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# How I Built A \$2.5K/Month Prospecting Lead SaaS As A Side Hustle



Jean VAN



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ABOUT

BUSINESS

TOOLS

SAVE



Jean VAN

Founder, **Fuelblock leads**

\$2.5K

REVENUE/MO



1

FOUNDERS

1

EMPLOYEES

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

Hello, I'm Jean. I started this journey about a year ago. I started **Fuelblock** in Feb 2022 to provide early-stage SaaS startup leads to B2B businesses and agencies. This is my side hustle while working as a product director for a tech company.

In short, I'm providing leads of early-stage tech startups that have just raised funding to sell them as leads. It's a subscription-based product, and every month, we send our customers a new set of leads.

Our main customer base includes digital agencies and b2b sales teams from various industries.

I'm making \$2.5k MRR by being part-time on it. I have a demanding job where I make perfect money, and to be fully transparent, I'm hoping that one day, I'll have the courage to quit and leap forward.

Company	Description	Revenue	Latest_Fundin...	LatestAmo...	Industries / Use cases	Staff	Monthly Visits	Signals to outsource	ALL Key people verified details
Aclaimant	Aclaimant offers a risk reduction platf...	\$1M to \$10M	2023-01-09	\$2,474,995	Customer Service Internet Internet of Th	11 to 50	5777	Social Media Marketing Influencer Marketing	Subscribe to unlock
Leap	Super wallet for Terra	\$1M-\$10M	2022-04-05	\$3,200,000	Infrastructure Wallet	20 - 49	28327	Social Media Marketing Content Marketing	Subscribe to unlock
Hivemapper	The world's first blockchain-based glo...	\$10M-\$50M	2022-04-05	\$18,000,000	Infrastructure Mapping APIs	20 - 49	8755	Social Media Marketing Influencer Marketing	Subscribe to unlock
Arcimoto	Arcimoto is an automotive company th...	Less than \$1...	2023-01-19	\$12,000,000	Automotive Manufacturing Product Desig	51-100	58107	Social Media Marketing SEO Organic campa	Subscribe to unlock
24M Technologies	24M Technologies develops energy st...	\$10M to \$5...	2023-01-11	\$3,198,085	Energy Energy Storage Transportation	51-100	3938	Social Media Marketing Influencer Marketing	Subscribe to unlock
GOALS	A gameplay-first football game	\$1M-\$10M	2022-04-05	\$15,000,000	NFTs Gaming Sports	20 - 49	9473	NFT promotion NFT platform development	Subscribe to unlock
Bridge Network	Decentralized cross-chain hub for the ...	\$1M-\$10M	2022-04-06	\$3,800,000	DeFi Bridge	20 - 49	5523	Social Media Marketing SEO Content Marke	Subscribe to unlock
GOGO Protocol	The most user-friendly open source D...	\$1M-\$10M	2022-04-06	\$2,000,000	DeFi Asset Management	20 - 49	4527	Social Media Marketing Influencer Marketing	Subscribe to unlock
NEAR Protocol	A blockchain designed to provide the ...	\$500M-\$1B	2022-04-06	\$350,000,000	Infrastructure Layer 1	20 - 49	17746	Blockchain development Social Media Marketi	Subscribe to unlock
ANYWAVES	ANYWAVES is a manufacturer of spac...	\$1M to \$10M	2023-01-10	\$3,000,000	Aerospace Air Transportation Manufactu	11 to 50	4702	Social Media Marketing SEO Content Marke	Subscribe to unlock
Alzheon	Alzheon is a clinical-stage biotechnol...	\$1M to \$10M	2023-01-11	\$1,703,768	Biotechnology Clinical Trials Health Care	11 to 50	4421	Social Media Marketing SEO Content Marke	Subscribe to unlock

Fuelblock

Search Web3 Platform

Type here to search company, industry or location

Company

Coinbase

Description

coinbase

Coinbase is a digital asset exchange company headquartered in San Francisco, California. It operates exchanges of Bitcoin, Bitcoin Cash, Ethereum, and Litecoin.

location

United States, San Francisco

Total raised

\$599M

Industry

Centralized Exchanges

Merchant Solutions

Payment Processor

Custody Solutions

Stablecoins

Algorand

Description

Algorand

Algorand is a company implementing an open source public ledger and cryptocurrency payment system utilizing the Byzantine Agreement message-passing protocol to reach consensus among network participants.

location

United States, Boston

Total raised

\$126M

Industry

Scaling Solutions

Enterprise Service

Decentralized Applications

Blockchain Development Platform

Crypto.com

Description

Crypto.com is company developing payments and cryptocurrency platform. It allows users to buy, exchange, send, track and spend cryptocurrencies.

location

Hong Kong, Hong Kong Island

Total raised

\$27M

Industry

Centralized Exchanges

Payment Platform

Wallets

Gemini

Description

GEMINI

Gemini is a digital asset exchange and custodial services company that allows users to purchase, sell, and store cryptocurrency.

location

United States, New York

Total raised

\$400M

Industry

Blockchain

Stablecoin

Flat-collateralized

Asset-backed

Currency exchange

Financial technology

Cryptocurrency wallet

Centralized Exchanges

Custody Solutions

Stablecoins

Algo-Trading

Chainalysis

Description

Chainalysis

Chainalysis is a New York City-based company.

location

United States, New York

Total raised

\$367M

Industry

Market Intelligence Services

Analytics & Research

KYC & AML

Ox

Description

Ox

A open protocol for creating decentralized exchanges using Ethereum. It was founded in 2017 and its team works in multiple global locations.

location

United States, San Francisco

Total raised

\$24M

Industry

Decentralized Exchanges

BlockFi

Description

location

Total raised

Industry

## What's your backstory, and how did you develop the idea?

I had never thought about being an entrepreneur. My dad, a store owner, often complained about his job. I remember him telling me, "Study hard at school, get good grades, and get a well-paying job so you can retire well." That's not bad advice, and I'm thankful for everything my parents taught me.

However, in a nutshell, it is "Stay on the well-traveled path". My entrepreneurial interests only started 8 years ago, and I've been learning every day since then.

“ Keep yourself motivated by focusing on a very long-term dream outcome (for me, it's being my boss and retiring early).

I've been working in product development in data analytics and databases in healthcare all my career. I had two "soft attempts" at side hustles in 2017 and 2019 with limited success, and I didn't like the problem I was working on.

In this third attempt, I "knew" how to develop this kind of product, but I wanted to start in an

industry I enjoyed, so I chose the blockchain world. So, no "Aha!" moment for me. As an employee, I had built similar products in the healthcare industry, so I figured I could make it work elsewhere as a solo entrepreneur.

How did I come up with the idea? The two main drivers for a buyer to take a sales call are the need and the budget. Say you are a tech startup that raised M\$ last week. You took money from VCs, and you need to deliver on growth now. Therefore, the budget is less of a barrier, and you must spend to grow. You will likely outsource your marketing, buy software, hire people, or even look for new offices.

So we send those leads to our customers as soon as they raise money so that they can accelerate their sales and grow revenue faster.

I have a good situation and a great tech career which I must say I enjoy. However, I took the classic path and now want to change. I'm pretty risk-averse, which I hate. I want to be my boss now. It's not about the money; it will be hard to beat what I make today. I want to prove to myself that I can do it, be more flexible, and spend more time with my family and on the things I love.

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

- Idea Validation:

I spent much time on Reddit and forums trying to drive traffic to my site and collect emails as a validation strategy. I also conducted phone interviews with some users. To be honest, it wasn't very successful. On the one hand, I got the usual answers like "It already exists" or "No thanks", but some users were also interested.

It's a lead generation database, so it's not revolutionary per se, but I have expertise in it. So, it'd be worth the shot if I could niche down and satisfy a small market. And it will be an incredible learning journey for me.

- MVP focus:

I pivoted a few times from a product and audience standpoint (targeted to VCs/Investment community). I started focusing on the Web3/blockchain/crypto/NFT space, our flagship vertical today.

1st MVP: Providing fundraising data to Web3 investors. There wasn't much traction there due to high competition, a lack of differentiators, and a higher cost of entry. So I pivoted after speaking to a few prospects interested in the Sales/marketing use case instead of VC/Investment.

2nd MVP: As I discussed with various users, it seemed like there was an opportunity there. So I quickly pivoted the website and its messaging to target this audience. A few weeks later, I got my first customers and never looked back. It's hard, still a side hustle, and I am fighting to acquire each customer. I only started doing some marketing nine months later.

Another Product Expansion: Then, I pivoted again as I got a lot of demand for web2

tech/AI/SaaS/Software startup leads. So, we're doing both now to meet our customers' needs.

Now a focus on Product's development side:

- The website development

I created my landing page using a no-code platform and was able to put together the initial version (v0.1) within a few days. My goal was to launch it as soon as possible, and I used feedback from prospects to make improvements every few days.

At first, there were some trial-and-error periods as I tried different approaches. Once I honed in on the key messaging that seemed to resonate, I extended the testing period to a few weeks to ensure and make sure that the landing page copy was compelling.

Today, on the live site, I continue to use the same iterative process of adjusting the messaging, copy, and design based on ongoing testing. Testing, testing, and testing! It's a long process.

- How was it built?

Well, let me tell you about the automation I set up for this project: I used Softr, Airtable, Googlesheet, Convertkit, Zapier, and Gmail to make my life much easier. I spent a lot of time trying to perfect this, and still, it is not perfect.

Data collection involves web scraping, data downloads, APIs, and manual curation. I used cool tools like Octoparse and DataFetcher API to make it happen. I even developed my tool to scan and collect info based on specific keywords on the web. I sourced from media outlets, government sites, and company sites to get all the information I needed based on customers' feedback.

Once the data was collected, I worked on manipulating, transforming, and cleaning it up in Google Sheets. I started doing most of it on my own, but then I realized I needed some extra hands to help out, so I hired some contractors to support there to focus on sales and marketing.

Finally, I created the data model and stored everything in Airtable. Keeping everything up to date and maintaining the site/data is still a wild ride, but I handle it the same way - with a mix of automation and good old-fashioned elbow grease! I'm still in the "do things that do not scale" period.

- What business model did you start with?

This is a classic, predictable SaaS model with a monthly plan. It works fine, and I can still run with this today.

- Insights into you were you able to manage both your job and this project?

The most challenging aspect of my journey is managing my time effectively. With a family that includes two young children, a demanding job that I find fulfilling, and a mortgage to pay, it's tough. No Netflix or not much is going out with friends.

As a result, I dedicate my evenings and weekends to working on my project, and I consciously prioritize this time. Although I have short-term goals for my project, one client at a time. I

remind myself to focus on the bigger picture during difficult times.

## **Describe the process of launching the business.**

When we launched our product, we started with the minimum requirements to make our users successful. We focused on critical areas such as fundraising timing and key contacts to deliver value to our users. Initially, I had to do everything myself, but later, I found some contractors to help me.

Now, I still do everything and hire some contractors to help here and there. I'm still early in this journey and have hit a plateau over the past few months. I need to ramp up my marketing efforts now.

So far, I've only used cold outreach and LinkedIn to reach potential customers. I'm not a marketer, so I'm upskilling in that area.

At first, I was so eager to talk to anyone and everyone, chasing leads like crazy. I learned a ton from that experience, especially what DOESN'T work! I got feedback from all kinds of businesses, from recruiting firms, sales teams from various industries, contractors, dev shops, agencies, and VCs.

My first customer was a VC firm looking to track down the next big thing in Web3 startups; that was luck and a one-off. The use case was that they wanted to get in early and secure their allocation on the next funding round.

My main challenge was mostly centered around my "differentiated messaging". Prospects wanted to know how they could trust the quality of my product and what set me apart from everyone else.

I heard things like, "This is too generic," "I don't understand what you do," and "This is just like XYZ." I realized I needed to take a risk and differentiate myself by focusing on the web3/blockchain vertical. And guess what? It worked! My messaging started to resonate, and I learned how important it is to niche down, understand your target audience, and speak their language.

From there, I repeated the process over and over again. It took time, but I got more confident and started seeing more and more traction.

After a few months, I started to see some clear winners emerge. That's when I honed in on my ideal customer profile and focused on the segments that showed the most interest and interaction. I took the time to understand their use cases and expand from there. And you know what? It's been a wild ride, but I'm loving every minute of it!

I've bootstrapped everything with my savings.

My monthly costs are as follows:

- CMS: \$40
- Contractors: \$300

Email: \$20

- Email: \$80
- LinkedIn tool: \$70
- Google Suite: \$6
- Lemlist: \$99
- ConvertKit: \$39
- Marketing: \$300 (this will double now)

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

My entrepreneurial advice is cliché, but it worked for me:

No matter what people say is best, ignore it and do it anyway. It may or may not work for your specific business. You need to find what works for you.

Prioritize tactics that you are comfortable with SEO, cold emailing, Twitter, etc.

I'm not the best marketer: I tried newsletter sponsors and networking, but they didn't work for me. I also tried Reddit early on, and it was okay for feedback.

I didn't prioritize ads, social media, or partnerships, so I didn't use them.

Linkedin outreach has worked the best for me, but it's prolonged. I'm trying to scale this now and will double down on cold emailing, social media, and content marketing.

One piece of advice: early on, I focused 80% on building and 20% on marketing for almost a year. Now I'm switching gears to 20% building and 80% marketing, at least, that's my strategy.

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

I am above profitability, but my business is still a side hustle. I plan to increase my marketing spend to acquire more customers, which I believe will be challenging for the next few months. In addition to that, I am focusing on doubling down on SEO.

My short-term goal is to reach a \$10,000 MRR, which I can see a clear path to achieving. With the low churn rate and current customer acquisition trend, I am optimistic about reaching this goal. However, I am not sure what comes after that.

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

I made my fair share of mistakes and poor decisions as a founder. One of my biggest mistakes was not testing enough before launching our product. I assumed there was a need for our solution, which there was, but the competition was higher. I had to find a lower point of entry. This resulted in a slow uptake of our v1 product. I did this research on the fly, which cost me time and money.

Another missed opportunity was investing less in content marketing earlier on. Especially SEO. It should be two marketing strategies in parallel (e.g. short-term and long-term). We focused too heavily on cold outreach, which had a very slow uptake.

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

My favorite tools are [Softr](#), [Convertkit](#), and [Lemlist](#).

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

I love the MFM podcast (My First Million Podcast), especially Sam!

- No BS advice
- Relatable and my goal too!

The SaaS podcast by Omar Kahn and MicroConf podcast.

- Good tactics for SaaS execution

Books:

- Lean startups: Main principles and avoid main mistakes
- Atomic habits: And mental framework to push things through tough times.
- \$1 million offer: to sharpen my psychological marketing skills

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

Okay, here's what has worked for me so far:

- Action over "over-learning" - just do it! You can't do everything, so focus on executing 3-4 big short-term impact tactics (e.g., cold outreach) and one long-term impact action (e.g., SEO or Twitter). Don't worry about optimizing just yet, just take action.
- Keep yourself motivated by focusing on a long-term dream outcome (for me, it's being my boss and retiring early). This helps me overcome short-term fears, which can be challenging daily.

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

I may hire a support function in the future, but I'm doing most of it via contractors right now. I'm not there yet.

## Where can we go to learn more?

- Here's my [site](#)
- My Twitter [@jmv\\_pfb](#) and my email [jean@fuelblock.io](mailto:jean@fuelblock.io)



Jean VAN, Founder of Fuelblock leads



Pat Walls, Founder of Starter Story

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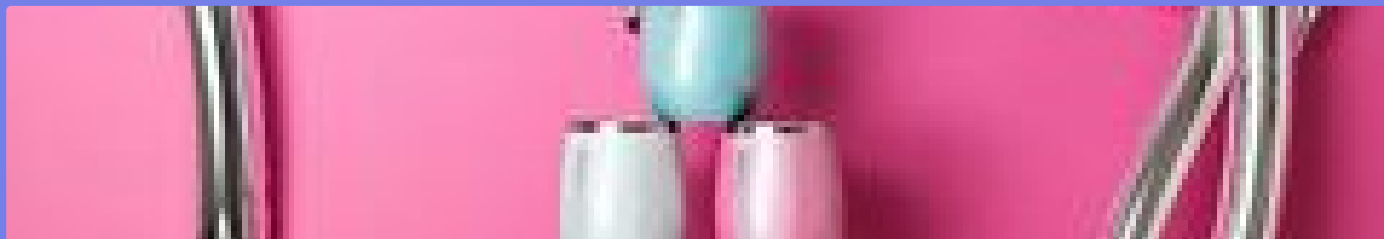
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Dylan

**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**





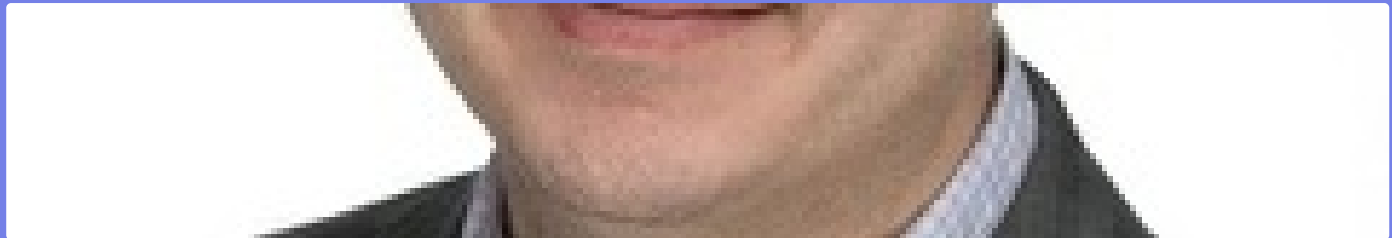
Seo agency

**\$10M** / month



Matt

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



Finance blog

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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.



Samping

**\$432K/YEAR**

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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Osman

**\$1.68M/YEAR**



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Instagram

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**Bilal Budhani**

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