My Side Project Does One Simple Thing & Makes $14K/Year

Slavi Grozev

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Founder, **Random Trivia Generator**
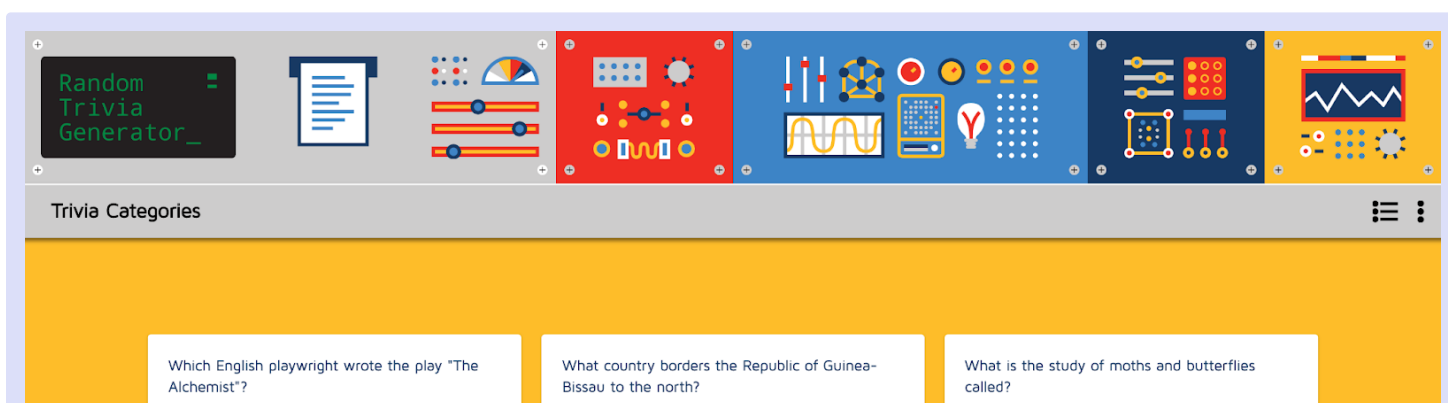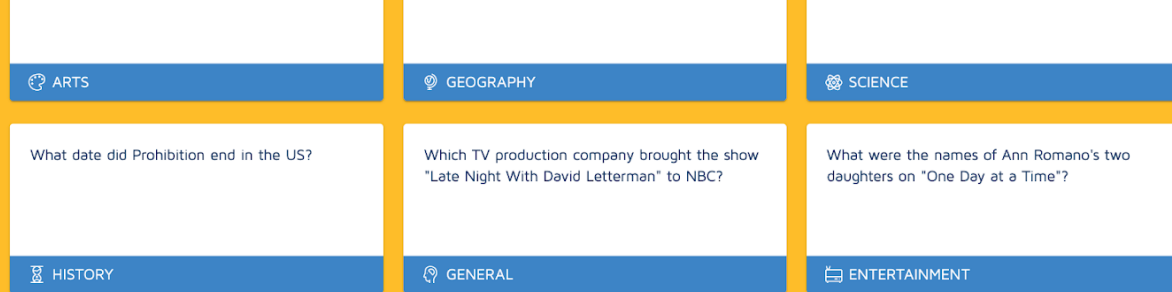
$1.2K

REVENUE/MO
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FOUNDERS

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EMPLOYEES

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

My name is Slavi and I started a website more than 10 years ago that serves quick, short, simple trivia questions and nothing more. It is called **Random Trivia Generator**.

More than a decade later, I still run the site and it serves over 200,000 visitors per month.

ARTS	GEOGRAPHY	SCIENCE
What date did Prohibition end in the US?	Which TV production company brought the show "Late Night With David Letterman" to NBC?	What were the names of Ann Romano's two daughters on "One Day at a Time"?
HISTORY	GENERAL	ENTERTAINMENT

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

Before the first iPhone came out, there weren't any simple trivia sites that served simple, short trivia questions without having to navigate through countless menus and deal with numerous ads. With the popularity of smartphones, like the Blackberry, more people were using their phones to access websites but there weren't any trivia sites optimized for mobile phones. At the time, very few websites were optimized to run on a mobile platform. So trying to access a trivia site at the time was very frustrating, especially when you are traveling long distances in Canada and want to keep everyone in the car entertained.

> **My girlfriend (now wife) bought me a PHP/MySQL book for my birthday and I started reading it and tinkering.**

I decided to do something about that, so when I had some time in the late 2000s. I started to tinker with the idea and created a very simple 1-page site. I only showed the creation to my wife and a few friends we frequently played trivia games with. Over the next several months, I kept adding questions, improving the layout but around July 2010, I left it alone as I was getting busy at work. Through word of mouth and online searches, the website started to organically grow and by the end of 2010, I noticed that hosting was costing me more than expected. I then started to track the metrics and found out there were over 1,000 page views per day. This is when I knew my idea had other fans. At the time, this wasn't the only site that I had but it did become the focus when I had time to spare.

I have been actively supporting the site ever since then and it now has over 35,000 unique, vetted, community-reviewed questions. Of course, to handle all of that, the website has gone through several redesigns and key back-end upgrades.

Take us through the process of building the site.

In the late 2000s, I had a few weeks off and decided to do something about the lack of mobile trivia sites. My girlfriend (now wife) bought me a PHP/MySQL book for my birthday and I started reading it and tinkering with a simple mobile trivia site.

It took about 5 days to learn just enough and put together a working version of Random Trivia Generator 1.0. The experiment cost me $25 to buy a domain and sign up for a pay-per-use host. The site was simple and scalable and could be accessed through both desktop and

mobile devices for a very similar experience. And when I say mobile, I mean small resolution Blackberries, Nokia phones, etc. I had a Nokia E72 at the time and the site worked great. It was quick to load due to its text-only format, and it used very little data so it worked over very slow networks (remember 2G/HSPA, etc.?).

When I made the first version public, there were only about 300 questions in 6 different categories that I wrote myself. Most of the questions were either Canada/Toronto or science-centric since this is where I was at the time. However, with its growing popularity, I expanded the questions to cover a wide variety of topics at different difficulty levels. Once I made my email public, it didn't take long for users to start sending me their questions as well as corrections to questions, or ways to improve the wording. By the mid-2010s, it had become more of a community site and my job was just to screen submissions and fix errors.

Although it only cost me $25 to start the site, with its growing popularity, hosting was becoming expensive so I added a small AdSense ad to cover the costs. More than 10 years later, that ad is still on the site and still pays for the hosting, compliance fees, membership fees, and all the other costs associated with running a site these days.

Describe the process of launching the business.

"Launching" the site was as simple as making my private site public. Once it was good enough, I decided to show it to my friends and let them use it for their games. From there it grew organically through Google searches for "random trivia", as well as through trivia forums, and Reddit! One of the first growth spikes was through a RedFlagDeals post where users had created some fun challenge of naming a fake album with a randomly generated trivia answer. This pushed sustained daily traffic to over 1,000 unique users.

At the time, I didn't think the site would become so popular so there was no strategy behind its launch, no ads, no launch party, nothing. When I started to make a decent amount from ads (~$300/month), I got a business license, tax software and my hobby became an actual company. I also have business cards!

I am often asked about revenues. I introduced the first ad (the one I still use, by the way) about 18 months after launching the public site. The first month I made only $30 but this was a time of exponential growth so revenues were almost doubling each month until they reached around $1,200/month. The growth slowed down but didn't stop.

In the early 2010s, the website looked like this:

The Random Trivia Generator

Press F5, or click refresh, to get new ones. There are **17597** questions!

Category	Question	Answer
Arts & Literature	During what war was the novel "M*A*S*H" set?	Korean War
Geography	What major river runs through Dublin?	Liffey

Entertainment	After returning from death in the movie "The Lord of the Rings", Gandalf the Grey's name changes to what?	Gandalf the White
History	Which US president signed the Emancipation Proclamation?	Abraham Lincoln
Science & Nature	What was the name of the second orbiter of NASA's space shuttle program?	Challenger
Miscellaneous	What type of sport is Birling?	Logrolling

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

The goal of the site has always been to serve trivia questions in their simplest form. The best way to attract the visitors I want is to focus on simplicity, quality, and variety.

> 66 If you have an idea, just do it. Don't worry about how it looks, how it performs, and if it is what you had in mind. In most cases, the first version will not be anywhere close to what you had in mind, but at least you now have a platform from which you can build.

There are now over 35,000 questions and the site is one of the larger trivia sites out there. This is in great part thanks to the community, especially a few power users who have contributed a great deal of content and/or fact-checked existing content. Wikipedia has also been a great resource for content. I would frequently open a random article, read it in its entirety, check sources and write a few questions. This is also a great way to learn some interesting facts. I understand my audience and I don't try to dilute to appeal to a wider audience. I stick to what I know and the people I know.

The best decision I made was to hire a company to design a site that works with modern devices, meets all technical standards, and is very scalable. **Equal Parts Studio** in Toronto just killed it. The process took a while and was self-funded but the results speak for themselves. But now it is very easy to manage submissions, create and edit content, and the site works across multiple platforms and devices.

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

I have been working as an engineer for over 10 years but I still dedicate some of my spare time to Random Trivia Generator. I am not as involved as I was years back but I hope to get back into it once my kids are a bit older and more independent. It is hard to balance family, career, health and still find time for side projects. I have great respect for those who build successful businesses while taking care of kids.

The site has been profitable from pretty much the first month I put an ad. My overhead is low but I do spend a few thousand every few years to maintain the back-end and ensure the infrastructure is as modern as it can be. Although not sexy, this improves user experience and reduces frustrations around loading times and performance.

I am currently looking for developers to add a few more features related to content management and a public-facing searchable database. But other than that, the site works the

same way more than 10 years later.

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

Stick to what you know. One big mistake (financial and effort-wise) was trying to get into the app stores (Apple and Google) early on. I got swept by the "must-have-an-app" wave and lost sight of who my audience was. Turning the site into an app and getting it onto the app stores took a lot of effort away from maintaining the infrastructure which could have been better used to improve the back-end.

Since then, I focus on the audience and on maintaining a clean, simple website, and adding as much trivia as I can.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

It all started with Notepad++ and LAMP. Notepad++ is still heavily used but most of the daily activities have shifted to Robo 3T where I can review submissions, create and edit trivia. Asana is the management tool for when backend improvements are being made.

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

The idea was created in a vacuum and I have not read any business books related to it but if I had to pick an influential book, it would have to be **Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl**.

Having said that, I do have a large library of business and management books for my full-time job. **Personal MBA, by Josh Kaufman**, and **The Introverted Leader, by Jennifer B. Kahnweiler**, are a couple of books I recommend.

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

If you have an idea, just do it. Don't worry about how it looks, how it performs, and if it is what you had in mind. In most cases, the first version will not be anywhere close to what you had in mind, but at least you now have a platform from which you can build.

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Slavi Grozev, Founder of Random Trivia Generator

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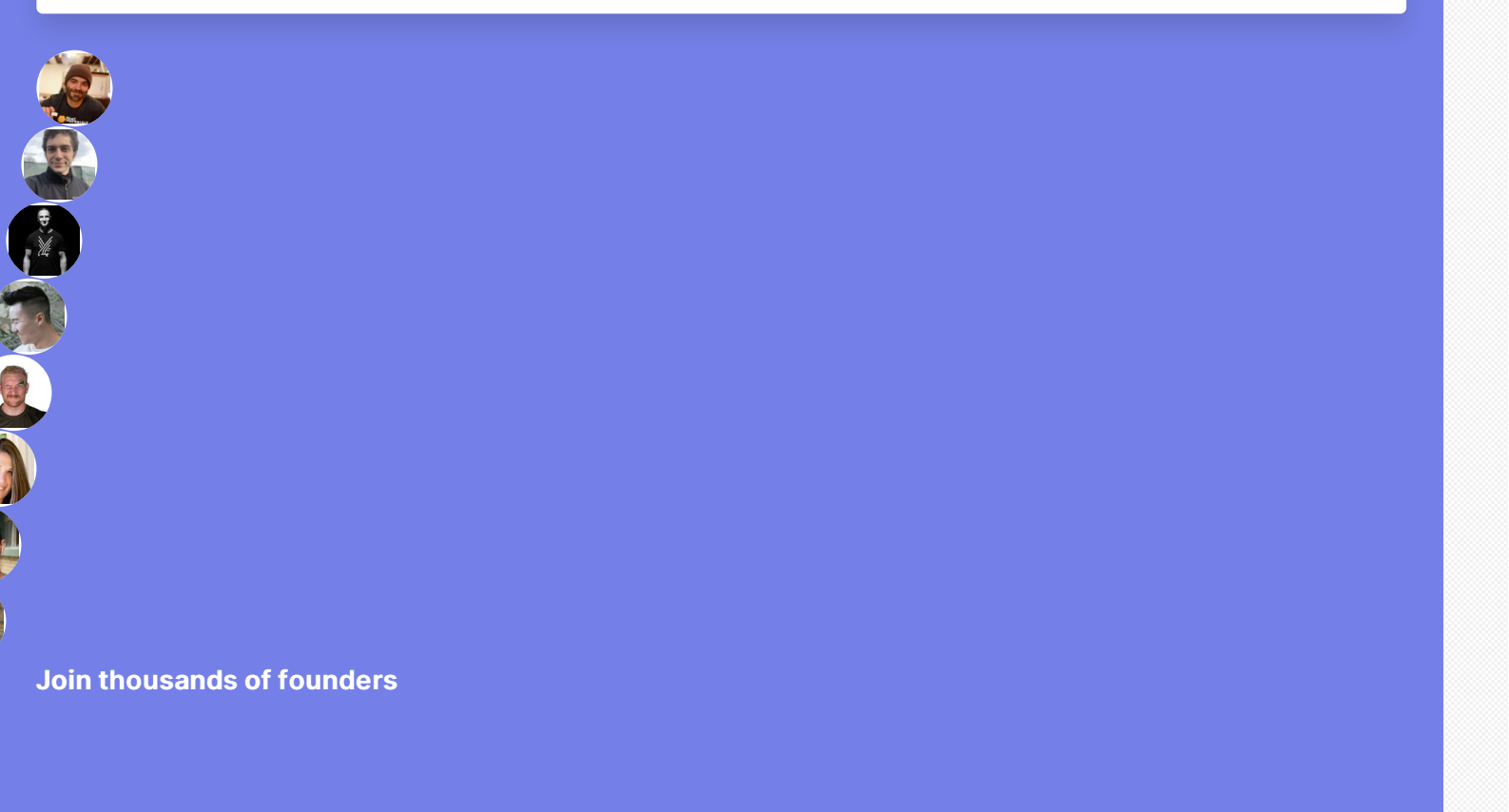**How To Validate Your Business Idea**
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