sign-up:** [Mailchimp](#)! The old faithful.

We try not to overcomplicate things. The best tool is often the one you're most used to.

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

The Indie Hackers [podcast](#) is full of gems - people just need to apply them. I'd also check out [Indie Bites](#) as a great short-form version of similar interviews. Not Investment Advice is brilliant for learning about internet culture and Web3.

[Lenny's Newsletter](#) is fantastic for learning about product management, but many of its lessons can be applied to building a business more generally.

For books, I'm particularly interested in community, research, design, and strategy. So I'd recommend:

- **Community:** [Get Together](#), [The Business of Belonging](#), [Buzzing Communities](#)
- **Research:** [The Mom Test](#), [Deploy Empathy](#), [Rocket Surgery Made Easy](#)
- **Design:** [Don't Make Me Think](#), [The Design of Everyday Things](#)
- **Strategy:** [7 Powers](#), [Good Strategy](#), [Bad Strategy](#)

Some other random suggestions that I enjoyed are [The Score Takes Care of Itself](#) and

Influence. If you want some great fiction that isn't relevant to your business, read [Dark Matter](#) or [The Road](#).

I also recommend hiring a coach or mentor for important, specific subjects. I used [MentorCruise](#) to find a user research coach ([Jack Fantham](#)), [Sparrow](#) to find a growth coach ([Amar Ghose](#)), and good ol' Twitter to find my community-building coach ([Carmen Taubman](#)). They're all awesome.

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

The three most common mistakes I see are people building stuff nobody wants, not talking to users enough, or not doing enough marketing. If you can avoid these errors, you're probably in the top 10% of founders already.

- **Build stuff people want.** To quote my friend Sabba at VEED - 'make something people search for'. Ahrefs, UberSuggest, and Exploding Topics are full of interesting, high volume, easily rankable keywords you can build a business around and drive early traction. Building products without much known pre-existing demand is possible, but you're playing on hard mode.
- **Talk to your users.** You should be speaking to a different user every week - this is recommended in Continuous Discovery Habits, and it's just as relevant to early-stage founders. Read Deploy Empathy, Rocket Surgery Made Easy, The Mom Test, and Awesome to get better at this. While listening to too much user feedback is possible, in practice it's extremely rare. It's most likely you're just not talking to enough users, not doing the analysis work to find common patterns, or not applying the results. Be careful of only listening to your loudest users as well. Seek out the quiet ones too.
- **do marketing.** Not a Product Hunt launch, a tweetstorm, and posting on Hacker News. But a real, consistent marketing strategy based on a clear understanding of your customer needs, your positioning in the marketplace, the channels to reach your customers, and the resources at your disposal to make it happen (in skills, time, and money). When you deeply consider these things, the marketing strategy becomes surprisingly simple.

As a rough proxy, I think early stage solopreneurs/teams should be spending 1/3 of their working time on building, talking to users, and marketing apiece. Most I speak to are spending 90% on building, even after their product is already functional.

Also...join a community! Communities like [Ramen Club](#) are full of founders at different stages who can help you with these things and more. Not to mention our in-house mentors, masterminds, co-working discounts, etc.


Are you looking to hire for certain positions right now?

I'm looking for a great branding design for a short project (I assume it'll be 5-8 days of work). Send your portfolio to charlie@ramenclub.so.

Where can we go to learn more?

- [Website](#) (use code STARTERSTORY for 50% off your first month)
- [My twitter](#)
- [Ramen Club Twitter](#)

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

-

Charlie Ward, Founder of Ramen Club


Pat Walls, Founder of Starter Story

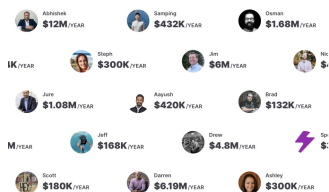
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Dylan

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



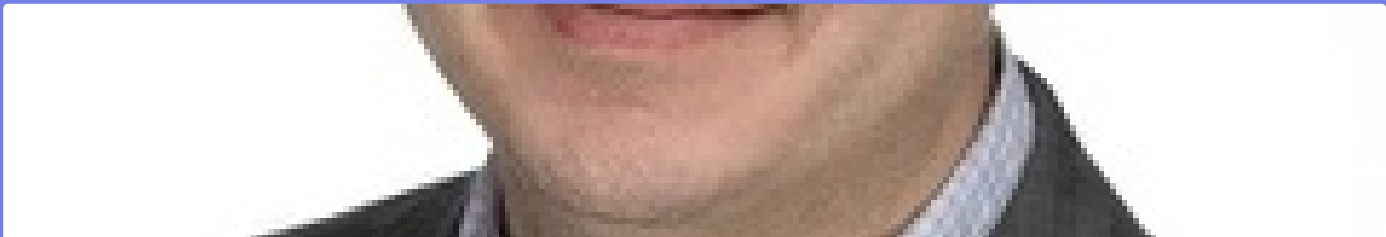
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Matt

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Michael

Michael
\$1.08M/YEAR



Scott

\$300K/YEAR



Chad

\$1.2M/YEAR



Garrett

\$300K/YEAR

Resources to keep you building



Abhishek

\$12M/YEAR

Building a business is not a game of luck.

It's about taking action every day.



Sampung

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You'll get access to courses, frameworks, weekly live events, alongside a group of people that genuinely want you to succeed.

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Michael

\$1.68M/YEAR



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Don't take our word for it



Sam Parr

My First Million

I love this website.



Rand Fishkin

Moz / SparkToro

Love Starter Story's transparency.



Johne Vang

Be The Match

You can't find this information anywhere else.



Trent Baren

Instagram

So much valuable information.





Bilal Budhani

Entrepreneur

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



Jenn Leach

Millennial Nextdoor

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



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Starter Story



Jamie

\$1.62M/YEAR

Starter Story: Learn How People Are Starting Successful Businesses

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Michael

\$1.2M/YEAR

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Michael

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