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Steve Christensen Is Building Watches From Old Train Tracks



Steve Christensen



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Steve Christensen

Founder, **NOVO watch**

\$20K

REVENUE/MO



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

Hi! My name is Steve Christensen and I handmade watches using reclaimed materials such as military tanks and train tracks at [Novo Watch](#). I consider myself a horologist so my profession ends in -ist and my mom thinks I made it.

Our flagship product is BY FAR our Coalbanks collection watch. They're timepieces made using train tracks made between the years of 1882 - 1885! Originally they were made in Wales or the UK and shipped to my hometown of Lethbridge to be used at Mine #8 where they facilitated the transportation of coal to build our city.

It is an iconic place to many people and it's where we found our original traction. It even made the National news in Canada, which was wild. We completely sold out of our first limited 15

piece editions immediately and had our first-ever \$16,000 day!



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

I am a watch fanatic! Ever since I was a young boy I've loved watches. During a summer job, after failing to find a cool new watch to buy, I told my friends I was going to start my own watch company and I did!

“ It seems the best way to attract customers is the story. Customers are smart and if the story isn't authentic they'll see that.

My goal was to look at new unique ways to tell time and approach the watch world differently. For the next few semesters and throughout my masters program I would sit at the back of the class drawing designs, emailing people from China and sending money to unknown people in hopes I would see my ideas turn into reality. When I finally got my first products, I was hooked. Entrepreneurship in the watch world my dream and I was standing at the foot of it.

Like any idea and venture, things change. The minimalist movement of watches exploded and we got caught up in it. However, in keeping with NOVO's love of all things new and unique I began to gravitate toward the concept of repurposing. Making old things new again. Which for me meant history given new life in the face of a watch. It lead me to rusty old rail yards and antique shops with my wife.

To workshops filled with the scent of leather and glue or the heavy smell of heat and flame. I've had to rethink sourcing materials. How best to alter them, whether through machine or man. And I spent many hours each day for months at a desk filled with tiny tools and even tinier bits of metal assembling and disassembling the inner workings of a mechanical timepiece. It only

of metal assembling and disassembling the inner workings of a mechanical timepiece. It only made sense that a watch formed of decades old steel track should be coupled with such a time honoured art.

This new watch proved a steep but rewarding learning curve and I'm grateful to the artisans who were willing to teach and work with me on all the elements of it along the way.

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

This is the fun part!

The process is pretty standardized really: find material that has a story, figure out how to use it in a watch design, make it by hand, take pictures, put it online.

Find the material

I get to literally drive or hike to somewhere that has the history I'm looking for and explore. With the help of others, I'm able to learn what material was used for what purpose and piece the story together that I'm looking to tell ensuring I'm authentic in the process.

Figure out how to use it in a watch design

Once I get the material I look for ways to use it. Do I create the whole case, dial and back using the material? Do I just use pieces of it in the design? This allows me to get as creative as possible.

Make it by hand

Once the design is nailed down I literally get to make it by hand. I have my blacksmith and machinist do the big parts, then I get to sit at my bench and finish, file, paint and just put it together. These are some of my favourite moments seeing everything coming together into one beautiful piece.

Take pictures

Once the beauty is done I get to take photos of it. This is where I get super excited (again) that I get to share it with the world! Sometimes I can't hold back and share sneak peeks of it before it's released.

Put it online

Finally, once every step is complete, I make it a product on our website that will allow others to actually purchase it.

Of course it's not that easy. With any handmade watch it takes hours of intricate work. Sometimes I think it would be a good idea to buy a machine to do some tedious jobs but then I think we'd lose the handmade feel / soul of the product.

Describe the process of launching the business.

When I took on the first handmade watch project it required a lot of training and learning. I was

When I took on the first handmade watch project it required a lot of training and learning. I was lucky enough to train under an extremely talented watchmaker from Switzerland who guided me through a lot of the process.

Without him I would have had a very difficult time making this happen. Once I was comfortable working on swiss movements and sourcing material with a great team including a blacksmith and machinist, i pulled the trigger.

From there, since we make one at a time, it was just waiting for orders! I wasn't sure how long it would take to get an order and I waited for just over a month for my first one! After that, they seem to come much more often :).

The biggest lesson I learned during this process is that it's OK to move forward before you think you're ready. It's the stress of making something for someone that helps close the gap of uncertainty.

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

It seems the best way to attract customers is the story. Customers are smart and if the story isn't authentic they'll see that.

What do we do that's different? Why would they find value in our product over someone elses? Authenticity is simple: write, create and say what you really mean. Don't make anything up.

Our videos are well done and I find that helps to spread the message. Here's a few great examples:

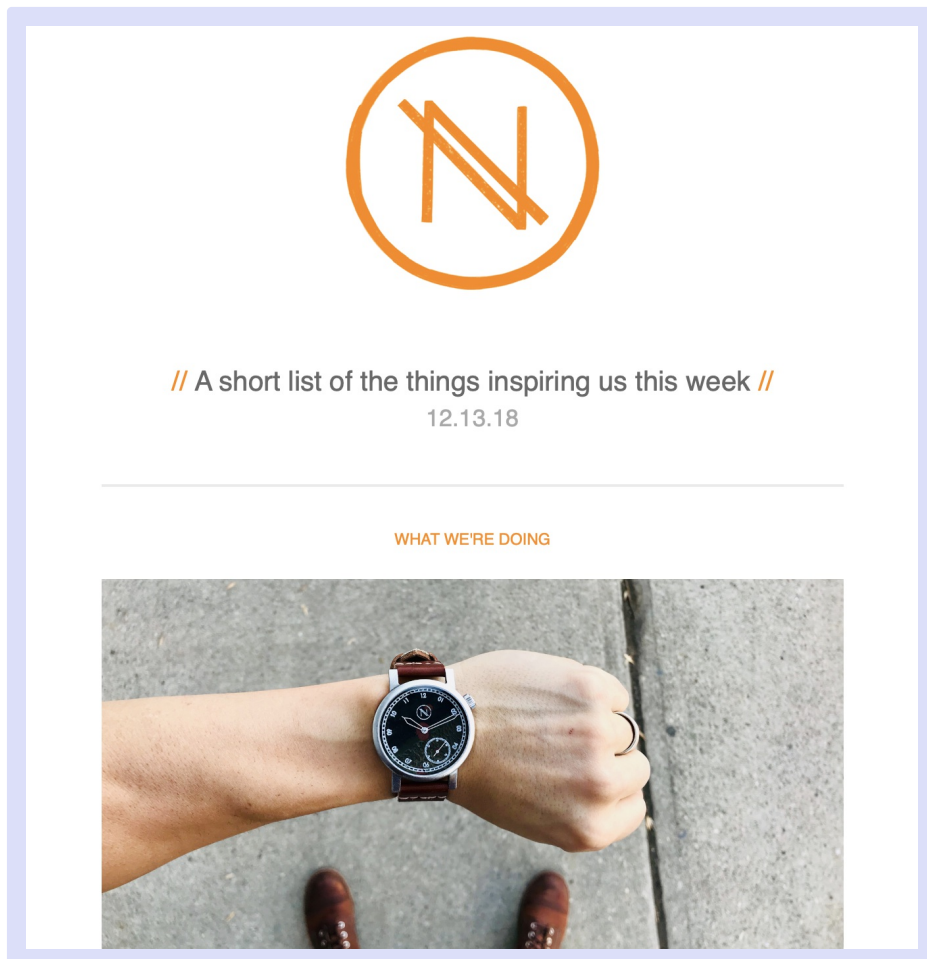
Making a watch in 60 seconds

Our Foundation

And our hand engraved movements

Also we try and be interactive with our current and future customers through social media and email. Daily thoughts on Twitter, adding behind-the-scenes content on Instagram, sharing our favourite blogs on Facebook. Basically anything that helps give our fans an inside look at our products and life at NOVO. Social media is simply the place for us to post pictures and thoughts while talking to our followers.

Weekly email blasts allow us to show our followers the things and people inspiring us that week. By not always asking for their business I find it's a much better relationship of sharing rather than trying to make them buy. Here's a great example of what the intro of an email blast will look like:



Then from there we have these sections:

- What we're doing
- Who we're following
- Article we're reading
- Quote we're contemplating
- Brand we're loving

This gives us a reason to send stuff to our customers that doesn't ask them to buy but rather gives them new things to ponder.

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

Today is a great situation. We're learning to move slow but deliberate.

You'll see only a few products at a time on our website and that's the way we'd like to keep it for now. Behind the scenes we're also making custom watches for others using meaningful material of theirs. We look to sell 4 - 10 watches every month.

“ Draw out your idea and plan. I find writing very difficult and super boring. By getting out a pad and paper and drawing out the idea I think your creativity of what you're creating and how you're going to sell it can come out.

I hope the future gets even more simple where we do one product at a time. I would love to document the entire process of each new product from the trip to design and manufacturing.

I really think people would feel a part of something really special this way and we'd only do a limited number every year. It would allow me to focus specifically on certain skills each time around as well as create a lot of value for future NOVO watch owners.

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

Be yourself and find your voice. Stories are everywhere these days and authentic voices are needed.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

Absolutely LOVE Shopify for our store. We don't do massive quantities so their shipping tools work perfectly for us.

A lot of Numbers for Mac as our CRM.

We're pretty basic. Standard Mac apps such as notes, reminders, mail, etc. are the programs we use.

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

These are the books I love:

- [4 Hour Workweek](#)
- [Essentialism](#)
- [Measure What Matters](#)

I'm a huge fan of podcasts:

- [Joe Rogan Experience](#)
- [Watch and Listen](#)
- [Hodinkee Radio](#)
- [Fighter and the Kid](#)

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

Draw out your idea and plan. I find writing very difficult and super boring. By getting out a pad and paper and drawing out the idea I think your creativity of what you're creating and how you're going to sell it can come out.

Where can we go to learn more?

- [novowatch.com](#)
- [twitter.com/novowatch](#)
- [facebook.com/NOVOwatch/](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [@novowatch](#)



Steve Christensen, Founder of NOVO watch

NOVO watch has provided an update on their business!

About 1 year ago, we followed up with NOVO watch to see [how they've been doing](#) since we published this article.

About 3 years ago, we followed up with NOVO watch to see [how they've been doing](#) since we published this article.



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

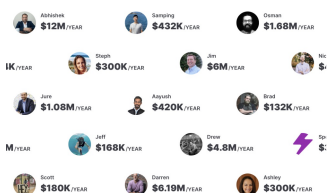
Want to find more ideas that make money?

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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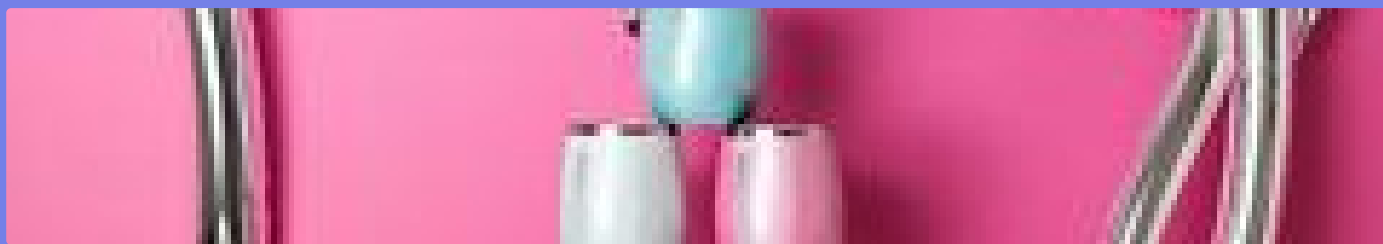
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Michael

\$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.

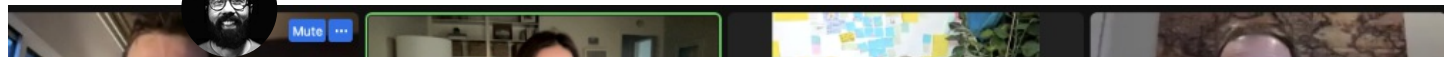


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Sam Parr

My First Million



I love this website.



Rand Fishkin

Moz / SparkToro

Love Starter Story's transparency.



John 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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Jamie

\$1.62M/YEAR

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