

You want to start a new web agency...
but you're a developer

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iterate.ie/drupaldays14

Drupal Open Days

Presented by

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@iterate



1. A little about iterate

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Founded in August 2011

Started just building small Drupal websites

Have become a fully serviced agency focusing on User Experience (UX)

We're working with big organisations such as NUI Maynooth, Openet, Griffith College, UCD and PFH Technology group on websites and applications

Increasingly we're doing consulting work without any development at all

We are huge advocates of Drupal and want the platform to succeed



2. Why we adopted and use Drupal

2. Why we use Drupal

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Flexible, free, modular, enterprise ready.....

you've probably heard this by now..

2. Why we use Drupal

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I always wanted to work for myself and build something up and
I had been developing for years with Drupal.

2. Why we use Drupal

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Drupal doesn't force design or technical constraints on our design team, if they design it, the technology can implement it, we've built some cool things

2. Why we use Drupal

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I have experience of working with closed source platforms, it's ugly and expensive with too many trade offs.



3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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All systems come with their quirks, Drupal is no different

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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Configuration management hell in multi developer teams

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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**Content staging environments are a pain the more complex
the solution is.**

Mix taxonomies, permissions, revisions, field collections, media assets throw in some beans, you're going to have a bad time.

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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Crappy or non existent modules for edge cases

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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Sometimes updating modules breaks stuff

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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No upgrade paths between releases

Noble but not good for selling Drupal

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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Drupal is hard to learn

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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You can overcome it though after suffering the pain

3. Sometimes, Drupal sucks

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If we didn't believe in Drupal, we would have abandoned it over the last year as we grew. It's worth the pain.



4. Pitching Drupal

4. Pitching Drupal

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**Transition from implemented to proposer changes your perspective on
Drupal**

Unless Drupal is asked for specifically...

Nobody Cares

100% of our build work was via Drupal leads in 2011

20% right now but we build 90% of our projects with it

You're proposing a solution, not a CMS

It just so happens that you have a great CMS to pitch
If you have good Drupal skills and can back it up, you can
overcome any concerns and enthuse people about the platform

Drupal: Damaged goods?

You need to be honest with both the good and the bad
of Drupal up front

Internal IT staff resistance

4. Pitching Drupal

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You risk losing the entire project over the CMS if it's not accepted

Sometimes Drupal just seems too much for a potential customer

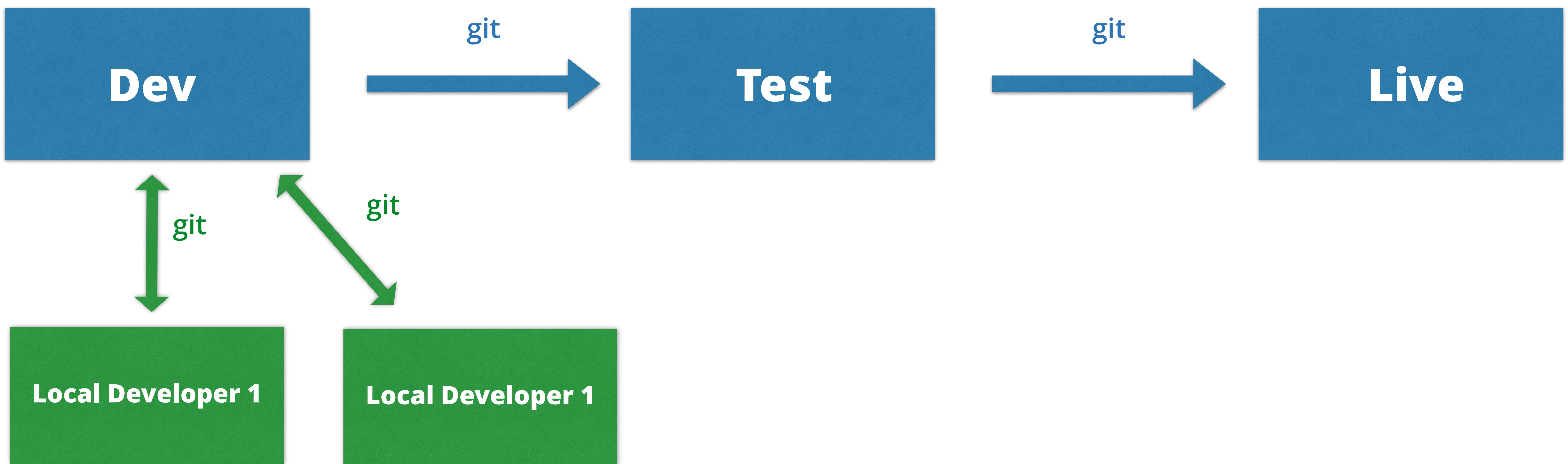
4. Pitching Drupal

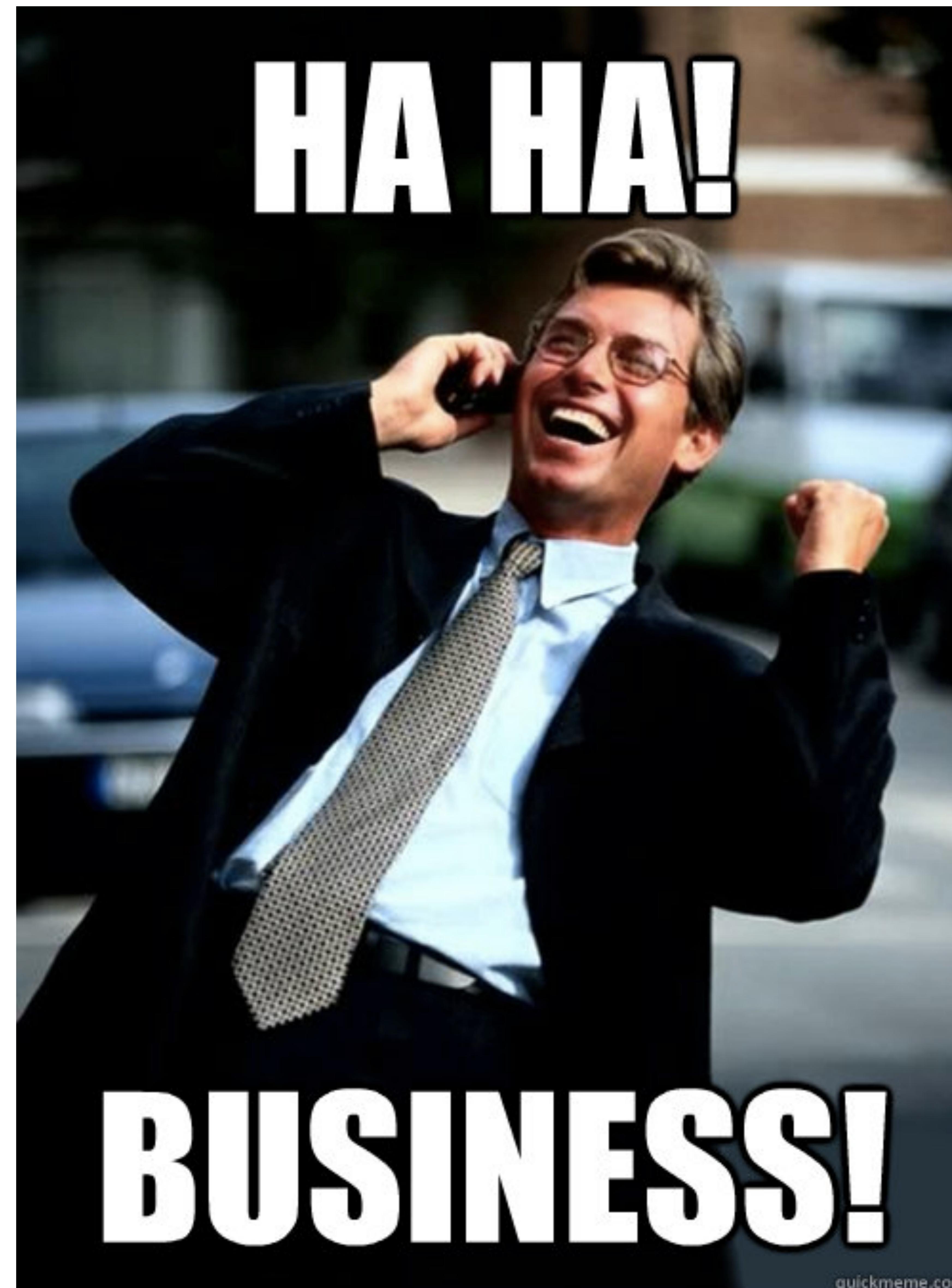
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Propose a rock solid hosting platform with modern workflows

Hosting Drupal can be painful, choose your hosting partner very carefully and ensure they have Drupal skills. They should also have various dev, test and production environments, use git, have varnish out of the box....

We're partners with Aberdeen Cloud





5. Starting an agency.. but you're a developer

5 - Scaling a business on Drupal

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Gary
Managing Director
2011



Alex
Graphic Designer
2011



Luis
Lead Developer
2012



Mark
Front End Developer
2013



Karen
Director of User
Experience
2013



Bruno
Developer
2013



Nicole
Content Strategist
2014



Kate
UX Researcher
2014



Lee
Digital Marketing
2014



Stephen
Developer
2014

LOSE



6. 12 tips for keeping your sanity and become profitable

So you've started working for yourself and plan to build up a new company, congratulations!

Like me and many others, you might:

- Be completely green and naive in 'business'
- Have limited knowledge of legal issues, taxes and all that boring stuff you took for granted in your old job
- Have a burning desire to work for yourself
- Have not fully formed your new service offering
- Have just turned 30 and had an early mid life crisis
- Possibly, be a bit stupid

Tip 1. Accept from day one that it's going to end

- Everything has a life cycle, including what you will consider your cool little company. You need to accept that one day, it'll all be over.
- Accept it'll end but you can honestly look back on what you did and say to yourself that you couldn't have done anymore.
- When it ends, you'll have so much experience that you may adapt and go again, you probably won't have much trouble getting a job elsewhere if that's what you choose.

Tip 2. Figure out what makes you different?

In the service industry, particularly online you are about to compete in a highly saturated marketplace. Every company needs a hook or niche to differentiate themselves.

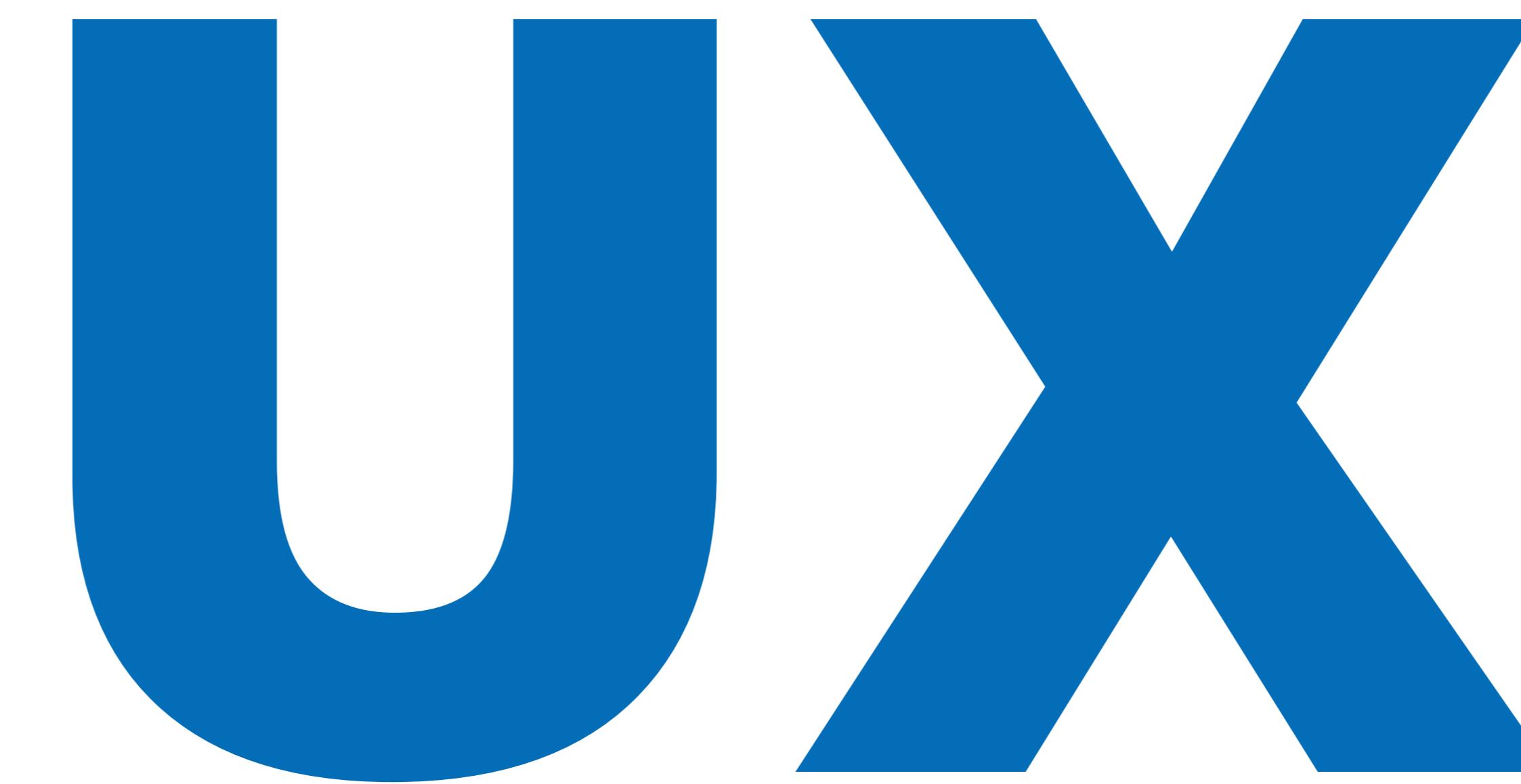
There are three general milestones you need to reach before you'll feel any way comfortable and confident before growing.

1. Do you really have a service you are confident you can offer?
2. Can you get your first contract?
3. Can you start building up a regular and consistent amount of work, broadening your customer base?

Tip 2. Figure out what makes you different?

We focused on two elements initially, these have been the core of the business from day one and have developed beyond recognition since then and continue to develop.

1. Be an industry leading Drupal development agency in Ireland
2. Develop a true 'UX' practice staffed by qualified digital researchers and designers



Nothing to do with 'Graphic Design'

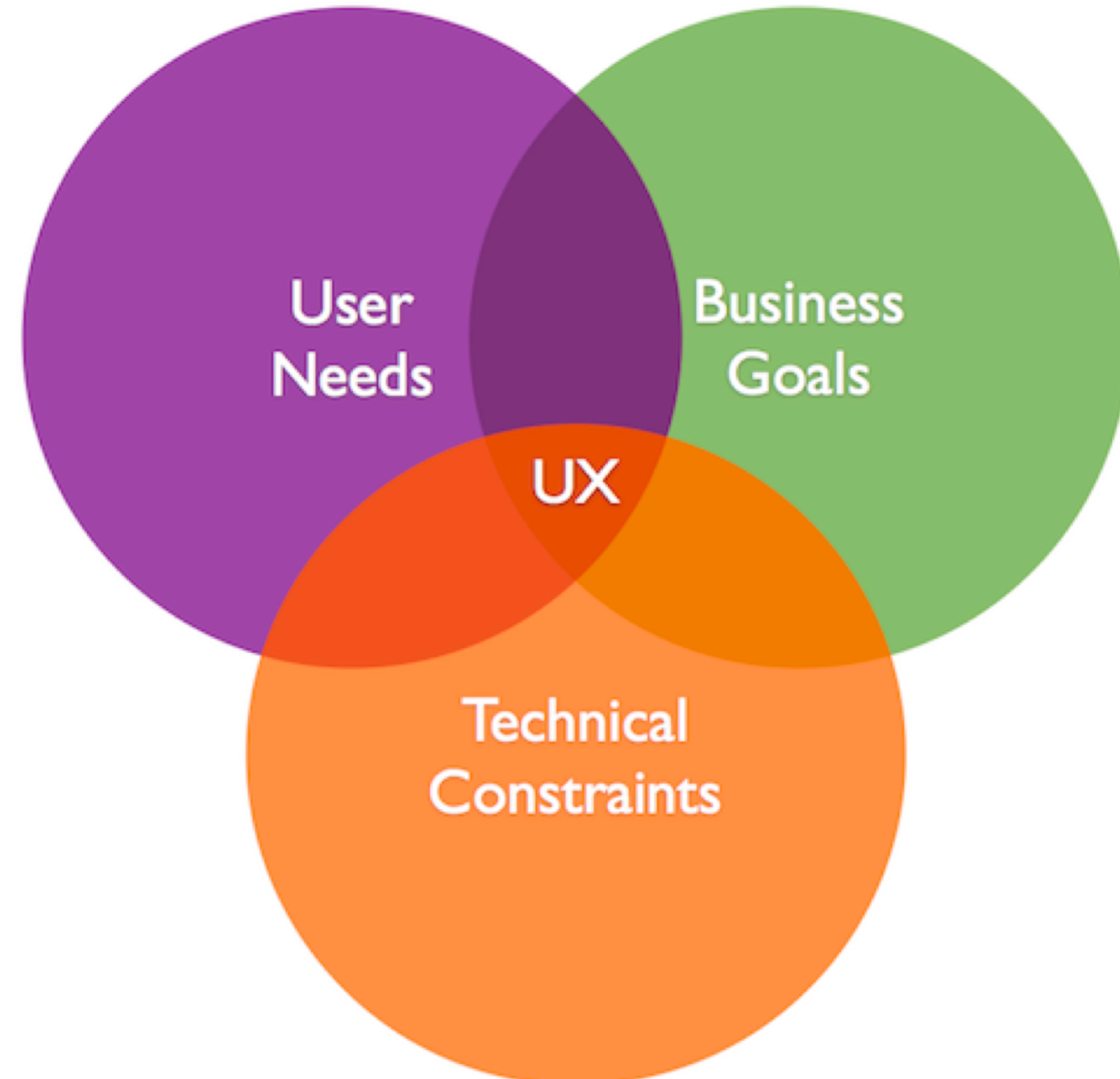
A highly skilled discipline with defined practice areas

The most abused buzzword on the web right now

Most 'UX Designer' job offerings have no basis in
true UX research or design practices

6 - 12 tips for keeping your sanity and become profitable

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UX is our process, not part of it. There is no mythical 'Strategy' guru.

Tip 3. The more successful you get, the less you'll develop yourself

- If you want to be a developer, maybe don't start a company which you hope to grow and scale.
- It's impossible to be a full time developer and manage what you're building up. You'll likely spend your time in meetings, working on proposals, managing people, managing projects, working on the business full time, not working on client work.
- Ultimately you are responsible for the direction and growth of the company, you owe it to your staff and clients to deliver in the best possible way.
- You will become a cost to the company and won't be billed out much if at all

Tip 4. You'll deal with difficult people and projects occasionally.

- You need to become an excellent communicator
- You need to be willing to accept that some feedback is subjective
- You need to know the sort of project you don't want to work on, and never take them on again
- You need to learn to say NO, the more honest you are with people instead of doing 'free' work the better your relationship will be, most people are reasonable
- The better you get as a company the easier this gets

Tip 5. Costs will rapidly scale as you grow

- This is a reality, the busier you get the more money you need to pay wages and operational costs.
- You need to be on top of your cash-flow, know what you have, what you owe, what's due to be paid within the next 30 days and what your sales pipeline looks like
- You need to agree limits in that cash-flow where you need to take immediate action early and not completely collapse one month
- Base new hires on financial facts, not a gut feeling
- Can't pay, don't play: Don't take on unpaid interns to do billable work, it's a horrible way to treat people

Tip 6. You really better love what you do

- You're going to work many jobs at once, these will go down over time if you can manage to grow, but for the first years, you'll likely be doing anything and everything.
- You're going to be exhausted and at times it'll feel overwhelming. The first year in particular is a very hard slog, you'll likely not earn much yourself and you may end up working 6-7 days far too often.
- Holiday plans? Don't count on taking any extended leave from work any time soon.
- You need to eventually overcome this, working crazy hours is detrimental to you and the business in the long term, but it may be needed initially.

Tip 7. Client trust is earned, not a right

- Potential clients should be diligent, would you spend thousands of euro on something you fought hard to get a budget for?
- You need to prove your value and expertise not just say 'we can do that', but 'we have done it'
- You're pitching work to intelligent people who can spot dishonesty or the 'hard sell', there is no sense at all in faking what you can do
- Understand any of your potential clients fears and concerns early and honestly address them
- Never take on work you cannot do

Tip 8. You will hire good people and one day they might leave

- Your staff should be everything to you, without them you are nothing
- You have a duty to respect and look after your staff
- You need to allow your staff to develop even though it costs money and they'll be out of work
- At first, you probably won't have the capacity to pay what the 'top' agencies might pay but you have a lot to offer in terms of allowing staff a lot more professional freedom
- Pay into staff pensions, pay their health insurance, set up support services. Just be nice. When you can afford it, give people their due with salaries and bonuses.

Tip 9. Develop your processes

- You need to develop processes around just about everything the company does.
- In the beginning you'll get away with just a couple of ad-hoc methods but over time, these will get you into a lot of trouble
- You need to ultimately become efficient and not 'wing it' anymore.
- This is very hard work and it's something that never ends.
- Don't try to do tax returns, payroll yourself, get a good accountant.

Tip 10. You may get crappy comments about 'that little company'

- Just because somebody 'bigger' than you does something different, don't imitate them, go with your gut and do things the way that best work for you, your staff and your customers.

Tip 11. Look after yourself

- It's hard sometimes, you'll have so many things in the air at once that it could be easy to get completely overwhelmed
- Over time it becomes a lot more 'enjoyable' if you've put the hard slog in
- You may one day have to make decisions that horrify you, such as letting staff go, you need to accept that it's not a charity and deal with financial facts no matter how hard that might have to be in the future
- Take holidays: I'm terrible at this, but I'm finally coming around to the idea.

Tip 12. Don't be arrogant, you need to reach out

- You're not as smart at you think you are, you will need help along the way
- We reached out to the Dublin Business Innovation Centre who arranged lots of great advice and arranged incubation space in the Guinness Enterprise Centre
- They day you think you've figured it all out and are somehow superior to your competition is the day to pack it all in, this isn't a science and you can always get better
- Hire people into your company and listen to them, don't dictate and tell people what to do, your job is to soak everything in and act on it
- You really aren't as smart at you think you are

7. Myths and realities

The mythical 'time between projects'

7. Myths and realities

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You don't have a 'company culture'

7. Myths and realities

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This is not your new lifestyle



7. Myths and realities

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This is more like it



7. Myths and realities

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You really have to love it, it'll grow to a point of being very hard to walk away from it all



7. Myths and realities

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Is it worth it?



Thanks for listening

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