

JOLT

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Introduction

To get people to buy, you need their attention first.

Attention is the lifeblood of your business. If people don't know who you are, it doesn't matter how good your product is. You can't sell what people don't see.

The good news is that it's easier than ever to get your message out. The internet has democratized mass communication.

As a kid growing up in the '80s, I had three TV channels. Everyone watched the same shows, because there weren't any other choices. I was limited by availability. The only way to hear about something new was to see it on TV, in the newspaper, on the radio, or in a magazine.

The internet has spawned thousands of new channels. YouTube alone has 17,000 channels with more than 100,000 subscribers each. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat make it easier than ever to engage with customers. Blogs still attract significant traffic: On WordPress alone, over 409 million people visit a blog each month.

The downside? It's harder to get people to pay attention to what you're saying. When I was a kid, only the big media companies had a megaphone. Now everyone has one. Attention is a currency and there's only so much of it to go around. Consumers now have thousands of places where they can spend their time and attention. The pie isn't bigger, and there's more people that want a piece of it.

The doors

It's hard to rise above the noise, but if you don't, you can't be in business.

Imagine a hallway with hundreds of doors. Your product is behind one

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of them. What the customer doesn't know is that your product is a pot of gold. Your competitors' products? They're buckets of coal.

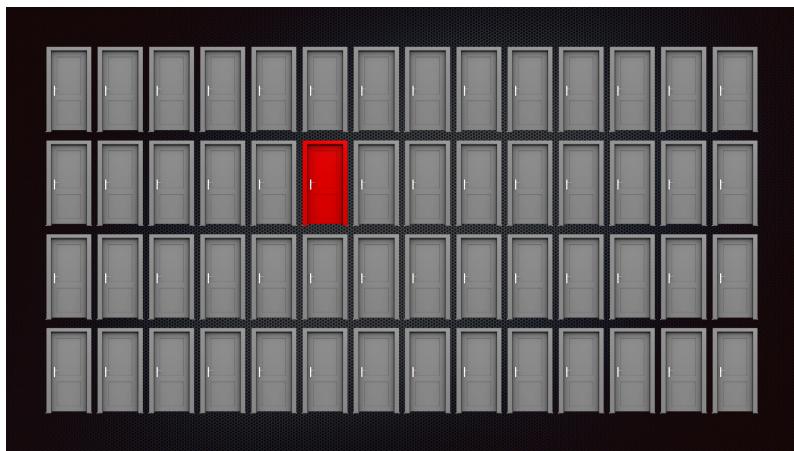
The customer needs to choose the right door to get to the pot of gold. They can only choose once. The doors themselves all look the same: they're solid and black.

How would you help the customer get to your product?

First, you'd paint that black door red. Give your customer a reason to notice *your* door.

Second, you'd probably put a sign on your door. It might say something like: "If you're looking for a pot of gold, open this door!"

Third, you'd leave your number. You know those tear-off phone numbers you see on bulletin boards? You'd have those too, just in case the customer wasn't ready to commit. This way, they'd have something in their pocket to remember you by.



A real pot of gold

Marketing can attract customers, but they'll only stick around if your product is good.

At its core, marketing is appealing to human desire. That's what gets people to buy.

To succeed, our product's quality needs to live up to its promise. Good marketing cannot "outrun" a bad product. Ultimately, word of mouth prevails.

"Most marketing problems are a product problem." — Lars Lofgren

People make their purchasing decisions emotionally, and then justify them rationally.

For those of us who make things, this means two things:

1. A product's emotional appeal is what gets customers in the door.
2. Usage and enjoyment is what gets customers to stick around.

If we want to run good businesses, we need both.

Surprise them

So let's assume your product is great. How do you get people's attention? How can you, in effect, paint the door red?

You can't use the same tactics as everyone else. People are in a slumber. They have thousands of messages thrown at them every day. People don't respond to outdated methods.

This gives you an opportunity: Be different, break out of the mold, and surprise folks. People long for originality, creativity, and imagination.

Terry O'Reilly, host of the radio show and podcast *Under The Influence*, summarizes why this approach is effective:

The element of surprise is one of the most powerful tools in marketing. It creates impact. Surprise is the vital element

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of any good story. As marketer John Steele says, in surprise lies the energy to change a mind, convince, inspire, recruit or persuade. In other words, surprise is a catalyst for action.

That's what this book is about: Delivering the jolt of excitement that your audience craves.

Each chapter features a unique marketing idea you can try. I'll provide you with real-world case studies for each. As well, you'll get specific action steps to use in your business. Some early reviewers called it "guerrilla marketing for the online world."

These are unorthodox tactics. As you read them, you might think: "nah, that won't work for me." Push yourself to consider it. My job is to make creative suggestions. Your job is to think of creative ways to apply them.

My goal is to move you out of your comfort zone and inspire you to try something new. My hope is that this creative stretching helps you acquire new customers for your business.

Let's get started.

You Want to be First to the Party

The general rule with house parties is this: “Don’t arrive too early. Arrive late, and stay late.”

In business, that rule is reversed. **You want to be first.** Whether it’s a:

- New technology (virtual reality, artificial intelligence)
- Social phenomenon (Pokemon Go, Snapchat, music streaming)
- New platform (Stripe, Apple App Store)
- Marketing channel (Product Hunt, Instagram Ads)
- Nostalgic cycle (New wave of punk rock, Nintendo introducing new game with old characters)

First-movers can have a huge advantage, especially in the digital world. Corbett Barr, co-founder of Fizzle, outlines how it works:

There is a first mover advantage that you get on any new platform. In the early days of Twitter, people who grabbed a foothold there were able to amass a big number of followers, even though they might not have been famous elsewhere. As Twitter got bigger and bigger, that effect just magnified.

Case study: Bidsketch

My friend Ruben Gamez started Bidsketch.com in 2009. It was a side project that he worked on during nights and weekends. A year and a half later, he was making enough to quit his day job.

The utility of his software wasn’t new: It allowed contractors to create

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proposals for clients. People had been creating, printing and mailing estimates for years.

Ruben's web application allowed people to do all that work virtually. Instead of writing proposals in Word, users could easily generate them online. Bidsketch emailed the proposals, and could track when they were viewed (no printing required). Rather than mailing (or faxing) agreements, the client could accept the proposal electronically.

When he started, he didn't have any competitors. No one else was doing what he was doing.

I had a friend who was going to meet a client for the first time. I was talking him through the proposal process. I went online to search for a tool that could help him with that. I looked for a web app, and I couldn't find anything. I thought: "I can't believe there isn't a web app that does this. There are invoicing apps, and other business apps, but nothing in this niche."

Because he was first in his niche, Ruben was able to carve out a lot of the market for himself. It was hard work, because he was breaking new ground, but it became a competitive advantage. For a long time Bidsketch was the only way to create and send online proposals.

Resist the temptation to be snobby

There's a temptation to scoff at new things. We're hesitant to jump on the latest fad.

Before the original iPhone was released in 2007, it had lots of detractors. Gundeep Hora, editor of CoolTechZone, forecasted:

The iPhone is going to be nothing more than a temporary novelty that will eventually wear off.

Steve Ballmer infamously derided Apple's phone in USA Today:

There's no chance that the iPhone is going to get any significant market share. No chance.

Ballmer didn't think Apple would get more than 3% of the smartphone market. In 2015, iPhone took home 91% of profits in the sector, with 15.9% of units sold. I'd say Ballmer was wrong.

The risks

First-mover advantage does have risks. Whenever you're betting on a new platform, trend, or technology, there's a chance it won't work out.

There are folks who invested in platforms like Tumblr, Google Wave, and Digg. Technology-wise, the Palm Pilot and BetaMax were first, but didn't win. History's proven that those weren't good long-term bets.

However, for every Google+ failure, there's a Snapchat.

If you don't try, you'll never have a chance of winning. Mikael Cho from Crew puts it this way:

You can set yourself up to create [luck]. Quantity is what gets you to quality. Start placing little bets; try a bunch of things. One of them might work and become big.

Case study: first on Product Hunt

In 2013, I got an email from my friend Ryan Hoover. Ryan was a guy I'd met online. We were both getting serious about product management and blogging.

Ryan had created a mailing list dedicated to finding and sharing cool new tech products. He'd called it Product Hunt, and asked me if I wanted to be a contributor.

In my head I thought: "Ugh, I don't really want to be a part of another mailing list," but I trusted Ryan, so I said "sure!"

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The screenshot shows a web-based application interface with a blue header bar. In the top left is a user profile icon with the name "linky dink". To the right are links for "tools", "browse", "settings", and a search bar. Below the header, a sidebar on the left lists dates: "Thursday 05 December" and "Wednesday 04 December". Each date has a corresponding post card. The first post, dated December 5th, is titled "Product Hunt" and features a link to a blog post. The second post, dated December 4th, is titled "Photofy" and describes a photo editing app. To the right of the posts is a large grid of circular profile pictures representing the users who have joined the "Product Hunt".

Thursday 05 December

[Product Hunt](#)

Today me and Nathan Bashaw publicly announced Product Hunt on PandoDaily (<http://pando.com/2013/12/04/can-the-democratic-power-of-a-platform-like-hacker-news-be-applied-to-products/>). Thanks for all your support and validation of the concept. Soon I will share a blog post with more details but in the meantime, visit the site and send me your feedback! :)

Wednesday 04 December

[Photofy](#)

A sleek new app that empowers you to turn your ordinary photos into works of art & expression, then easily share them with the world!

Product Hunt
A collection of new, innovative mobile and web apps worth exploring. More details at <http://bit.ly/product-hunt>.



Ryan invited around 30 of his friends to be the initial “product hunters.” Throughout our day we would submit cool products, and every night an email digest would go showing all the links that had been “hunted” that day.

After one week, 170 people subscribed to the Product Hunt list. Fans started approaching him at events in San Francisco to say they really liked the idea. Ryan could see the idea had traction:

It was at that point where I was like, “Okay, I’m not the only person that likes this. Clearly, other people do.” I thought: “Maybe there’s something here.”

After validating the idea with the mailing list, Ryan decided to build an actual web app. He teamed up with his friend Nathan Bashaw and created the initial version over a weekend. That became ProductHunt.com, one of the Bay Area’s current darlings.

Nowadays, launching on Product Hunt is an absolute necessity for any new tech product. It’s more important than having a big blog like TechCrunch write about you. It can drive thousands of new users to your site.

Because I was early, I've been able to build a cachet on the platform. As of this writing, I've submitted 99 projects, made 57, and amassed 3,714 followers.

Why? Because I said *yes* to joining another mailing list. If I'd said no, I would have missed the opportunity.

Your turn

Find what's trending

How do you find new platforms to try? Here's a few places to look:

What are teenagers using?

When Snapchat came out, everybody wrote it off as a sexting app for high school students. Now it's used by a 40-year-old DJ named Khaled Mohamed Khaled. He has millions of followers who tune in to watch his daily routine.

What are geeks playing with right now?

A "tastemaker" is someone who has influence over what becomes popular. Increasingly, geeks are becoming tastemakers. Chris Dixon gave these examples on his blog:

Many breakthrough technologies were hatched by hobbyists in garages and dorm rooms. Prominent examples include the PC, the web, blogs, and most open source software.

Another good example? Minecraft, the block building game that sold to Microsoft for \$2.5 billion. What are geeks playing with right now? They're fiddling with virtual reality headsets, arduinos, and 3D printing. There's an opportunity to invest in these trends before they go mainstream.

Sillicon Valley investor Naval Ravikant puts it this way:

You don't make the best investments by chasing trends. You

make money by being there before it's a trend. So read science and technology journals.

What's currently underground?

When I was a junior in high school, I was invited to attend a party at a giant warehouse. The location was secret. We had to call a phone number on our ticket to hear the address.

As we arrived, hundreds of kids waved glowsticks and danced to house music. This was my first rave.

It'd be years before big acts like Daft Punk, The Chemical Brothers, and The Prodigy emerged as mainstream acts. What started as an underground movement grew to become a hugely influential genre.

Look to the fringes of society. It where tomorrow's trends are born.

What just popped?

Even if you miss a trend, you can still jump aboard right when it "pops" into the public consciousness.

Nobody expected Pokemon Go to be such a fast-growing social phenomenon. The game allows players to catch virtual Pokemon on a real-world map. In its first week it had more downloads than any other app in history.

Enterprising retailers didn't wait for the media to confirm Pokemon's popularity. They started offering in-store specials for Pokemon players. They also bought virtual Pokemon "lures." Lures increase the likelihood of Pokemon appearing in their store. The result? More foot traffic and more sales.

Current opportunities

Here are some trends that you should pay attention to:

- **Ads on Facebook and Instagram.** For most keywords, Google Adwords are way too expensive. Facebook's ad platform is still early enough that there are good deals to be

had. In one interface you can book ads on Facebook's newsfeed, sidebar, mobile app, and on Instagram.

- **Snapchat.** Not just for kids. It's one of the fastest growing social networks for good reason: It's the perfect place to tell your story. Every day, you add small video updates. These are clipped together in a longer narrative that can be watched by anyone who follows you. Another good way to grow? Snapchat takeovers. This is where someone (like StartupTV) invites you to take over their account for 24 hours. If you offer enough value to their followers, they might follow you.
- **Virtual reality.** My friend Amir Khella had already built a successful software company (Keynotopia). Then he saw VR. It impacted him so deeply he decided to leave Keynotopia to build a new virtual reality company. Once you try it, and see how immersive it is, you too will start to see the opportunities.
- **Augmented Reality.** Google Glass, those funny-looking glasses, were too early. They allowed you to see digital information overlaid on the real world. Pokemon Go has proven that there's an appetite for augmented reality. The next step will be glasses that enable us to look up from our phones. Pay special attention to Microsoft's HoloLens.
- **Facebook Live.** Despite the early success of apps like Meerkat and Periscope, live video never really went mainstream. Facebook Live changes that. Starting a livestream is as easy as doing a status update. I was demoing Facebook Live at a local retail shop. Two minutes after I started my stream, someone showed up in-store because they'd seen my video. The other thing I like about Facebook Live is it saves videos to your newsfeed, so people can easily watch them later.
- **Chat bots.** I discuss this in a later chapter. Building interesting conversation bots has big potential for brands. For example, you could build a bot that answers frequently asked questions. You already have all the content; you just need to identify the keywords, and have it reply to those queries.

2

Rage Against the Trend

In the previous chapter, I told you to jump on trends early. In this chapter I'm going to tell you to do the opposite.

Sometimes you can get more attention by going against the grain. Derek Sivers takes this position on his blog:

I know I'm not the only voice you hear. There's a message I know that most of my readers or listeners are hearing, because it's a common message we all hear these days. I don't want to just duplicate it. So I try to think of a good counter-[argument]. I do it to compensate for something I think is missing in the common message. So my public posts are a counterpoint meant to complement the popular point.

We see this in music all the time:

- Punk rock was a reaction to disco and arena rock.
- Grunge was reaction to the hair metal scene in L.A.
- Conscious hip hop was an east coast reaction to the west coast's gangsta rap.

If you can't be early, be different

The benefit of jumping on a trend diminishes greatly once the market becomes saturated. Everyone is trying to duplicate the early-movers' steps, trying to a piece of the pie. In his 2014 XOXO talk, Kevin Kelly warned attendees:

Anytime you try to emulate someone else's success, you're

only going to get a sub-set of their success. What got them there won't get you there.

Do you know anyone with a Microsoft phone or a Blackberry? Both were late to the full-touchscreen mobile game. They tried to replicate Apple's success by making copycat phones, and charging a premium for them. Android succeeded by making the operating system free to manufacturers. This allowed them to move faster and cheaper than their competitors.

Once you give up this idea that the path is set for you, it becomes freeing. Now you know it's up to you.

To succeed, you need to forge your own path.

Case study: Pokemon Go

I mentioned this game in the last chapter. It's a fascinating example of countervailing popular wisdom. It breaks the rules. Sara Haidar reveals some of these in her excellent article, *Pokémon Go vs Growth Hacking*:

1. The game doesn't ask you to invite friends (or upload your address book).
2. It doesn't send push notifications.
3. There is an in-app store, but it doesn't prompt the user to buy upgrades.
4. Up until now, the game hasn't been featured in any of the app stores.

If you've played a popular game like *Clash of Clans*, you'll immediately notice the disparity. *Clash of Clans* feels like a virus: it's constantly sending notifications, and asking you to make in-app purchases.

More so, Pokemon Go spread organically, with very little spending on advertising. It's rumored that Supercell, the studio behind *Clash of Clans*, spends over \$1 million a day on marketing their games!

Pokemon Go broke other rules when it comes to gaming too. It's a real-world game that gets you off your couch, exploring landmarks

like museums, monuments and parks. The game is also social. It's not uncommon for players to interact when they meet up at Pokéstops.

A phenomenon like this makes people curious. They want to try it for themselves.

Case study: My blog

The predominant trend on the web right now is clean, flat design. Everything is designed to look crisp and professional.

I decided to go the other way. My website is decidedly rough, raw, and rugged. I use an unfashionable monotype typeface. My links are the browser's default color: blue. It looks, well, ugly.

Surprisingly, people love the design. It's so different, it's refreshing.



Randy Skopecek
@rskopecek

[@mijustin](#) I really like the new style of your site
[justinjackson.ca](#)

4:53 PM - 4 Jun 2016

◀ ▶ ❤

[Follow](#)

Quit copying “best” practices. Following the crowd just means you blend in. You don’t want to fit in; you want to stand out.

Be careful

Before you go into rebel mode, carefully consider your move. Some trends are so strong and prolonged that they’re worth investing in, regardless of how late you are. For example, if you’ve been holding out against getting an email address, I’d say you should probably get one. Your fax number won’t cut it anymore.

What you’re looking for are the rumblings of revolt. You don’t want

to be the lone wolf, you want to be part of a resurgence. Have your ear to the ground. If notice a thread of discontent, it might be time for you to lead the countermovement.

Checklist

If you're going to rage against the trend, make sure it's a good move by following this checklist. All of these should be true:

- Has the trend become a best practice or common wisdom?
- Is there already an underground countermovement?
- Is your audience open to the countermovement?
- Can you engage in the countermovement and still connect with your audience?
- Does the countertrend still allow you to sell your product?

Your turn

Opportunities

As soon as something becomes a best practice, that's an opportunity for disruption. Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

Web design

What are the current trends? If it's popular to have a white background, try a different color. If everyone's using photos, try hand-drawn illustrations. Does every website have a pop-up asking you for your email address? Create an "anti-popup" where you say:

To improve your reading experience, I've purposefully not used a popup here. Want more from someone who hates popups as much as you do? [Subscribe here](#).

The fact that you're different will mean you'll stand out.

Honest Instagram

On Instagram, everyone's trying to create the illusion of a perfect, colorful dream world. What if you did the opposite? Take only black and white photos, and show the gritty side of your life.

I'm trying this myself with a new account called @sohaggard. I started with zero followers. This will be an ongoing experiment; check back and see how it goes!

Reverse the maxim

Our culture has common sayings that have been around forever. One way to surprise people is to modify these truisms. For example:

- **Instead of “happy hour,” why not “sad hour”?** This is exactly what the Kona Brewing company did in 2014. They asked, why only one happy hour? Why not make 23 hours of the day happy, and have one sad hour?
- **“Don’t go where the money is; go where the money is going.”** Here I’ve mixed an old proverb with Wayne Gretzky’s famous quote: “I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been.”

A different incentive

It’s common practice to offer people a free PDF if they subscribe to your mailing list. Why not offer something else? Here are unique ideas other people have tried:

- **Useful templates.** Bidsketch is online proposal software. What do they offer as a free incentive? Offline proposal templates for Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, and Adobe InDesign! The connection to their product is clear: If folks want templates, they’ll likely benefit from proposal tracking software.
- **Free stickers.** Why not send subscribers something real? DesignGood.com will send you stickers via old-fashioned post when you signup for their email list.
- **Photos, sounds, videos.** Music for Makers is a stock music site. They sell royalty-free music. For \$25 you can download a track and use it on your promotional video, podcast, or presentation. You can also sign up for their email list and receive a free MP3 every Monday. These are the same songs that are for sale, but available only for a short time.

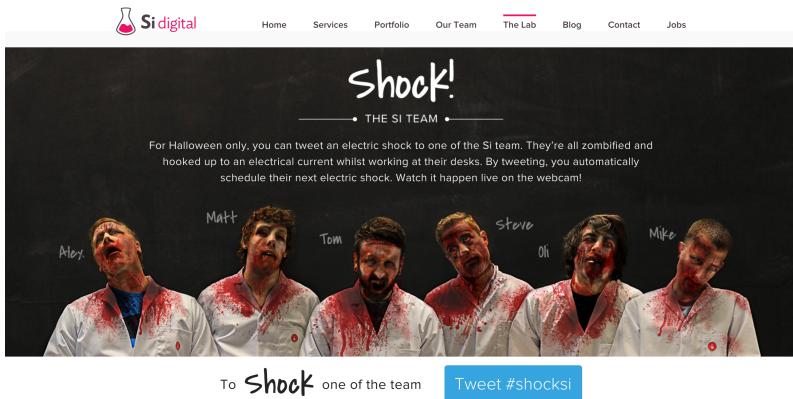
3

Twitter Electrocution

I was giving a talk on product marketing when someone in the audience asked me:

What's the best marketing stunt you've seen?

Instantly I thought of the team that electrocuted themselves on Halloween.



Back in 2013, an agency in England was thinking about ideas for a hackathon. The company, Si Digital, had just procured two tiny Raspberry Pi computers. The team members were sitting around thinking about how they could use them.

Oli Northam blurted out a crazy idea: “Why don’t we let people shock us with dog collars on the internet?”

Everyone laughed. Then, they thought about it. It was a crazy idea, but it would allow them to play with a new technology and do something fun. Maybe they could even get some exposure for their agency!

Their first step was to procure shock lighters, normally used for pranks. They hooked these up to the Raspberry Pi and were able to signal the shock lighter to deliver an electric charge.

Next, they built a small robot arm that could initiate the shock for each lighter. Each employee sat at their desk with tinfoil around their fingers. This tinfoil was connected to wires, which ran to the lighters.

After that, they wrote web software that would search Twitter for the hashtag #shocksi. Whenever someone tweeted the hashtag, a random team member would receive a shock.

All that was left to do was set up a web cam, and launch the website: www.sidigital.co/halloween.

The team had no idea how many people would discover the project. Would anyone watch the livestream or deliver shocks via Twitter? They put out one tweet announcing the project, and went to bed.

The electric shocks started as soon as they got to the office the next day. People were talking. The bizarre Halloween experiment went viral, almost immediately. Someone submitted their site to Hacker News and Reddit. Soon, they were receiving shocks nearly every second.

Demand was so great, they had to add another web server on the fly just to keep up with requests.

After eight hours, they ended the project. The team had received 1,135 electric shocks throughout their workday. Their website got 16,388 visitors, and people sent 1,306 tweets about the project.

And the most surprising thing? They did all of this without a dedicated marketing team. They explained the response on their blog:

Some said ‘Props to the marketing team’. This made

everyone in the office chuckle. There is no marketing team at Si digital. In a company of six, everyone's opinion counts and anyone can have an idea about anything that they feel would be beneficial.

Individual makers (and teams) would do well to emulate this attitude!

In just one day, this small team had significantly elevated their profile. They'd created a story that people talked about (and are still talking about to this day).

The rise of internet stunts

Red Bull, the energy drink company, puts millions of dollars into sponsoring events.

And lately, they've been investing more money into live events. The most famous was Felix Baumgartner's 24-mile space jump.

Red Bull turned the event into a livestreaming internet stunt. They had cameras everywhere: in the mission control room, on the helium balloon, inside the capsule, and on Baumgartner himself. Viewers watched each step of the launch. This culminated with Felix standing on the edge of the capsule, ready to jump from 120,000 feet (36.6 km). It was here that he dramatically stated:

I know the whole world is watching now. I wish you could see what I can see. Sometimes you have to get up really high to understand how small you are... I'm going home now.

He proceeded to fall off the platform. As the world held its breath, he free-fell for four minutes and 20 seconds, breaking the sound barrier. They gasped when he went into a near fatal uncontrolled spin, and cheered when he was able to regain control.

Nearly eight million people watched live as Baumgartner touched down safely in eastern New Mexico. YouTube confirmed that it was the most concurrently watched video stream in history.

The mission was dubbed as a “jump from the edge of space.” While not technically accurate, the slogan sums up how people felt about the event.

This wasn’t a sporting event; this was a pop culture event. Steve Martin of M&C Saatchi Sport and Entertainment later commented:

World records in stunts are old hat but this was so extreme and the storytelling so perfect that it will be very hard to beat. They will be talking about it in boardrooms and at marketing conferences for many a year.

A good story doesn’t need dollars

It’s estimated that the Red Bull space jump cost between \$10 million and \$50 million.

But Si Digital’s Halloween shock prank likely cost less than \$500 to implement.

It’s not the cost of the event that matters; it’s about the story that you spin.

Your turn

The brilliance of Si Digital’s event is that it naturally leads to their core service offering. They build unique digital campaigns, and their stunt proves they’re good at it.

If you’re going to use stunts as a marketing channel, make sure that the event has a natural link to your product.

Author Jonah Berger says products, like animals, have natural habitats where they thrive.

These environments create triggers that cause consumers to think about them. For example, if I say “beer,” what comes to mind? You might think of drinking around a campfire, taking in a sporting event, or eating pretzels.

Likewise, your stunt should have a connection to the product you offer.

Brainstorm

Your first step is to think of ideas. Rather than doing this in a single session, I use a notepad to record ideas as I think of them. This “passive brainstorming” is often more effective than locking yourself in an office. Don’t try to come up with ideas all at once!

Remember, you’re looking for a good story. The narrative has to be interesting enough that people will talk about it.

One way to evaluate how viral your ideas are is to write them as headlines. For example:

“I used my app to livestream my partner’s eating and sleeping habits. Here’s what happened.”

“We created a drone army that dances to heavy metal music.”

Stunt checklist

A good marketing stunt has these characteristics:

- Recorded and streamed live
- Interactive
- Gives the audience an artifact to share (like a tweet, an image, etc...)
- Evokes emotion
- Can be retold as a compelling story

Launch checklist

You can ensure that you get the initial traction you need by following these steps.

Before the launch

- **Prepare your network for the launch.** Ask your friends to

schedule social media posts announcing the project at a specific time.

- **Alert your audience.** Do you have your own mailing list, Twitter following, or Facebook fans? The day before you launch, build anticipation by sending your audience a teaser.
- **Reach out to media outlets in advance.** Reporters love getting hot tips in advance. Drop them a line explaining the project, and when it will launch.
- **Think about the primary goal.** What's the main objective for the project? Do you want more leads? More brand awareness? Identify your goal, and make sure your web page has the appropriate buttons or forms.
- **Test.** Wake sure that all of your systems are working. If you get a lot of traffic, everything will be tested (server load, API limits, etc...)

During the launch

- **Interact.** As people engage with your project, make sure you acknowledge them.
- **Submit to bigger networks.** Community sites like Reddit can really boost your campaign. They love stories that are new and novel. Just make sure you're submitting your project to the appropriate place.

After the event

- **Write a post-mortem.** What were the results? Share your experience in a blog post, video or podcast.
- **Connect with media contacts.** Some reporters may want to write a story about it.
- **Follow up with leads.** If you got new leads from the event, get in touch right away. Ask them if there's anything you can start helping them with.

4

Is this the Real Life?

Nate Kontny has a pretty normal life. He's married to Lynette. Together, they have a daughter named Addison. They live in Chicago. On the weekends they go to the park with their dog. And during the week, they work together on a software product called Highrise.

What's unique about them is how they mix their personal and business life. Most software products have a newsletter where they announce new features. However, most don't start their newsletter the way Nate does.

Every issue, Nate gives a new personal update on his family. For example, here's an excerpt from his December issue:

Can't believe it's December already but with the flurry of Christmas decorations and lights, it sounds about right. We actually had a nice chance for some rest and relaxation on a beach just before Thanksgiving, only to come home to snow!

We expect company newsletters to be boring, robotic and full of corporate speak. We're used to seeing stylized stock images of models. Instead, Nate uses real family photos from his iPhone. These newsletters are surprising because they're personal.

Benefits

I asked Nate how his company, Highrise, benefits from this personal touch.



Highrise

Hello! Wanted to wish all of our mothers out there a belated Happy Mother's Day! (well, belated for most, since depending what country you're in, we may be early or late).

It's wild how much I respect Mother's Day now that we have our own little one. My wife was up with her since 2 this morning, when out of nowhere she awoke ready for the day. At least for Mother's Day we spent a perfectly gorgeous day here in Chicago with both of our moms and Addison at the conservatory and zoo.



Though a little groggy today :) Things are still humming nicely at Highrise. Check out a few new things we have for you below.

The Highrise newsletter

"I get a lot of folks emailing me back about their own lives, children, and grandchildren," he replied. "Who doesn't want to know more about their customers?"

Because his newsletters are unique, people actually read them. They even share them online. This means Highrise gets a word-of-mouth boost from something that used to be just for existing users.



Abdo Magdy

@AbdoME

Reflecting on [@natekontny](#) personal note on Mother's day at [#HighRise](#) newsletter. I like it.

10:02 AM - 11 May 2016

◀ ▶ ❤ 1

As a business, it's important that you stay top-of-mind.

If your boss asks you: "Hey, what CRM tool should we use?" you'll likely investigate whatever pops into your head first. Human connections (like getting a family update from Nate) are especially strong triggers. You're much more likely to recall an event if it was emotionally significant to you.

Finally, there's the idea of building trust. In a sense, all marketing is about getting potential customers to trust you. When Nate shares personal information from his life, he's being vulnerable. It's building this rapport over time that earns you the right to a customer's confidence.

Your turn

A lot of us like our online personas, because they're clean. We hide our mess behind smiling avatars, stylized Instagram shots, and clever status updates.

These airbrushed profiles have left a vacuum. As human beings, we crave personal connectedness. To stand out, be real.

Brainstorm

First, you'll want to think of your channels. What mediums do you use to communicate with your audience?

Sample channel list

- Blog
- Email newsletter
- Twitter
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- YouTube channel
- Point of sale
- Banner ads

After you have the list, do an audit. What does your current tone sound like? What content do you typically send?

Next, look for opportunities for each channel. What could you add that would make your communication feel more human?

Ideas

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **“Day in the life.”** Using pictures, text or video, describe what your typical day looks like. Show people how you start your day, some of your tasks, who you meet, and how you end your day.
- **Real photos.** Instead of stock images, start using real photos from your own camera roll. Put these on your website and in your newsletters.
- **Snapchat Stories.** It’s not just for teens. Snapchat makes it easy to capture brief video clips throughout your day. It stitches these all together in a story that your followers can watch. After 24 hours, each clip in your story begins to disappear.
- **Answer questions on Reddit and Quora.** People need your help. Thousands of questions get asked on sites like Reddit and Quora. Look for opportunities where you can be helpful. Be vulnerable in your responses!
- **“Year in review.”** Plan on writing an annual post, late December or early January, where you review your previous

year. Outline your significant milestones, both personal and professional.

5

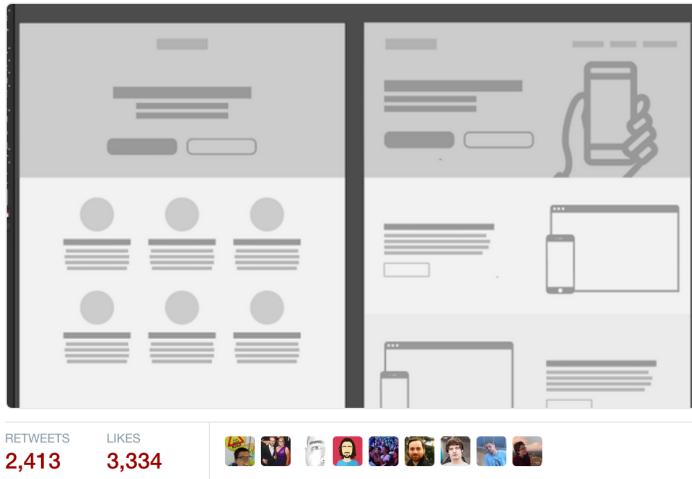
Ugly and Weird

Everyone wants a good-looking website. While taste may be cyclical, a burnt orange colour scheme in autumn, the adjectives describing the site stay the same: beautiful, clean, professional. This is what we've come to expect.

My friend Jon Gold is a designer. He recently tweeted this great bit of satire:



which one of the two possible websites are you currently designing?



10:40 AM - 2 Feb 2016

When everyone's pursuing the same look, nothing stands out. This is a huge opportunity for people looking to rise above the noise. If everyone else is building websites with a clean, flat aesthetic, why not do something different?

Break out of the pattern

If you really want to be noticed and remembered, you need to be truly unique. Human beings are wired to take note of things that are exceptional.

Matthew Lieberman, a UCLA psychology professor, states:

We always seem to be on the lookout for who else will find this helpful, amusing or interesting, and our brain data are showing evidence of that.

In this chapter, we'll look at alternatives to current design trends.

Brutalism

The term “brutalism” comes from the world of architecture, and refers to a style that was at its height from the 1950s to the 1970s. The buildings in this period were predominantly made of exposed concrete.



METU Sports hall, detail from the rear facade, 1961-1980

Like their architectural cousins, brutalist websites are stripped down and raw. They focus heavily on the words that ask: What is the purpose of this page?

The most famous brutalist site on the web is likely Craigslist:

The screenshot shows the Craigslist.ca homepage. At the top left is the Craigslist logo with 'ca' in red. Below it are links for 'post to classifieds', 'my account', and a search bar with the placeholder 'search craigslist'. To the right is a search bar for 'kelowna / okanagan' with a dropdown menu for 'english' and a 'nearby cl' section listing various Canadian cities. The main content area is divided into several sections: 'community' (activities, local news, lost+found, musicians, childcare, classes, pets, events, general groups), 'housing' (apts / housing, housing swap, housing wanted, office / commercial, parking / storage, real estate for sale, rooms / shared, rooms wanted, sublets / temporary, vacation rentals), 'personals' (strictly platonic, women seek women, women seeking men, men seeking women, men seeking men, misc romance, casual encounters, missed connections, rants and raves), 'for sale' (antiques, farm+garden, free, furniture, arts+crafts, garage sale, atv/utv/sno, auto parts, baby+kid, barter), and 'jobs' (accounting+finance, admin / office, arch / engineering, art / media / design, biotech / science, business / mgmt, customer service, education, food / bev / hosp, general labor, government, human resources, internet engineers, legal / paralegal, manufacturing, marketing / pr / ad, medical / health, nonprofit sector, real estate). A sidebar on the left contains a 'post to classifieds' button, a 'my account' link, a search bar, an 'event calendar' for May 13-19, and links for 'help, faq, abuse, legal', 'avoid scams & fraud', 'personal safety tips', 'terms of use', and 'privacy policy'.

Simple, functional and fast, the design of Craigslist hasn't really changed since the site was launched in 1995.

It's the minimalism of brutalist websites that make them so surprising. Instead of trying to fill every ounce of screen space, they focus on the bare basics.



mikeguppy.com

Messy

A lot of modern web design has revolved around being clean and organized. What if you turned that concept upside down?



hotelshanghai.de

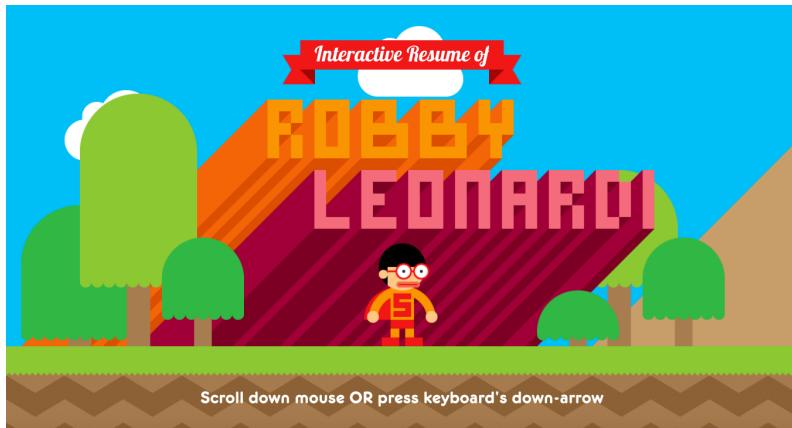
Hotel Shanghai is a German nightclub in Essen. The nightlife industry is fiercely competitive. A quick search shows 11 other dance clubs in the area. How do they stand out?

One way is their messy, eclectic website. Every time you load it, it looks different. There's always a collection of floating items in the background (a donut, red lips, an arm flexing, a panda's head). It's so weird and noisy it demands your attention.

It also fits their audience perfectly. If you're a tourist looking for a unique experience, their website promises a night to remember.

Interactive

Robby Leonardi decided that his resume wouldn't fit the mold. He created a website with all of a resumé's regular features. His looked like a video game.



www.rleonardi.com/interactive-resume

When you visit the site, you're invited to navigate a character through multiple levels. In Level 1, Robby shares an overview of who he is. As you swim through Level 2, Robby uses fish, crabs, and turtles to describe his skills. Level 3 is an exploration of his work experience. In Level 4, you board a hot air balloon, and ascend into the sky as his awards scroll by.

It's a brilliant presentation. By the end, you can't help but want to contact him.

Your turn

Remember: a website design doesn't need to be permanent. You can try something new, and see how it affects your results. If things don't work out, you can always switch back.

Ideas and examples

Look at your website. Which of these ideas might work for your business?

- **Hand drawn.** Websites like Basecamp.com and IsItTimeForaNap.com use hand drawn illustrations to give the website a homey feel.
- **Minimalism.** My website, ThisIsAWebpage.com, was all

about simplicity. It's just text, on a white background. And yet, it was viewed over 150,000 times in its first week. Minimalism can be surprising.

- **Personal.** Paul Jarvis is a friend of mine. His website, pjrvs.com, has a distinctly personal tone. At one time, the main text on his page read: "Paul Jarvis is a ridiculously hard-working strategist, writer, teacher and software creator – and the most sensitive scoundrel you'll ever meet."
- **Wacky.** What if you tried something really weird? Maybe, like SallyThurer.com, having a site that's really bizarre could work for your brand.

6

Text and Bots

I asked the people of the internet to give me their cellphone numbers. And they did. Over 200 people said I could text them anytime.

This was a part of an experiment for my podcast *MegaMaker*. I asked them to text me at +1-424-247-5762 (you can try it too). When they text the number, a bot asks them: “Do you want to be added to the list?” If they say yes, the bot asks them for their first name. Now they’re on the list!

Usually, a podcast is very passive: You just listen. The SMS campaign was designed to create engagement with listeners. Every week, I’d send them a question, or a small challenge.

Hey Justin, I'm doing a poll of
MegaMakers: are you an introvert or
extrovert?

Extrovert

Engagement was off the charts: 100% of the people on the list received the message, and nearly 50% replied.

In North America, everyone reads their text messages. It’s the universal push notification that we all pay attention to. If your pocket buzzes, you reach for your phone instinctively.

Currently, many businesses are building relationships over email. They’re growing mailing lists. They’re sending broadcasts. They’re running drip sequences.

This means people's inboxes are getting *crowded*. There's a lot of a noise. How can you break through? Move to a channel where there's less competition.

Getting someone's phone number requires a whole new level of trust. But once you've earned that right, there's no better way to build a relationship.

I recently sent out a group message, and someone replied: "is this really you?" I sent a text back: "yup, I read every reply; text me any time." He couldn't believe it. Sometimes people will text me out of the blue to ask me a question. I don't mind. I don't get too many incoming messages, and I know they really appreciate it.

Beyond SMS

While SMS still rules as the universal messaging platform in the United States and Canada, the rest of the world has moved on.

Globally, most messages are sent through apps like WhatsApp, Line, and Facebook Messenger. Much of this usage is regional. This means the market is fragmented, but it also presents a great opportunity. It means you can use whichever app best fits your market.

At the time of writing, here are the most popular apps by geographic area:

- Europe: Viber, Skype, WhatsApp
- Canada and U.S.: SMS, iMessage, Facebook Messenger
- Mexico: WhatsApp, Skype
- Brazil: WhatsApp
- China: WeChat
- Japan: LINE
- Australia: Facebook Messenger
- South Korea: KakaoTalk
- India: Nimbuzz, WhatsApp
- South Africa: WhatsApp
- Russia: WhatsApp

Here come the bots!

With the rise of text-based messaging, text-based interfaces are becoming more popular. For example, in the team chat software Slack, this command will send a reminder:

```
/remind me to pick the kids up from school at 3pm
```

The idea with bots is that instead of having a human being answer a query, you can have a computer do the work. Some use natural language processing, but most use simpler keyword matching.

How could you use bots for marketing? It's another way to provide value and earn trust. For example, there's a bot for Facebook Messenger called "And Chill" that you can ask for movie recommendations. If the bot learns what I like, I might be inclined to buy a movie that it suggests.

There's also a lot of opportunity to mix human and bot interaction. For instance, the SMS number I used for my podcast onboards new subscribers using a bot. All future interactions are handled by me responding to incoming texts.

Chat bots can also help marketers segment their lists. When a bot asks a question, it can tag a subscriber depending on their response. If you were building a mobile app, for example, it might be helpful to subdivide your list based on what phone they're using.

Today, 4:14 PM

Curious: are you on Android or iPhone?

iPhone

In this case, the system tags each contact depending on what they reply. Now, the developer can send the Google Play download link only to Android users (and the iTunes link only to iPhone users).

Start with Facebook Messenger

One of the easiest ways to get started with bots and text messaging is to build on top of Facebook Messenger.

Download your Page's Messenger code

The first step is to give people an easy way to start a conversation on Facebook with you. One way to do that is the Messenger code. It's a QR code that users can scan with their phones. When scanned, Facebook Messenger will automatically start a conversation with your brand.



A sample Messenger QR code

To download your Messenger code, follow these steps:

1. Go to the Facebook Page for your brand
2. Click the “Messages” menu option at the top of your Page
3. In the bottom left, there’s a small “Information” icon.
When you hover on it, it will say: “View Response Assistant and Messenger Code.” Click it.
4. A modal window will popup with your unique Messenger code. Download the image.

You can use that Messenger code image a variety of ways:

- Put it on your website
- Make it your profile photo on other social networks
- Print it out and put it in your shop window
- Place it in ads for your business

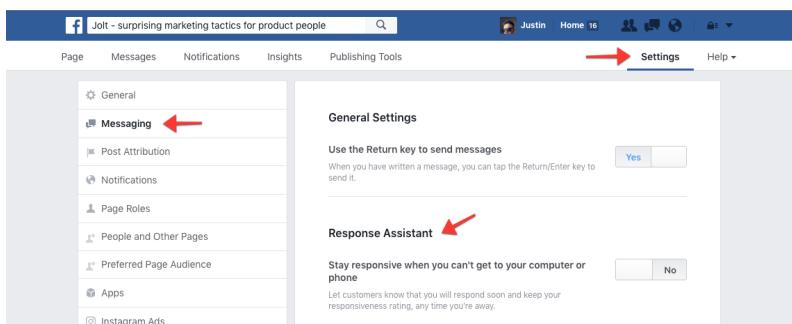
Now, when potential customers want to chat directly with your business, they have a way of contacting you.

Create a simple bot

You can’t always be at your computer. Facebook has a built-in method for displaying three types of automatic messages:

- **Welcome:** displays as soon as someone new messages your Page.
- **Instant reply:** a way of automatically messaging someone when they ask you a question.
- **Away:** a message that displays when you’re away.

To access these features, go to your Page’s settings, and click on “Messaging.” On this page you’ll find settings for “Response Assistant.”



Here you can set your automated messages. For example, my Instant Reply reads:

Hey! Justin here. Thanks for messaging me. I'll reply as soon as I can!

Advanced Messenger bots

Want to build something more complex? You have a few options:

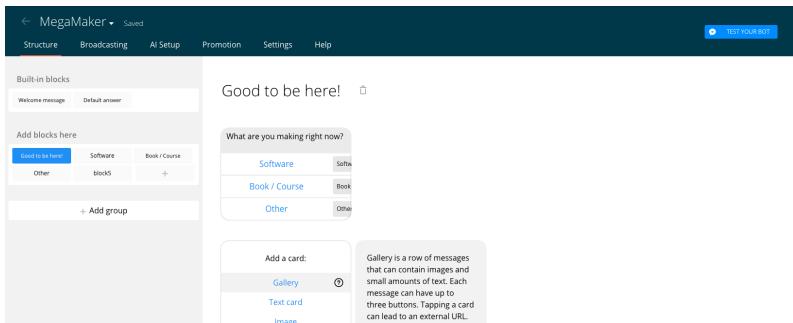
- If you are a programmer, you can visit Facebook's developer platform. They'll have instructions on setting up webhooks and tokens, as well as posting and receiving messages.
- If you're not a programmer, you can use a tool like ChatFuel.com to build a Messenger bot. This is the workflow I'll demo here.

Creating a bot in ChatFuel

I've tried a number of GUI tools for creating Messenger bots, and ChatFuel is the most intuitive. Here's a quick guide to getting started:

1. To start, head to www.chatfuel.com. Click "Create a free Facebook bot." Their site will ask you to log in to your Facebook account.
2. Once connected, it will ask you to name your bot and choose a template.
3. The "Structure" section is where you'll be able to create "Blocks." Blocks are a sequence of interactions that can be

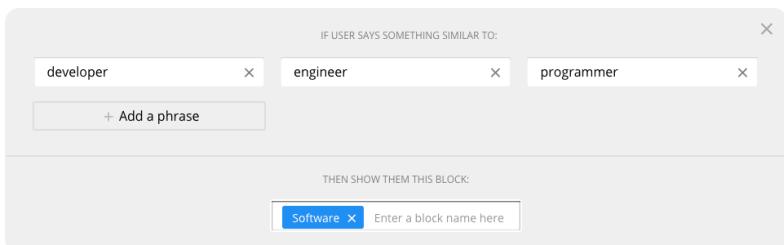
customized with cards. Most often, you'll ask a question, and have buttons available for their responses.



Building interactions using Blocks

For example, if you were a pizzeria, you might create a text card that asks, “What size pizza do you want?” You’d then present the user with three options: Small, Medium, Large. When they click the size they want, the next block might ask them to choose their toppings.

ChatFuel also has a simple Artificial Intelligence wizard that allows you to define automatic responses to certain keywords. To use it, simply go to “AI Setup” and enter in some related keywords. Now, choose the message (or block) you want to display when someone types those keywords into chat.



You can show messages when certain keywords are triggered

Other tools

ChatFuel isn't the only tool you can try. Take a look at these as well:

- **API.AI (www.api.ai)**. A developer focused tool for building

conversational bots on a variety of platforms (including Facebook Messenger).

- **ManyChat (manychat.com).** An alternative to ChatFuel for building simple Messenger bots.
- **Network Effects (networkeffects.me).** Get a custom SMS number, send text message broadcasts, and reply in Slack.

Ideas

Chat bots and text messaging are fertile ground for creative marketing. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Ask Me Anything.** Allow people to text, or message you, their questions. For example, if your product is about analytics, invite the public to ask questions about Mixpanel, Kissmetrics, and Google Analytics. You could even get creative with a bot that recognizes certain keywords; use it to answer commons questions automatically!
- **Public challenge.** Messaging allows you to engage people in realtime. I've tried challenges like: "Take a photo of what you're seeing out your window right now, and send it to me." The response is amazing. People love doing something different with their day. For the photo challenge, I published the results on my website, which generated more traffic and attention.
- **Launch it like a product.** Smart chat bots are micro-products. Get the same fanfare you would from a regular product launch! Tell the world about your new bot, and ask people to try it out. Announce it on sites like Product Hunt, Reddit and Hacker News.

Be a Winner

I've been thinking a lot about Air Jordans and Donald Trump lately.

Kids in the '80s bought Air Jordans because they wanted to "be like Mike."

People buy Trump's book, *How to Get Rich*, because they want to be wealthy like he is. As Jeffrey Pfeffer explains in Forbes:

People are seemingly hard-wired to associate with and embrace success.

Folks act *aspirationally*. They're motivated to buy because they perceive Jordan and Trump as *winners*.

There are three cognitive biases at play here.

1. Selective perception

Human beings have preconceived beliefs that drive their decision-making. One such belief is that wealthy people are infallible. In his interview with Bill Simmons, Chris Sacca explains:

The minute you're labeled a billionaire in this country everyone takes everything you say as bible. It's just, you can do no wrong, like, they just think, "Well, that guy's smart, he made a bunch of money, he must be a genius." And it's completely untrue, obviously. You know a lot of billionaires who are wrong about a lot of things.

For many, prosperity is the ultimate dream. People who desire to be rich respond favorably to messages from wealthy people.

2. Basking in reflected glory

In 1976, Robert Cialdini did a study of six universities and their football teams. He noticed a trend. After a victory by their school's team, students were more likely to:

- use the pronoun “we” when describing the team’s victory (as opposed to “they” when their team lost);
- wear university apparel;
- associate the success with themselves, despite not having actually contributed to the win.

This is called “basking in reflected glory” (or BIRGing, which I like even better). Our desire is to align ourselves with winners, and cut ourselves off from losers. Subconsciously we believe that our connection with winners also makes us a winner.

This also explains why we brag when we meet someone famous. As we tell the story, we’re “basking” in their fame (even if it’s just a reflection).

3. The bandwagon effect

Some products launch, and there’s an instant buzz about them. Everyone’s talking about it, trying it, or wanting to try it.

It’s especially noticeable with fashion trends. If you lived through the ‘80s, you remember hypercolor t-shirts. Today, you’ll see this in technology: People seem to rush to social apps in groups (Snapchat anyone?).

What causes a product to suddenly become popular?

As more people come to believe in something, others also “hop on the bandwagon” regardless of the underlying evidence. People decide to ignore their personal information signals and follow the behavior of others.

– Wikipedia

Despite our desire to be individuals, our propensity is to conform to the movement of the larger group.

People make their purchasing decisions emotionally, and then try to justify them rationally.

This is how Scott Adams (creator of Dilbert) explains Trump's success:

The evidence is that Trump completely ignores reality and rational thinking in favor of emotional appeal. He knows facts don't matter. He knows people are irrational. No one ever voted for a president based on his or her ability to name heads of state. People vote based on emotion. Period.

What does this mean for makers?

People have an innate desire to be on a winning team. It manifests itself in choices we make all the time:

- Buying the same type of phone our friends use;
- going to the popular party (and not being seen at a lame event);
- taking selfies with famous people and posting them on Instagram;
- getting excited about a new brand because everyone's talking about it.

I hate that this is how we humans act. I want to make things that matter, and have people buy them based on the merits of my product.

This truth about humanity presents me with a conundrum. What do I do about it?

For example, I write books about marketing and products. I could use a psychological tactic called *signalling* to communicate my success to others. Dan Ariely, a behavioral psychologist, explains:

The large and colorful tail of the male peacock tells the

female peacock about his strength and virility. In the same way, we humans are concerned with the signals we send the people around us about who we are. Signaling is part of the reason we buy large homes, dress up in designer clothes and buy particular cars. The car that you drive communicates something about you to the world.

It's possible that if I pose with a Porsche, people will buy more of my books. But the truth is, my dream vehicle is a bicycle. My wife and I just made a conscious decision to downsize our home. I don't want to fly first class, because I don't want to fly at all.

Here are three ways I'm thinking about this currently:

1. You can't fight human nature

Instead of fighting against these biases, use judo. Instead of trying to swim upstream, try to divert the flow in a positive direction.

2. Recognize where you're already a winner

"Everyone is an authority on something," my friend Jarrod Drysdale explains. "Show your accomplishments."

If you've written for Time Magazine, put the logo on your website. If you won the 2013 State Science Fair, put that in your byline. Worked with a big name customer? Ask them for a testimonial.

Jeffrey Zeldman recently relaunched a new studio site. I think he strikes a good balance of displaying his accolades and showing how he can help his customers.

3. Build authority the honest way

Being known as the person who helps others is the best reputation you can have.

Commit yourself to caring for people, listening to them, and offering them something of value. These will be small wins, but over time these acts of kindness add up.

Again, I like how my friend Jarrod puts it: “Even if you’re aren’t famous, you can still build trust by helping individuals one at a time.”

Your turn

Ideas

- **Celebrate your success.** Add concrete proof of the claims you make on your website (testimonials, well-known clients, earned media, awards, etc.)
- **Be generous to others.** Retweet or share what people you admire are doing.
- **Chime in.** If you have expertise to share on forums, share it. Build your reputation by helping. I talk more about this in chapter 12.

You’re not Michael Jordan and you’re not Donald Trump.

Thankfully, **helping people in a genuine way** cuts through all psychological biases. Stay focused on that, and you’ll win the affection of many.

8

Memetics

You might be surprised to learn that the word “meme” was originally coined by Richard Dawkins. It’s odd because Dawkins isn’t famous for his witty Reddit posts, but rather for evolutionary biology.

In his book, *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins describes a meme this way:

Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain, via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.

Broadly, the word refers to any unit of culture (idea, custom, style, behavior) that spreads through copying.

Memetics is the study and application of Dawkins’ theory. Researcher Susan Blackmore’s website gives great examples of the “habits, skills, songs, stories” that could be defined as memes:

- Internet memes (Rickrolling, Old Spice Man, and Dramatic Chipmunk)
- Urban legends (The Microwaved Pet)
- Popular songs (Rebecca Black’s “Friday”)
- Children’s games (“Cinderella dressed in yell-a” jump rope game)
- Chain letters (Bill Gates promising a financial reward)
- New age fads (Healing crystals)

When I asked Dr. Blackmore to review my list, she replied:

Remember that a meme is any information copied from person to person. So this includes every story ever told and passed on — not just the famous ones that replicate very successfully. It also includes all the technologies that have been passed around in human history, as well as financial systems, scientific theories, works of art and much, much more.

Netflix & Chill

One of Susan Blackmore's central tenets is that memes are not always copied perfectly. They adapt and change as they are imitated.

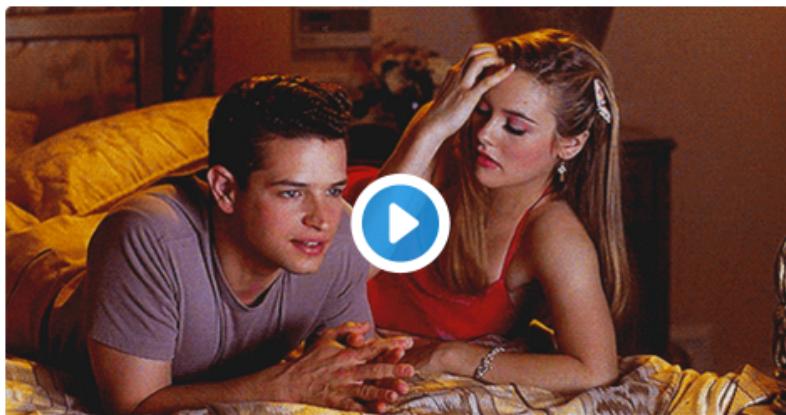
Since 2015, the phrase “Netflix and chill?” has been synonymous with “do you want to have sex?” But that wasn’t always the case.

Early uses of the expression weren’t sexual at all:

- 2009: “I’m about to log onto Netflix and chill for the rest of the night.” – @NoFaceNina
- 2010: “No workout tonight. Just feeling a little wiped. Gonna queue up a show on Netflix and chill with my kids.” – @Fenriq
- 2011: “I think I’m just gonna watch Netflix and chill today. I work for the rest of the break.” – @aymenclutch

The phrase undergoes a very memetic evolution. Initially, its meaning is literal: the desire to relax and watch a movie. As usage increases, a hint of sexual innuendo appears. Eventually, after millions of people mimic the innuendo, the meaning changes.

Netflix has only made a few passing references to the meme. I was only able to find a post on Tumblr, which they also shared on Twitter.



Netflix US

@netflix

Follow

Netflix and chill? No, really.

11:02 AM - 22 Jul 2015



2,276



2,934

They don't really need to mention it. It has taken on a life of its own. What's the value of all that free advertising? It's hard to quantify, but their VP of communications, Steve Swasey, admits that "the best marketing for Netflix continues to be word-of-mouth."

Netflix spent \$1 billion on marketing in 2016. If word-of-mouth is their strongest form of promotion, you better believe that the "Netflix and chill" meme has been valuable for the brand.

Can memes be engineered?

Many memes are accidental. They begin as something small and innocuous, before becoming culturally significant.

However, Richard Dawkins also asserted that memes could be deliberately created. He called this process *memetic engineering*.

In the fall of 2013, the video everyone was sharing was: "Worst Twerk

Fail EVER – Girl Catches Fire!” The title is pretty self-explanatory: The video shows a woman setting up a camera and doing a handstand. She then falls over onto a candle she had burning on the coffee table. Her yoga pants catch on fire, she screams, and the video ends.

In one week, the video received over 9 million views on YouTube. It was covered by hundreds of media outlets. This was just after Miley Cyrus’ infamous twerking performance on the MTV Video Music Awards. Some editorials blamed Cyrus for the accident, stating she was a bad influence.

And then, on Sept. 9, 2013, late-night host Jimmy Kimmel announced that the whole video was a hoax.

He revealed that the woman in the video was actually a stunt person, named Daphne Avalon. Then he showed the rest of the video. In the extended cut, immediately after Daphne’s pants catch on fire, Kimmel bursts through the door with a fire extinguisher.

Although the whole video was filmed with a basic webcam, the set itself was built on-location at Jimmy Kimmel’s studio. It was professionally directed by Brad Morrison. They applied a pyrotechnic gel to Daphne’s pants (she wore Kevlar underneath to protect her skin). They had three fake tables. They did three takes. Then they put it online and didn’t tell anyone. Kimmel didn’t tweet about it, and they didn’t alert any news desks.

Communities like Reddit and 4Chan have another word for an engineered meme: *forced meme*. For many, the attraction to memes is that they aren’t self-promotional. They’re bits of culture that appear serendipitously.

Kimmel proved that memes can be fabricated. In a Fast Company interview, director Brad Morrison explained why it worked:

The timing was excellent. Miley’s performance at the VMAs had everyone talking about twerking, and my video — that looked very real — featured a very convincing twerking fail

that ended with a cute girl catching on fire. Who wouldn't want to watch that? And people arguing over whether it was real or not just added fuel to the fire. It's all in the details, and understanding what people want to see.

The dark side of forced memes

One year after Kimmel's stunt, a startup from Chicago decided to try a similar tactic. They published a video entitled: "a hippo in the Chicago river?" In the video, tourists are looking under a bridge, when the head of a hippopotamus appears.

While it's not as convincing as the twerking hoax, it garnered about 90,000 views. It too was covered on some local news stations.

One month later, MortgageHippo, the company behind the stunt, posted a video called "Chicago River Hippo Revealed!" They show the original video, and then the camera pans to a spokesperson, who encourages people to check out their website.

What were the results? The reveal video got less than 8,000 views. Many commenters felt the stunt gave them a negative perception of the company. On a GrowthHackers thread, David Haddad commented:

People generally dislike being manipulated by brands.

This shows the risk in manufacturing memes. While they have the potential to spread, and impact the culture, they can also damage your brand.

Mark Surman articulates this nicely in his book, *Commonplace*:

Memetics isn't magic, and it's extremely difficult to manufacture a successful meme from the ground up. Ideas don't always behave the way that you want them to.

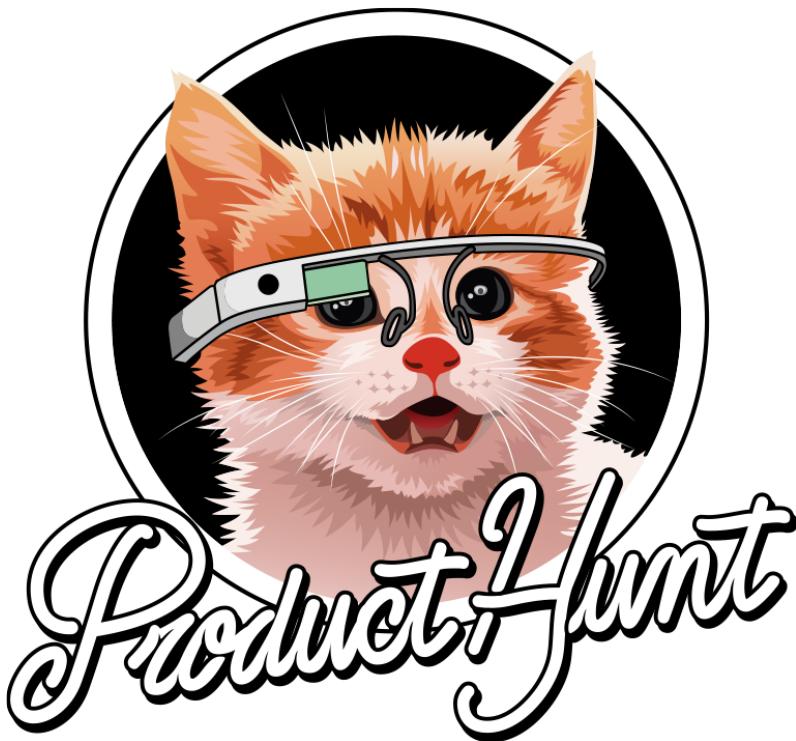
When memes work

As far as new startups go, Product Hunt had everything you could

ask for. They'd attracted over \$7 million in funding, including money from the world-renowned venture capital firm, Andreessen Horowitz. Their product, a daily leaderboard for new tech products, was gaining thousands of new users each week.

One thing they didn't have? A memorable logo. The founders had chosen a very simple design: the letter "P" on an orange circle. Many users on social media pointed out that this looked like the symbol for "Parking" in many cities.

An avid user of the site, named Jesse Thomas, sent in some fan art. One design featured an orange and white kitten, wearing Google glasses, with the words "Product Hunt" in cartoon script.



The Product Hunt team liked it so much, they made stickers from the

artwork and began sending them to early users in the mail. These users would, in turn, tweet photos of their special mail packages.

Soon reporters, bloggers, and fans started using the “Glasshole Kitty” as the unofficial mascot of the brand. It would turn up in press coverage, at meetups, and the stickers themselves became hot commodities. The meme was born.

Instead of discouraging the use of Glasshole Kitty, Product Hunt embraced it. Ryan Hoover later commented:

Although it [initially] made me nervous, we recognized an opportunity to encourage the community to become part of the product.

While they never replaced their original logo, the kitty graphic has been adapted and used on T-shirts, their Twitter account, and to launch new brands (like Product Hunt Podcasts).

Users continue to copy, imitate, and remix the meme. A group of Product Hunt fans in Miami hand-drew the mascot to welcome people to their meetup. Glasshole Kitty has also been featured in its own video game, and a coloring page.

Your turn

As you explore the world of memes; be careful! Heed Mark Surman’s warning: “Ideas don’t always behave the way that you want them to.”

Brainstorm

Product Hunt’s example shows us that perhaps the best memes come from your community and fans. Here are some brainstorming questions:

1. Has your brand produced any slogans that your audience has latched onto?
2. Do you ever receive fan art? Is there a particular piece that could get traction?

3. Search for your brand on Twitter. Then, filter by images. What images do people share in conjunction with your brand?
4. What units of culture have you created that you could open source? Allow your audience to remix and share!
5. Is your logo something that people would be proud to display on their laptop? If not, is there a mascot that your product could adopt?

9

Comics

When I was a kid, my family had a tradition.

Driving home from church, my dad would pull our station wagon up to Beach Corner Store. He'd go inside, and five minutes later he emerged with a copy of the Sunday newspaper.

Once home, he'd open up the paper. In the middle, in all of its colored glory, was the comics section. He'd hand that to us kids, and we'd each take a page. Splayed out on the living room floor, we'd read comics like Calvin and Hobbes, FoxTrot, and For Better or Worse through the afternoon.

There's something magnetic about comics. It's hard to ignore them. Why are they so compelling? Illustrator Randy Field explains why:

Comics are the most complete form of storytelling, blending visuals with words to actively engage more parts of the brain than any other type of storytelling.

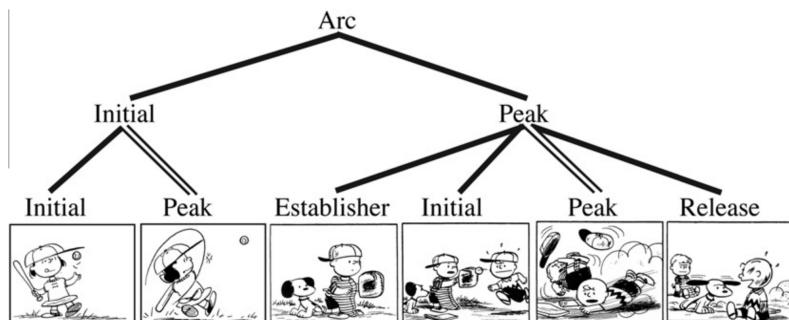
It all comes back to stories. Creating a comic strip is one way to tell your story in a unique way.

Susan Greenfield, a neuroscientist at Oxford University, explains:

Stories have a beginning, a middle and an end — a structure that encourages our brains to think in sequence, to link cause, effect and significance.

Comics gives us a great form in which to tell our stories. They have a natural arc: from the first panel to the resolution in the last panel.

There's a PhD named Neil Cohn who has devoted his academic study to the effect of comics on the brain. He's found that we process sequential images in comics in a similar way to how we process written language.



N. Cohn et al., 2012, (Pea)nuts and bolts of visual narrative: Structure and meaning in sequential image comprehension. Cognitive Psychology, 65(1), 1–38.

A typical comic strip will start with an initial action and introduce the characters. The action peaks at a climax, which is then resolved at the end of the comic.

In the example above, there are actually two narratives.

The first has Lucy throwing the ball in the air (Initial action), and hitting it with the bat (Peak).

The second narrative involves Charlie Brown running for home base. It starts in the third panel, and establishes Schroeder as backstop, and Snoopy as umpire. The primary action is Charlie Brown coming into view running for home, and diving. The arc ends with Snoopy calling Charlie Brown as “safe!”

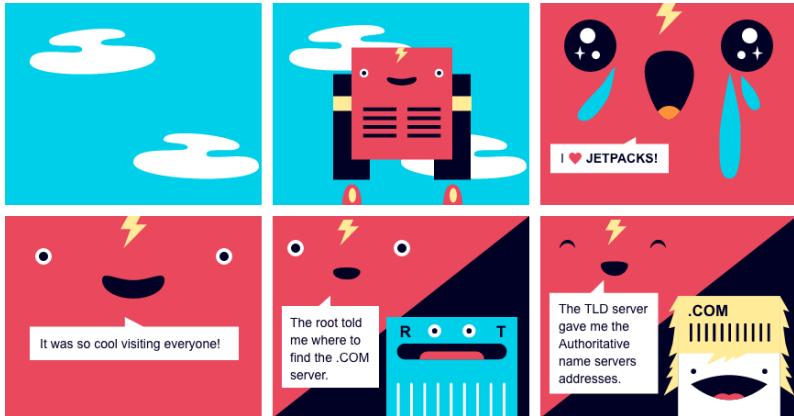
Example: DNSSimple

DNSSimple offers domain registration and DNS hosting. Their

challenge? To explain how DNS (The Domain Name System) works. It's hard. It's boring, complex and technical.

How did they overcome this hurdle? With comics!

Their team created an interactive web comic at howdns.works.



The *How DNS Works* comic

The DNSSimple comic below is abridged, but you can see it follows the pattern of:

- Establish characters
- Initial action
- Action leads into a climax (the peak of the narrative)
- Resolution (not shown in the example)

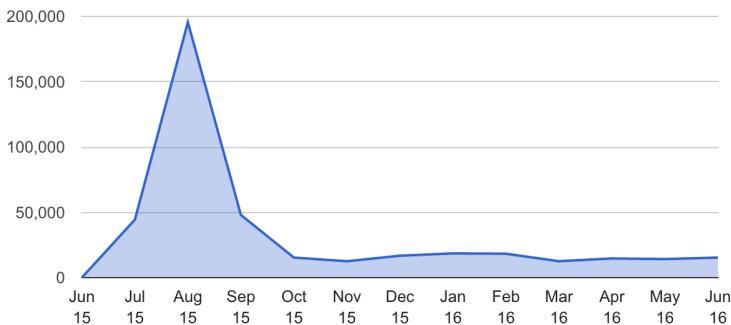
Your comics should follow a similar structure.

DNSSimple released their comic in six episodes, each explaining a different aspect of the Domain Name System.

Results

When they launched in July 2015, the comic gained some traction on Twitter. However, it wasn't until Aug. 8 that it became a huge hit on Hacker News and Designer News. This caused a huge spike in traffic, with nearly 200,000 visits that month.

64 Jolt



Since that initial spike, the site still gets a steady 15,000 visits per month. Even better, once people discover it, they share it enthusiastically. For example, here's what Twitter user @omcgo posted:

I wish my whole CompSci course had been taught like this!

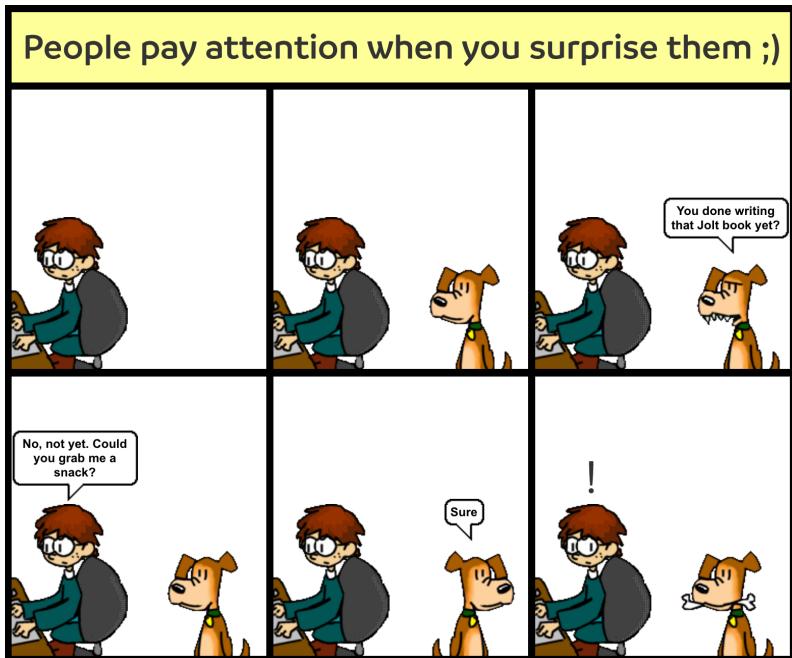
Your turn

Remember, the purpose of a comic strip is to tell a story. Before you start drawing, or hire an illustrator, make sure you've defined the narrative you want to tell.

Practice

A good way to practice storytelling is to use a simple tool like Stripcreator.com and try to implement Neil Cohn's framework.

Below is a strip I created to practice this sequence: establish characters, initial action, climax, and resolution.



Granted, my comic isn't super compelling yet, but that's the point of practice! The more times you repeat an exercise, the stronger your skill will become.

Tools

Want to try to create your own comics? Here are a few tools you can try:

- **Pixton (pixton.com)**. The best online comic software I've found. It gives you complete creative control: create your own characters, and put them in different poses.
- **Stripcreator (stripcreator.com)**. Simple comics, and an easy to use interface. You're free to publish the comics as long as you it's not from a contributing artist.
- **Procreate (procreate.si)**. If you have an iPad Pro with a pencil, you might want to check out this app. It's been designed specifically for the iPad, with illustrators in mind.

- **The Sketchnote Handbook.** Want to learn to draw? Mike Rohde has a great book that will teach you the fundamentals.

Hire a professional

Here are some amazing illustrators and cartoonists you can hire for custom comics:

- Sarah Steenland (sarahsteenland.com)
- Keenan Kirk (kidpixel.ca)
- Marc Johns (marcjohns.com)
- Kiki Schirr (kikischirr.com)

Ideas

- **Interactive.** If you're creating a web comic, why not make your strip interactive? Allow people to click on panels, find easter eggs, etc...
- **Print it.** Create a physical comic book (or single sheet) you can give away. People love getting physical items!
- **Serialize it.** Instead of just creating one strip, why not create a series?
- **Share your journey.** Make the comic autobiographical! Share the journey of what it takes to run your business in illustrated form.
- **Go lo-fi.** You don't need to be an amazing artist to draw a comic. One of the web's most popular comics, XKCD, is just stick figures.

10

Swag

Two strangers met in Cologne, Germany, because of a T-shirt.

They were both attending a conference. Ben was a presenter, and Sammy was in the audience. Sammy immediately recognized Ben's shirt: It was from my podcast, MegaMaker. The two connected, and snapped a photo for me.



Ben later described the whole meeting like this:

That moment at Leancamp Cologne was surreal. It was totally a secret handshake moment ... like ... Whaaaat, you toooo?

Physical goods can draw people together. Wearing the shirt of your favorite band makes you feel like you're part of a tribe. It also helps you identify other members of the tribe.

Tribal marketing

I'm going to use this chapter as a vehicle to talk about tribes. Seth Godin first introduced this idea in his book, *Tribe: We Need You to Lead Us*:

A tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea.

Can companies start tribes? Absolutely. One of the best examples is Basecamp (formerly 37signals). They attracted a huge audience on their blog, *Signal v. Noise*, by sharing mantras like “build software for yourself,” “have an enemy; pick a fight,” and “meetings are toxic.” Their writing was brash and opinionated; it resonated.

When they published their book, *Rework*, you started seeing it on bookshelves everywhere. If you noticed it on a friend's bookshelf, there was a good chance they were a part of their “tribe.” It was an invitation to discuss your favorite *Signal v. Noise* essay.

The real diehard fans procured Basecamp stickers, and put them on their laptops. Others made photocopies of mantras from the book (“Good enough is fine”) and pinned them to their wall.

In *Rework*, Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson drive this home:

All companies have customers. Lucky companies have fans. But the most fortunate companies have audiences. An audience can be your secret weapon.

If your brand has a tribe, they'll be your biggest cheerleaders. And if you give them a T-shirt? You better believe they're going to wear it proudly.

Making a T-shirt

There's nothing worse than a bad T-shirt. While T-shirts can create a shared connection with your audience, it can also have the reverse effect. If your shirt is on cheap material, doesn't fit right, or has ugly artwork, it's more likely to end up at Goodwill than create goodwill.

If you're looking for an example of a great company T-shirt, check out InVision's shirts. InVision is prototyping software for designers. They hired a talented illustrator named Kyle Steed to do the artwork for their shirts. The result was a branded shirt that doesn't *feel* self-promotional.



Three characteristics of good apparel

- **Great artwork.** You need to have something compelling on the shirt. Whether it's your logo, slogan or artwork, make sure it's something people want to wear on their chest.
- **High quality garment.** Cheap shirts feel cheap. They

shrink over time, the cut looks funny, and the fabric feels itchy. Get something that feels good.

- **Right fit.** The cut of the garment is also important. Some manufacturers have shirts that are short and wide, others go for a long and slim cut. It's worth getting samples from a number of vendors, and finding the ones you like best. Remember: men, women, youth, children and tots will all need different shapes.

Your turn

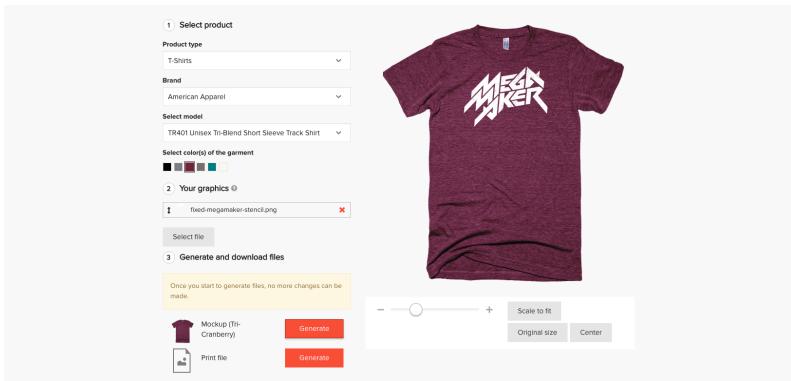
Manufacturing T-shirts

Traditionally, getting T-shirts screenprinted was an expensive venture. You had to guess which sizes you'd need, order a minimum of 50 shirts, get them shipped to your office, store them somewhere, and then mail them out by hand whenever you did a giveaway (or sold them) to a customer.

There's a better way.

Nowadays, I recommend people use a print-on-demand service like Printful, because they handle everything. They store the inventory of blank shirts. When an order is placed, they do direct-to-garment printing, package it, and ship it. And if you have it hooked up to a provider like WooCommerce, Shopify, or Squarespace, you don't have to do a thing! It all happens automatically.

They also have a great way of generating mockups for different types of garments.



Here are the steps:

1. Go to the Printful mockup generator:
www.theprintful.com/generator.
2. Choose the T-shirt brand you'd like to use (I prefer American Apparel) and the model (the *TR401 Unisex Tri-Blend Short Sleeve Track Shirt* is the highest quality).
3. Upload your artwork, and position it on the T-shirt.
4. Once you're happy with the mockup, generate the Mockup File and the Print File.
5. To save your files, create a "store" account on Printful.
6. Now you can order some samples! Go to your Dashboard, and then click on "Submit Order." This will give you a 20% discount, and free shipping.
7. When you receive the samples, look for three things: How does the logo look? How does the garment feel? How well does it wash and dry?
8. How do people react to the shirt when you wear it? Gather online feedback too. Post photos of you wearing the shirt on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

Ordering items through the Printful is more expensive than ordering in bulk, but a lot less hassle. You can try other items too: embroidered hats, mugs, cellphone cases.

This kind of direct printing allows you to figure out which items get the best response. It also allows you to collect data. For example: which

T-shirt sizes get ordered the most? Armed with this data, you could confidently do a bulk screen-printed order and not waste money.

Other tools

If you're looking for other ways to start making your own merchandise, here are some ideas.

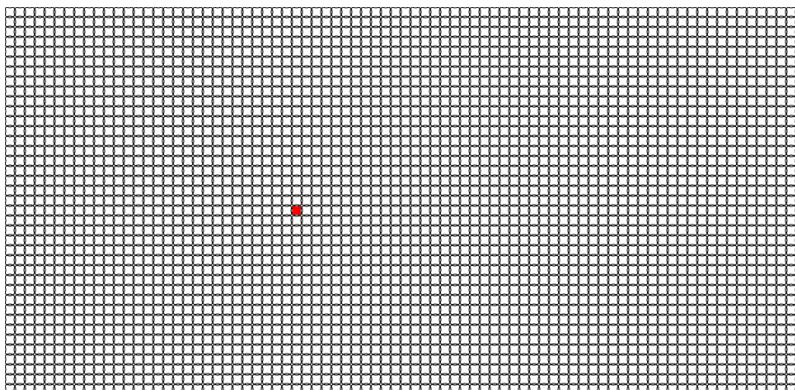
- **Teespring (teespring.com)**. Instead of printing shirts on demand, crowdfund screen printed shirts.
- **Cotton Bureau (cottonbureau.com)**. Another crowdfunding option; focused more on the design niche.
- **StartupThreads (startuptools.com)**. Order items in bulk, and have StartupThreads warehouse and ship them for you.
- **Packs (startuptools.com/packs)**. Create a custom branded package that contains various items (T-shirts, stickers, notebooks).
- **Scout Books (scoutbooks.com)**. Have you seen those Field Notes pocket notebooks? Scout Books allows you to create custom version, with your artwork.
- **Sticker Mule (stickermule.com)**. Upload your logo and get high-quality stickers made. You can order in small quantities, and even sell stickers directly in their online store.
- **Button Frog (buttonfrog.com)**. Same concept as Sticker Mule, but for buttons!

11

The Nerve

Writing is one of the best ways to get your message out. Whether it's on your blog, a specialized landing page, or on someone else's platform, words are powerful tools.

One of the common complaints I hear from people is: "Nobody's visiting my blog." The challenge is noise. Every month, 58.3 million new blog posts are written. Yours is just a drop in a very, very large bucket.



Even big, popular sites have a hard time attracting large numbers of views. The Huffington Post, for example, is one of the web's most popular blogs. On an average weekday, they get about 15.6 millions views per day. However, Nate Silver estimates that only 20% of their posts generate about 80% of their traffic. The median post only gets about 550 views (average views per post is 2,150).

Looking for exposed nerves

Those stats might discourage you. For me, I see a big opportunity. Sites like the Huffington Post are playing the volume game: they produce hundreds of articles each day, hoping that two of them stick.

You and I on the other hand, have a target market that we really understand. We know them better than anyone else. We know where they hang out. We know what events they go to. And most importantly, we can find the issues they really care about.

If you've been spending time with your audience you've probably heard them talking. They've been sharing their hopes, dreams, fears and pains. These are the exposed nerves of the community. When you're able to articulate what your audience is feeling, you'll attract their attention.

Case study: designers

DesignerNews.co is where professional designers hang out. It's like Reddit in that you can submit links, upvote them, and leave comments. Here's the top voted story right now: "Zara Copies Indie Artist's Work, Then Says She's Not Famous Enough For It to Matter."

Here's the gist of the story: Zara, a Spanish fashion retailer, have been plagiarizing artwork from an independent illustrate named Tuesday Bassen. It's a compelling report, especially when you see Bassen's work next to the pieces being produced by Zara.

tuesdaybassen asked **Z A R A** to stop stealing her artwork,

and they said, "the lack of distinctiveness of your client's purported designs makes it very hard to see how a significant part of the population anywhere in the world would associate the signs with Tuesday Bassen." Then they stole her art five more times.



@tuesdaybassen

www.shoptuesday.com

#SupportTuesdayBassen

If you hang out on Designer News long enough, you'll see this is a reoccurring narrative. There's a lot of designers who have had their work stolen. Whenever a new story appears, it ignites a deep passion in the community.

Now, let's say your business serves designers. You're looking for content that's going to attract readers. What should you do?

Look for the smoke, find the fire, and write about that.

Headline brainstorm:

- “How to protect your design before it’s stolen.”
- “What to do if your design gets stolen.”

- “Why big brands rip off small artists, and what you can do about it.”

Case study: students

Where do college students hang out? If you guessed Reddit, you'd be right. Statista estimates that 58% of Reddit's active users are 18-29. Students are also on SnapChat, but it's harder to search the conversation there.

Reddit is composed of sub-topics, or subreddits. For example, reddit.com/r/college is one of the many subreddits devoted to discussion about post-secondary life.

If you filter for the top stories from the past year, you'll notice a trend. Most of the top voted stories deal with finances. These includes stories about student debt, unrealistic college expenses, and the poor job market for graduates.

The screenshot shows the r/college subreddit homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for COLLEGE, hot, new, rising, controversial, top (which is highlighted in blue), gilded, wiki, and promoted. Below the navigation bar, a dropdown menu is open under the 'links from: past year' heading, with an arrow pointing to it. The main content area displays several top posts:

- How I won over \$100k in scholarships (by somebody who isn't getting paid to market to you) (self.college)
- High college fees you may not know about (imgur.com)
- You know college is expensive (imgur.com)

Each post includes upvote counts (e.g., 4 272, 5 252), submission times, and user names.

One particular headline from that list jumps out:

How I won over \$100k in scholarships (by somebody who isn't getting paid to market to you)

That's a great headline. You can see why it attracted so much attention. It touches the central nerve: college students need money. These are the type of headlines (and stories) you need to write to attract attention.

Craft the story

Donald Miller is a New York Times best-selling fiction writer. Lately, he's been teaching everything he knows about writing stories.

His StoryBrand framework is excellent. In it he provides the crucial ingredients every story needs:

- A hero
- A problem facing the hero
- A guide who helps the hero on their journey

Most of us want to make our business the hero. According to Miller, that's the wrong approach:

“We all self-identify as the hero. But people aren’t looking for a hero; they’re looking for a guide.”

When you write a blog post, a landing page, or an email, make your customer the hero. Your job is to give them a plan and guide them to success.

>Your turn

To find those exposed nerves, you have to be genuinely invested in your community. Here's the steps.

Brainstorm

First, think of all the different places your audience hangs out.

Online

- Forums
- Subreddits
- News aggregators
- Social networks (try using Twitter search)
- Blogs
- Support sites

Offline

- Conferences
- Meetups
- Workshops

- Coffee shops
- Festivals
- Industry parties

Listen

The next step is to pay attention. As you're spending time with your audience online and offline, listen. Ask yourself:

- What topics come up repeatedly?
- What's everyone struggling with right now?
- What's on people's wish lists?
- Where do people get stuck?
- What truth about themselves are they hiding?
- In what ways are they oppressed?
- What products, apps and websites do they use regularly?
- Who are their heroes? Who do they aspire to be?

Identify the nerve

Here's a few examples of content I've written that hit a nerve:

- **This is a web page (thisisawebpage.com).** Viewed over 448,454 times. *What nerve did it hit?* There are many web designers and writers who feel that words are the most important part of a website. They feel like the writing often gets ignored.
- **Your developers aren't slow (sprint.ly/blog/your-developers-arent-slow).** Shared over 6,386 times in its first week. *What nerve did it hit?* Managers often feel their engineers aren't working fast enough. Developers feel like their managers are being unfair.
- **Focus on your own shit (<https://medium.com/mega-maker/focus-on-your-own-shit-b8dc14f8c7c0>).** Viewed over 47,294 times on Medium (and recommended by 3,048 people). *What nerve did it hit?* Creative people often compare themselves to others, and feel bad about themselves because of it.

People keep asking me how I'm able to identify these topics. The best

answer I have is *you have to spend the time*. Only by spending time in a community will you see the right topics bubbling up.

It's even better if you're an active member of that group, and can feel that nerve in your own life.

Test it

Once you have a topic you think will touch a nerve, you need to create a small test.

My favorite way to do this is by tweeting about it first. If a simplified message resonates you know you're on to something.



Justin Jackson

@mijustin

Follow

Quit worrying about what everyone else is doing.

Instead, focus on the people you're trying to help. That's how you make real progress.

11:54 AM - 29 Feb 2016



264



331

You can also test a topic out by posting about it on a forum, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Reddit.

Create and launch

Next you need to create your piece of content. Writing and podcasting work best for me, but video, animation, or photos might work better for you. Keep it interesting! If you're writing, make your writing conversational and succinct. If you're doing video, keep the length between five to seven minutes.

The key to launching a piece of content is leverage the networks, websites and influencers in your community.

Amplification steps:

1. Give influencers a sneak peek *before* you publish. Ask if they'll help share it.
2. Publish your content.
3. Share your content on high value networks (Reddit, Hacker News, Designer News).
4. Mobilize your personal network to help you get initial traction.
5. Engage with the response

If you don't get traction don't despair. Timing and luck are always factors.

Try the steps again, this time syndicating the same content on a different platform (Medium.com for example).

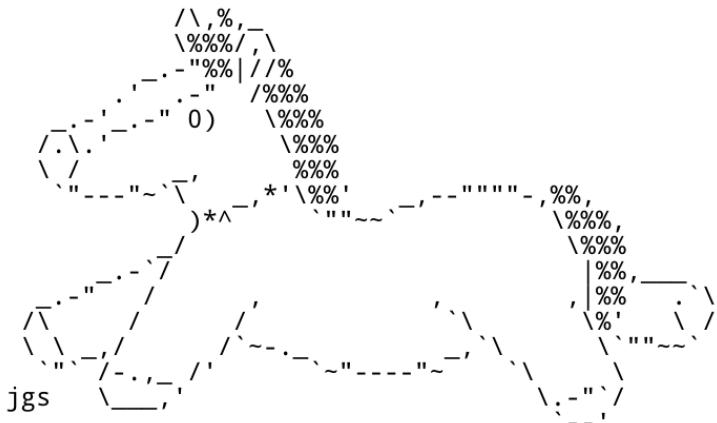
Sometimes your material is good; it just needs another chance!

12

Easter Eggs

Here's a trick to engage a technical audience. When web developers visit a web page, they'll often view the source code for that page.

Code is written using basic ASCII text characters. ASCII art is the process of drawing images (or bubble letters) with those characters. Here's an example:



Horse, by Joan G. Stark

Believe it or not, this is a full blown art form. Originally pioneered by Kenneth Knowlton in 1966, the community has grown to thousands of artists. Joan Stark, whose example is above, was especially prolific. Between 1996 and 2003 she made hundreds of pieces. She later commented:

I am just amazed at all ASCII artwork. There are a limited number of characters available on the keyboard and they are all fixed. Considering this fact, it is truly remarkable that there are so many different ASCII art pictures.

When software engineers view the source code for a web page, they're expecting to see HTML, JavaScript, and CSS.

This gives you, the website owner, the chance to surprise and delight them. Using an ASCII art generator, you can create your own art and embed it in your web page. Here's some art I used at the top of one of my pages:

```

1 <!DOCTYPE html>
2 <!--
3
4   / /
5   / \ / \ / \ ( ) / \
6   / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ < / - / -
7   / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \
8
9 http://justinjackson.ca
10 -->
11 <html>
12 <head>
13   <meta charset="UTF-8">
14   <title>Marketing for Developers</title>

```

These hidden features are called “Easter eggs.” In this case, I’m encouraging people to visit www.justinjackson.ca, which is my blog.

Here’s a side-benefit: when people find an Easter egg like this, they’re so thrilled they want to share it. I’ve had dozens of people share that exact screenshot on Twitter.

Case study: Balsamiq’s Easter egg

Balsamiq is a software company that builds tools for creating mockups. Their website looks pretty standard, until you visit their “Company” page. As you hover over their team photo, the words “Giddy up, partner” pop up. When you click the photo, the whole page transforms.

Regular team photos are replaced with each employee wearing western

garb. The men are sporting cowboy hats and fake moustaches. The women are wearing long country dresses.

The typeface changes as well: from Myriad Pro, to something more western looking. Their slogan, “Life’s too short for bad software,” is swapped for “Shucks! Life’s shorter than a snake without a tail. Ain’t no time for lackluster software.”



The goal is to amuse people; to make them feel like they've discovered a great secret.

Peldi, Balsaqmiq's founder, describes one of the hidden benefits of this approach:

The team loves it. It's a little secret they can share with their families and friends. It really embodies the “work hard, party hard” ethos, and it helps us convey that we don't take each other too seriously.

Why Easter eggs?

The real benefit of little gags like this is that people talk about them. When human beings find a hidden secret, we have to share it with the world.

It's what causes Mike Garrett, from Alexandria, Virginia, to tweet about Panic's code editor.



Mike N Garrett

@MikeNGarrett

Follow

Just found an Easter egg in Coda from [@panic](#). Hold option and click the plus at the bottom of the window on the Sites tab. Sound on. :-D

8:55 AM - 25 Jul 2016

◀ ↻ 1 ❤ 3

Word of mouth is still the primary way people discover new things. According to Ofcom research, 77% of people found new apps because of recommendations from family and friends.

Easter eggs are just another way to get people talking.

Your turn

Creating an Easter egg is a lot like creating a treasure hunt. You need to brainstorm a good surprise, and then you need to find a good hiding place.

Ideas

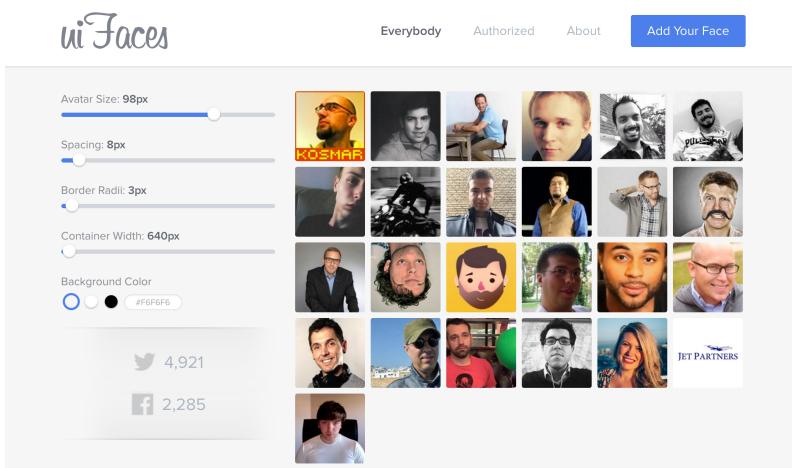
- **Key combinations.** In software and on websites, you can use a series of keystrokes to unlock the secret. The most famous is the Konami Code, which is these keystrokes: ↑↓↔↔↔→BA.
- **Hidden links.** Use hidden links on your website to send people to your Easter egg. This could be a link hidden in the source code (like in my example above), links hidden in your text, or links that are invisible.
- **Release notes.** App updates are usually accompanied by release notes that most people glaze over. Spotify saw an opportunity, and includes items like “This app is growing a really fancy beard” in its updates. These are shared by fans online.
- **In search.** Online search is an especially good place to hide

Easter eggs. Define a specific query that returns a gag result. For example, if you go to Google Images and search “Atari Breakout” the game will appear in your browser.

- **In settings.** Most folks don’t change their settings that often, which makes its a good place to hide gags. If you go to your Facebook language settings, you can change your language to “Pirate.” Each new Android release hides a new Easter egg in the *Settings >> About* screen.
- **On your 404 page.** In the Hypertext Transfer Protocol, the 404 error tells the user that the server can’t find the requested resource. Traditionally a 404 page tells the user “This page cannot be found,” but it’s also a great opportunity to get creative. One of my favorites is starwars.com/404.

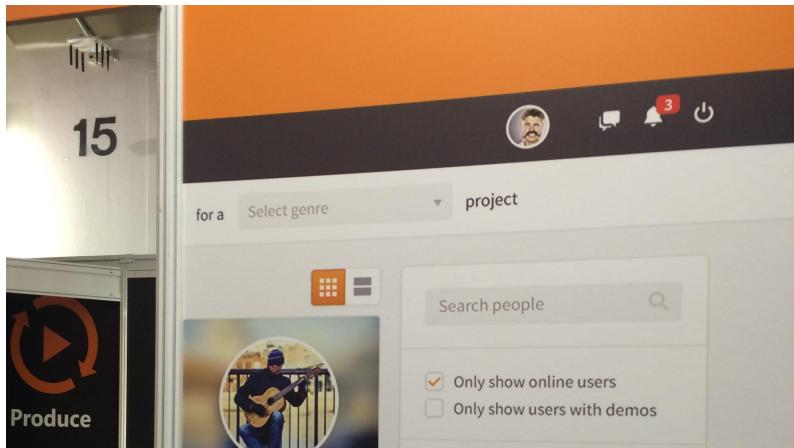
The Nice Virus

I unleashed a virus by accident. I uploaded a photo of myself with a fake moustache to a website called uiFaces.com.



uiFaces allows anyone to make their photo available for use in mockups, website designs, and even print design.

Since I uploaded my profile photo, it's been used hundreds of times in different projects. Nearly every week I get an email from someone who asks: "did you give this company permission to use your photo?" I even had a friend notice it on a physical display at a trade show!



The experiment taught me how much people equate my avatar online, with me as a person. Folks that know me are concerned that my image is being misused. Facial recognition is a powerful thing.

People buy from people

Who would you rather follow on Twitter: a person, or a brand? I recently polled my followers, and the results were overwhelming. People want to follow real human beings, not corporate accounts.

The person (CEO, founder) 100%

The brand (company) 0%

26 votes • 167 hours left

If this is true, it means you have way more “brand” potential than your actual business. As a human being, you can connect with people in a way that a corporation never could.

Your avatar is how people identify you online. As they see it more often, they’ll form a picture of who you are: “Oh, that’s Janet the designer,” “Look, there’s William the guy that’s always tweeting funny photos.”

The opportunity, for you, is to cultivate the kind of reputation you want to have.

Be helpful, everywhere

My friend Josh Doody is a career coach. If you go to Quora.com and ask: “What’s the best way to negotiate a salary?” it’s very likely that one of Josh’ answers will show up.

What are some effective strategies for negotiating salary for a new job offer?



Josh Doody, Author, focused on salary negotiations

8.4k Views · Most Viewed Writer in Negotiating Strategies

This is my strategy, which I've used to help myself and many other people maximize their salaries. The "Haggle to get to your final salary" section is written to match your specific situation. This... [\(more\)](#)

Upvoted | 28

Downvote Comment

...

Josh’s avatar on Quora, while only 50 x 50 pixels large, is one way for him to build a profile in his niche. As people increasingly see his answers, they start to see him as a career expert.

Another name that jumps to mind is Kai Davis. When Kai started going to conferences, he volunteered as the official note taker. He dutifully wrote detailed bullet points for each talk, and put them all on his website. This was a huge benefit to both conference organizers and attendees. His notes, and his website, were often promoted on-stage, and in event emails.

Soon, people started seeing Kai as the “notes guy.” He’d show up at the after-party, and people would run up and thank him for his work. He was introduced to hundreds of new people, some who later became clients.

If you want to be approachable, show that you’re a helpful person.

Your profile photo is your brand

As a face becomes more familiar, the more likely it is to be recognized

and remembered. This might seem like common sense, but it's important to keep in mind when we think about our avatars.

Use the same photo

If you use multiple photos across different social networks, you can't build familiarity. You want people to see your photo repeatedly, and recognize you as the same person. This should include all your profiles images, including your email account! Here's a quick checklist:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Gmail
- GitHub (if you're a developer)
- Slack
- Instagram
- SnapChat (a bit trickier, take a screenshot of your screen)
- Gravatar
- Disqus

Ryan Hoover, founder of Product Hunt, says this is especially important at the beginning:

People recognize you by your avatar. Once changed, followers need to re-associate the new photo with your person. This is less important for those that have already built a strong brand and following but those just starting out will have a harder time building recognition and should maximize their opportunities.

What makes a good profile photo?

There have been a number of studies that have tried to answer this question. The general advice is:

- Smile, and show your teeth.
- "Squinch." Squinching is a slight squint of the eyes, paired with a smile.
- For dating profiles, looking away from the camera and

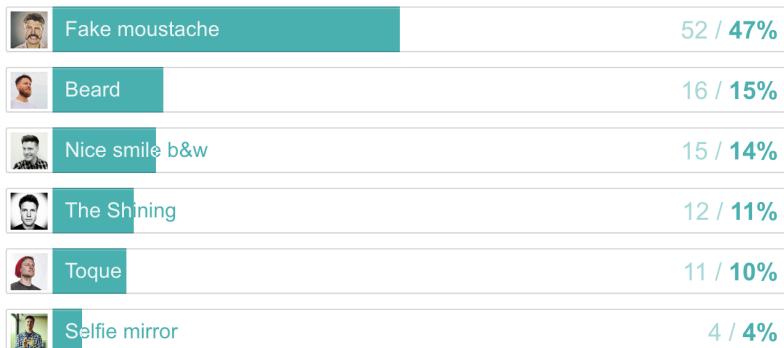
smiling is good for men. Looking at the camera and smile is good for women.

- Don't wear sunglasses, hats, or hair over your eyes.
- Asymmetrical framing. Make one side of the photo different, or more accentuated than the other.
- Emphasize your jaw line using lighting, and framing.

Composition is important, but those are just the basics. To really stand out, my hypothesis is that your photo needs to:

- be memorable
- invite curiosity
- communicate authenticity

I wanted to put this to the test, so I did a survey using myself as the guinea pig. Using images I regularly use as profile photos, I asked participants to vote for the image they found the most interesting.



The “fake moustache” photo was the most interesting by far, garnering 47% of the votes. All the others were in a linear progression: from 10%-15%. The lowest score was the selfie I took in the mirror.

Next, I asked respondents to rate which profile they'd most likely follow on Twitter. Here, the image with the beard was the most voted, at 35%. The fake moustache was next at 28%. The mirror selfie was the loser again at 1% (respondents cited that it looked “to self involved”).

Looking at the popular research, these results make sense. Dr. Laura

Naumann studied visual cues and perceived personality traits. Her study found:

Targets who were more open to experience were more likely to have a distinctive style of dress and look away from the camera. Observers' judgments correlated with targets' distinctive appearance, smiling and energetic stance.

In my beard photo I'm looking away, smiling, with a slight squint. It feels relaxed.

	Beard	38 / 35%
	Fake moustache	31 / 28%
	Nice smile b&w	20 / 18%
	Toque	11 / 10%
	The Shining	9 / 8%
	Selfie mirror	1 / 1%

When asked why they chose the beard photo, participants responded like this:

- “Adventure, clear, less trendy.”
- “Looks like you’re optimistically looking at what lies ahead; you’re smiling so something good is probably coming.”
- “It looks like you’re an adventurer.”
- “I can somehow relate to the person. Looks like an average person. Approachable.”
- “Looks most approachable. Most likely to interact back with me.”
- “Seems more natural, outdoors and less posed.”
- “Looks like someone I could trust.”

I've done similar tests with other groups of profile photos. In each case, the winning selection was described as “real,” “genuine,” “personal,”

and “authentic.” Losing selections had synonyms like “artificial,” “fake,” “too stylized,” and “too self-involved.”

The lesson here is clear: in an online world where everything can be manipulated, people are looking for authenticity.

Your turn

Your goal is for people to associate you with a topic that relates to your product. To achieve that goal, you’re going to help as many people as you can.

For example, Des Traynor is one of the founders of Intercom. Intercom offers software that helps small businesses acquire, engage and retain customers. With this in mind, he often speaks at business conferences, and offers his expertise on podcasts. He answers marketing questions on Twitter. He writes insightful blog posts.

Now everywhere he goes, people recognize him.



Karthik Narayan

@_karthiknarayan

Follow

Just ran into awesome @destraynor at @fourbarrel and I recognized him from his accent.

2:59 PM - 16 Jul 2016



Des didn’t start out speaking at big events. He started small, by helping one person at a time.

If you want to achieve a reputation as a helper, follow this checklist.

The checklist

Get a profile photo

Your first step is to get a great profile photo taken.

If you have the money, I would hire a professional photographer. They have the equipment, the lighting, and the knowledge to properly compose a shot.

Can't hire a pro? A good backup plan is to find a friend who takes awesome Instagram photos. Seriously! This is also be a good way to get that authentic look we were discussing earlier. My "bearded" profile photo that everyone liked was taken by my friend Marc Köhlbrugge.

When you're having your photo taken, try both indoor and outdoor settings. I also recommend doing a pose in formal attire, and then another in casual clothes. This will give you a variety of looks to choose from.

Test it

Using a tool like Typeform.com you can create a quick photo poll. Pose the question: "Who would you most likely follow on Twitter?"

In your first test, upload four of your professional photos, plus another two photos taken from your own collection (selfies, Instagram photos).

Here are some tactics to get people to take the survey:

- Share it on social networks (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Email friends directly
- Go to a public space, like a coffee shop, with an iPad. Get people to click on the version they like best. (This also works at meetups)

Once you have the winning photo from your collection, it's time to test it against other folks in your niche.

Go and find five other people in your niche, and download their profile photos. Then, go back to Typeform.com and create a new poll. Upload the five photos you just saved, plus your new photo.

Ask the same question: "Who would you most likely follow on Twitter?" As a follow-up, ask respondent why they made their selection.

Your objective is to have a profile photo that stands out amongst your peers.

Upload your photo everywhere

Now that you have a winning profile photo, it's time to make it ubiquitous.

Upload it to all of your social networks, your email account, and anywhere else you have a presence.

Usernames

If you can, this is also a good time to make your username consistent across all sites as well.

Often, people will know you only by your username, so make it memorable!

Special landing page

Most forums, comment sections, and profiles allow you identify a personal URL. If you're going to be "helpful everywhere" you'll want people to find you, and take the next step.

One way to really stand out, is to make a special landing page for each network that you belong to. For example, on Twitter I might use justinjackson.ca/twitter. On Product Hunt I could use [justinjackson.ca/product hunt](http://justinjackson.ca/product-hunt).

This gives you the opportunity to customize your message for each audience.

Start helping

You've set the groundwork. Now it's time to jump into action. Go out and find people in your niche that need help!

Where should you look? It really depends on your niche. Here's some examples for different niches to get you started:

Software developers

- Hacker News (news.ycombinator.com)
- The programmers sub-reddit (reddit.com/r/programming)
- Lobsters (www.lobste.rs)

Designers

- Designer News (designernews.co)

Retail store owners:

- Tales From Retail (reddit.com/r/TalesFromRetail)

Marketers:

- Inbound (inbound.org)
- Growth Hackers (growthhackers.com)

General:

- Quora (quora.org)
- Facebook Groups (facebook.com/groups)

Remember, your goal is to build a reputation of someone who is helpful. Be as useful as you can!

You've Got Mail

It's hard to dazzle me with an email. I get hundreds of them every day. They're mostly garbage. Plus, they give me anxiety.

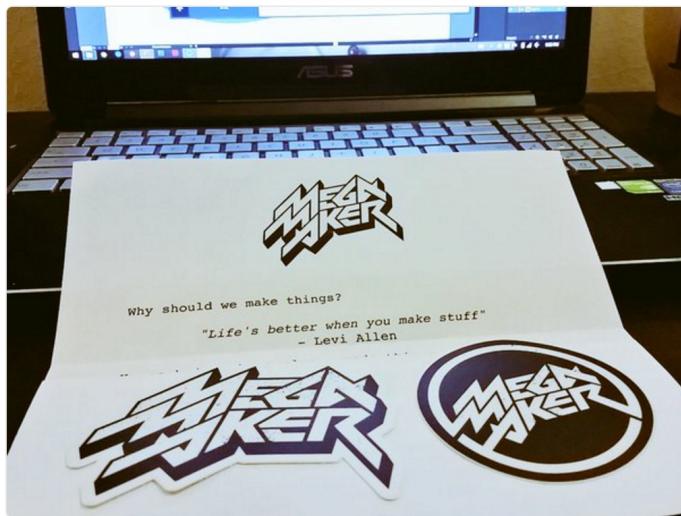
Compare that feeling to getting a package delivered to your home. There's curiosity and excitement. It's a little piece of Christmas, but on a regular day.

One of the most effective marketing techniques I've used this past year is sending people surprise packages. It's so unusual to receive something fun by post, that people's first reaction is usually to post photos on Twitter.



Darian Rosebrook @d_ebyn · Feb 9

My care package from @mijustin and his #megamaker challenge arrived.
Hardest part is deciding where the stickers go.



In an age where electronic communication is cheap and ubiquitous, the way to stand out is to send something the old fashioned way.

Expensive but effective

The biggest downside to sending stuff in the mail is it's expensive. Here's the typical cost of one my packages:

- Stamp to the USA: \$1.20
- Envelope: \$0.07
- Paper: \$0.02
- Ink: \$0.01
- **Subtotal:** \$1.30
- Stickers: \$1.44
- **Total:** \$2.74

However, when you compare that to Cost Per Click advertising, snail mail is definitely cheaper than a lot of keywords.

It costs more but the value you get might make it worthwhile. The

payback could be getting a new customer, or having someone share your letter online with their friends.

There's something about a physical artifact that you can't ignore. With email, I can close my laptop and walk away. But an envelope sitting on my kitchen counter demands attention.

The psychology of gifts

In his excellent book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert B. Cialdini describes the rule of reciprocity.

The rule says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us.

This rule has evolutionary roots in human history, and is deeply embedded in our psyche. The power of a gift is that when it is received, it immediately makes the receiver feel obligated to return the favor.

Give first, then ask

It's because of reciprocity that it's better to give people something of value *before* you ask for the sale.

A surprise in the mail isn't just memorable. You've given the receiver a gift. It might be a way to say thank you, or a nice gesture to begin a relationship. Your initial act will have them thinking about ways to return the favor.

Your turn

I'm sure you're asking questions like: "How do I get people's addresses? What kind of stuff should I send by mail? How do I use this tactic to increase sales?"

I'll answer those questions in this section.

Getting people to sign up

When you're asking people to sign up for your email list, you give them an incentive. The same is true for postal mail.

Here are some incentives you can offer:

- **Stickers.** People love stickers. They'll put them on their laptops, on their cars, and on their notebooks.
- **Notebook.** A small notebook is flat enough that it will fit in a regular envelope. It has utility: people always need a place to jot down notes.
- **Tattoos.** Fake tattoos are a nostalgic way to get people's attention.
- **Printed photographs.** The game Firewatch allowed people to take virtual photographs while playing. You could then have these photos printed and mailed to you.
- **Printed checklist.** In this paperless age, most folks don't have printers anymore. However, they may want a printed copy of a checklist, or guide, that they can put up on their wall. Offer to mail it to them!
- **Posters.** A bit bigger, but still fairly inexpensive to ship. The advantage is that if your poster is awesome, it becomes a free billboard for you in that person's office or home.
- **Postcard.** Getting a postcard feels personal. It could be a photo of your team, your town, or somewhere you're travelling.
- **Thank you card.** The Product Hunt team sent handwritten thank you cards to early community members. A truly memorable gesture!

Tools

Technology can also help you scale your mailing operation. These providers will ensure you don't have to do any of the heavy lifting yourself.

- **Postal Methods (postalmethods.com).** In the past I've used this service to print and mail simple letters, invoices and receipts. You can use their interface, or their API (if you're a programmer).

- **Lob (lob.com).** The best-known API for having letters and postcards, printed, stuffed and mailed.
- **Try Paper (trypaper.com).** Another API for printing and mailing letters, invoices, and postcards.
- **Kite (www.kite.ly).** An imprinting and shipping API built for software developers. Allows you to create and ship over 250 types of items, including T-shirts, books, and other promotional items.
- **Pechoo (peecho.com).** Allows you to create magazines and books on-demand. They print them and ship them for you.
- **Pwinty (pwinty.com).** Order and ship photo prints.
- **Sticker Mule (stickermule.com).** Create your own stickers, magnets and buttons.
- **Straytats, Tattify, Tatyyoo (straytats.com, tattify.com, tattyoo.com).** Create your own custom temporary tattoos.
- **Printful (theprintful.com).** Easy way to create posters, mugs, T-shirts, pillows and more.

Ideas

Here are a few other scenarios where snail mail could work.

Software signup

When someone signs up for your web application, have them enter their billing address. Put an automated event in your onboarding flow that triggers a mailing.

There's a variety of items you could send new customers:

- **Team postcard.** Send a photo of your support team, with a message on the back that says you can call them anytime.
- **Letter from the CEO.** Send new customers a letter from the CEO, thanking them for signing up.
- **Keyboard shortcuts postcard.** Some software features a variety of keyboard shortcuts. Many people will print these out initially so they can memorize them. Why not send it to them so they don't have to?

Reward ratings and reviews

Apps, software, books, music, movies, and podcasts all have online reviews. If you notice someone giving you a good review online, message them and ask if you can send them a thank you package.

Here are things that work well:

- **Stickers.** If they love your product, they might want to put your sticker on their laptop.
- **Fake tattoos.** Fun and easy to mail.
- **T-shirt.** A T-shirt is the ultimate thank you. Now you have a fan who is also out wearing your shirt!

List Builder 2000

While postal delivery is a good way to elicit surprise, your email list is still the best way to get new customers.

My previous book, *Marketing for Developers*, has sold over 2,442 copies. About 1,400 of those sales were affiliate sales. But at least 1,000 came from my mailing list.

To download a sample chapter, folks entered their email address. When I launched the book, there were about 2,650 people on that list. During the launch, 615 people bought. That's about a 23% conversion rate, which is extremely high. For many businesses, having 1% of website visitors convert to paying customers would be amazing.

Your website often has only one chance to make an impression. People check it out, and bounce. Once you've lost them they typically don't come back.

Email, however, gives you multiple chances to build a relationship with your audience.

It ain't easy

Like most things in life, anything that's worth doing is going to take some work.

The secret is out: email is the best way to build a sales funnel. Now that it's common knowledge, everyone's try to get people to subscribe to their list. That means more competition.

When you're faced with competition, you have to do things the Jolt way: stand out by being different.

What's worked for me

Currently I have 12,524 subscribers on my list. Of that group, 3,674 have bought something I've made (or, about 29%).

Here are the ways that I went from zero subscribers, to thousands.

Make yourself known

My mailing list didn't really start growing until I started my podcast, *Product People*. The podcast was helpful in a number of ways:

- **It helped me focus on one topic.** Previously, I'd tried writing an email newsletter about a variety of interests. *Product People* was all about bootstrapping software products. Because of that focus, people knew what they were getting when they signed up for the mailing list.
- **It helped me build a reputation.** The podcast gave me the opportunity to interview dozens of amazing product influencers. My interactions with these people helped me to earn the trust of listeners.
- **Built-in repetition.** Every week, podcast listeners would hear my pitch: sign up to the mailing list to get bonus interviews, and behind-the-scenes segments. Repetition is key. It often takes a number of impressions before someone will give you their email address.

This isn't just about starting a podcast. You could cultivate a similar reputation with a blog, YouTube channel, or Instagram account. The key is to make captivating content.

Build your list around a product launch

If you're building something people really want, they'll be happy to sign-up to get notified when you launch.

This is a step so many entrepreneurs miss. They're so busy building,

fixing, and preparing that they don't put up a simple landing page with an email form.

When I'm building a new product, the first thing I do is create a mailing list signup page. Here's why I find it valuable:

- **It forces me to write a great headline and sub-headline.** These are the two most important elements on any page. They need to answer the question "What pain am I solving, and for whom?" They should answer, "What am I building?" The headlines for this book were: "Sell more by standing out," and "a book for programmers, designers, freelancers, makers, and entrepreneurs."
- **It forces me to make a preview.** In the software world, we use the term "Minimal Viable Product" to describe a basic version of a bigger project. We also use things like clickable prototypes to explain how a future product will work. For this book, I wrote the sample chapter first. When you create a smaller preview of a product, it forces you to really understand the problem you're trying to solve.
- **It helps me gauge demand.** The number of email subscribers you get on your waiting list can be a good gauge of future demand. Giving someone your email address is a transaction: your inbox is valuable to you. If people are willing to look at your landing page, read your offer, and sign-up, that's a good signal.
- **It gives me someone to launch to.** You finally finish your product, lift your head up, and get ready to reveal it the world. The first question you'll ask is: how do I tell people about this? A launch list answers that question. Even if you only have 10 people on it, you can at least announce your launch to somebody.

Create an email course

One my most successful campaigns from this past year was an email course called *Tiny Marketing Wins*. When you subscribe, you get a sequence of 13 emails. Each email features a small marketing tactic that anyone could implement in a day.

I launched the service on Product Hunt, where it got 581 upvotes, and drove 2,588 people to sign up.

The idea with an email course is to give away your best stuff, for free. Why would you want to do that? It builds trust. Remember, you're establishing a relationship with each new subscriber.

Think about all the emails you get from people trying to sell you something. You don't know who they are, and you can't remember how they even got your email address.

But when you do an email course, they get a new email from you every day (or every week). Bit by bit you're able to prove yourself to them. Show them that you know what you're talking about.

Tiny Marketing Wins developed some true fans. I've received hundreds of emails from people thanking me for the content:

Thanks for sending out this newsletter each day. It truly makes my day!

The hardest part about building a course is getting started. Here's my advice: take your five best blog posts around a particular topic, and use those to form your sequence.

Your email course is your chance for a good first impression. Provide as much value as you can upfront. Blow their socks off.

Create an online challenge

Inspired by Crew's site launchthisyear.com, I created the 2016 Maker Challenge. and launched it in January. I recognized that most creative people want to focus more on their own projects. Their new year's resolution was to "make more stuff."

When someone signed up for the Maker Challenge they got a sequence of emails designed to inspire them, and help them organize their ideas.

Again, I launched it the same way I'd launch any product. I announced it on Product Hunt, tweeted about it, and got my network to share it.

The response? 1,849 people subscribed in a matter of days.

Slow, steady, progress

Marc Andreessen, a Bay Area investor, coined the term “product/market fit:”

Product/market fit means being in a good market with a product that can satisfy that market.

You're looking for newsletter/market fit. When you start building your list, it feels slow. You'll gain five subscribers, and then lose three. Keep at it! Here's how to get there:

- **Choose a good audience (market).** A good audience is a group that you connect with, that would make a good customer, and is reachable online.
- **Find a voice that resonates.** You don't want to imitate someone else's newsletter: you want to create something that is uniquely you. However, you also want a tone that connects with your audience. Finding this voice takes time. Keep trying, iterating, and improving.
- **Frequency is the key.** When you're getting started, you should send a newsletter at the same time, every week. You need to build a rapport with subscribers. If you only appear in their inbox occasionally, they'll never remember you.

Newsletter onboarding

You want to ease people into your newsletter. When you build a software product, you introduce new users to the application using an onboarding flow. The same is true for an email list.



Currently, I think the best way to onboard new subscribers is with a five day email course or sequence. Once they've gone through that sequence, have your email software automatically add them to your regular list.

Here's how that sequence looks:

1. **Start with your landing page.** You need to sell your email course the same way you would a product. Write headlines that clearly outline the intended audience, and what outcome you're going to provide them. For example, Crew has a good email course with this headline: "The beginner's guide to building an online business."
2. **Make your course a 5 email sequence.** Over five sequential days you can teach the basics of almost anything. This material serves two purposes. First, it establishes you as an expert in the field. Second, it helps you build a rapport with your audience.
3. **After the initial sequence, add them to your regular email list.** Your regular newsletter should be sent every week. It should feature your newest and best writing. Your newsletter is also an opportunity to share feature updates, new product launches, and special offers.

Stand out

I love Derek Sivers' rule for public speaking:

Cut out everything that's not surprising.

The same rule applies to email. Everything about it needs to be surprising.

The subject line

Most people have hundreds of emails in their inbox. They get dozens of new ones every day. It overwhelms them. Your email needs to be unavoidable. Here are some of my favorite subject lines:

- **“Your account has been disabled.”** This email from copywriter Josh Earl starts with a story about how his Facebook account was disabled. This subject is a bit risky, as some folks might get offended, but it definitely stands out.
- **“I’m unsubscribing from The Fizzle Show.”** This one came from the Fizzle podcast. I love it, because it instantly makes you curious. “Why is someone unsubscribing?” You want to get the answer, which forces you to open.
- **“What are you built to destroy?”** The subject line of this Copyhackers email is blunt, and asks an intriguing question. You’re not quite sure what it means, but you want to know more.

The first line

When viewing your inbox, most email software now shows the subject line plus the first line of the email. This means you’ll want to put just as much thought into your opener as you do your subject line.

It should continue to invite curiosity. You want the reader to keep going down the rabbit hole.

Formatting

Email newsletters have gone through an evolution. Initially they were formatted to look like print publications: photos, multiple columns, and fancy typography.

Then marketers realized that the best way to stand out was to make your newsletter look like a regular email. No logos, no images; just text and links.

But nowadays, every email looks like a regular email. If you want people to notice your newsletter, you have to continue to evolve. Here’s a few ideas that you could use to punch up your emails:

- **Use emoji.** Emoji can add a splash of color and personality to your subject line, and the body of your email. They draw the reader's eye, which is especially important when people are skimming.
- **Use a feature image, right after your first paragraph.** Another technique that's been working for me is an attention-grabbing image near the top of the email. I'll usually place it after the first paragraph. The "alt text" attribute is important here. This is the description that will display if the reader hasn't loaded images.
- **Have a strong brand.** Paul Jarvis just sent his 200th issue of his *Sunday Dispatches* newsletter. It has one logo at the top, a strong headline, and features a new article every week.



Unsubscribes are OK

At the beginning the most disheartening feeling you'll have is one someone unsubscribes. You'll spend hours crafting your newsletter, send it out with great expectation, only to have a group of people unsubscribe.

Early on, when you're trying to find your voice, list building is slow. You'll claw your way up to 100 subscribers, and then have 10 people unsubscribe the next day.

Don't fret. An unsubscribe isn't necessarily a reflection of your work. It could be someone saying:

- "This isn't for me."
- "I'm not ready for this right now."
- "I have a lot going on in my life / inbox right now."

Focus on the people who **are** getting value from your newsletter. Double down on what's working. Email them directly. Call them on Skype. Ask them what their biggest struggle is. Look for more ways to help.

Your turn

The best way to get started is to register for an email newsletter account, and put up your subscription page.

Tools

Email services

There's a variety of email service providers. Here's a few of my favorites:

- **MailChimp (mailchimp.com).** The most well-known service, and a great option for people getting started. Their free tier gives you 2,000 subscribers and 12,000 emails per month. They also have all the features you'll need: on paid plans you can use their Automation feature to build sequences and courses.
- **ConvertKit (convertkit.com).** If you're looking for a simple solution that focuses on email sequences, ConvertKit is a great option.
- **Drip (getdrip.com).** For more advanced automation in your email sequences, I'd look at Drip. They also have great reports for people wanting to see conversion numbers for their email funnels. Especially useful if you're marketing at Software as a Service business.
- **Goodbits (goodbits.io).** I've just started using this service for building link-based newsletters. They have a browser

extension that allows you to save website clippings and links to your newsletter. When you're ready to send, you just log in to Goodbits arrange the links, and click send.

Landing pages

Each of the providers above provide default email subscription pages you can use. If you'd like something more custom, here are a few options:

- **Squarespace (squarespace.com).** Don't have a website yet? These days I recommend getting started with Squarespace. It's as low as \$8 per month, and has many options for setting up landing pages.
- **Unbounce (unbounce.com).** Easily build hosted landing pages with a drag-and-drop interface.
- **Levels (levelstheme.com).** My friend Hamish and I built this landing page for people who want to self-host using WordPress or regular HTML.
- **WrapBootstrap (wrapbootstrap.com).** If you're a developer who likes using the Bootstrap design framework, WrapBootstrap has a number of options you can download and customize.

Examples

Here's a collection of some of the best newsletters and email courses available today.

- **SaaS Weekly (hiten.com).** A newsletter curated by Hiten Shah featuring "useful links for people interested in SaaS businesses."
- **Critique (studiofellow.com/newsletter).** Jarrod Drysdale writes a weekly newsletter for professional designers.
- **Josh Earl (joshuaearl.com).** Josh's stuff isn't for everybody; he's an unapologetic internet marketer. However, his copywriting is excellent, and worth examining.
- **Software Lead Weekly (softwareleadweekly.com).** Oren Ellenbogen's newsletter is a great example of building your

content around a specific niche (in this case, people who lead engineering teams).

- **Patio11 (training.kalzumeus.com)**. Patrick McKenzie writes such good emails his audience forgives him for how infrequent they are. He writes about software entrepreneurship, and has a great storytelling style.

It's Yours Free

My boss wasn't happy. In his hand, he held a bill from Getty Images. Apparently, we had used one of their photos in our newsletter, but hadn't paid the licensing fee. An employee had searched for the image on Google, and decided to clip it into the article they were writing. To license the image would have been a few hundred dollars. The penalty for unauthorized used was thousands. Did I mention my boss wasn't happy?

Finding good images on the web is hard. Licensing them is expensive. Even those under Creative Commons often have restrictions on them.

On the other side of the country, Mikael Cho had problems of his own. His business, Crew, was running out of money. They needed customers fast.

After re-launching their website, Mikael noticed that they had leftover images from the photo shoot they'd done. These were beautiful, high-quality photographs. As an agency owner, he knew how hard it was to find images of this quality. He decided to give them away for free. He bought www.unsplash.com, and put their leftover photos on there.



One of the early images from unsplash.com

Mikael posted the link to Hacker News, a community forum for startups, designers, and developers. He went back to work, focusing on what to do about Crew's dwindling bank account.

Later that day, the photographer who'd shot the photos contacted him:

I don't know what you did with those photos but there's a ton of people on my portfolio site right now!

Unsplash had climbed the list at Hacker News, and was sitting at number 1. Thousands of people were discovering it, and visiting the site to download images.

In one afternoon, Unsplash became known as the place to get unique photos to use in your blog posts or web designs.

There was also some serendipity here. Medium, the online blogging platform, had just opened up its beta to new writers. One feature of a Medium blog post was a placeholder for a huge "hero image" at the top of the page. It made the articles look impressive, but finding images

large enough was a challenge. Along came Unsplash. Right time, right place, right offer, and right price (free)!

How Unsplash saved Mikael's business

When Unsplash launched, Crew only had enough money for three months of expenses. They believed they had a good product that met a need. Their existing customers were happy. But they just couldn't get enough leads in the top of their funnel. To make more revenue they needed more people to know who they were.

Crew is an interesting case study because they didn't have any other forms of referral traffic at the time. Unsplash was the only thing sending people to the Crew website. Mikael describes how it affected their business:

The first month after Unsplash, we grew from 5,000 projects being posted on Crew to 20,000. And for the next four months, Crew continued to grow 30% month over month.

Because of one side-project, Crew's business quadrupled in one month. Since then they've taken the lessons they learned from Unsplash and applied it other free giveaways:

- **Moodboard** (gomoodboard.com). Allows team to create a free online mood board for design inspiration.
- **Launch this Year** (launchthisyear.com). An email course helping people to launch their app ideas.
- **How Much to Make an App** (howmuchtomakeanapp.com). Online tool for calculating the cost of making a mobile app.
- **App vs Website** (appvswebsite.com). Interactive questionnaire that helps you decide if you should build a mobile app or a traditional website.
- **Coffee & Power** (crew.co/coffee-power). A list of coffee shops that have good WiFi and lots of available electric outlets.

Bits are cheap

One advantage to creating free digital tools is that they're relatively affordable to deliver. Unlike physical mail and objects, the transmission of a PDF, a website, or an image is fast and inexpensive.

They're also easier to manufacture. Once you have a master version of a digital project, you can create as many copies as you want.

Giveaway marketing can take multiple forms:

- **Engineering as marketing.** This is where you have a software developer build a tool, the same way you would with an app. They're typically smaller scope than a full-blown product, but they'll still require an investment.
- **Design as marketing.** If you have design assets that you've used for your own projects, you can share them! This includes things like icon sets, photos, and frameworks. For example, Bootstrap is a popular CSS framework that grew out of Twitter's design team.
- **Business intelligence as marketing.** Does your team have a killer calculator, estimating process, or forecasting tool? If it's useful to you, it might be useful to others. You might also have also collected valuable information you can turn into a PDF or a book.
- **Templates as marketing.** This is where you take an Excel, Word, or Pages template and provide it to the world for free.

Your turn*Solve a pain that you have*

One of the reasons Unsplash hit a nerve was it touched on a real problem: it's really hard to find nice royalty-free images.

Mikael experienced this pain firsthand when he was browsing for pictures he could use. Likewise, you'll want to examine your niche and solve their problems.

What are your byproducts?

The other asset Crew had was a byproduct: extra images from a photoshoot. Your main business produces all sorts of byproducts; things that aren't your main wares, but still have value.

In their book *Rework* Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson describe how this worked at their company, 37signals:

Our last book, *Getting Real*, was a byproduct. We wrote that book without even knowing it. The experience that came from building a company and building software was the waste from actually doing the work. We swept up that knowledge first into blog posts, then into a workshop series, then into a .pdf, and then into a paperback.

Brainstorm

Here are questions you can ask to find potential giveaways:

- **What assets are we no longer using?** Did you create an icon set that you're not using anymore? How about a fancy JavaScript animation?
- **What do we have extra of?** Like Mikael, you may have paid for photos, vector images, sound files, that you paid to have created, but are just sitting on your hard drive. Give them away!
- **What would be fun to build in a day?** Give yourself (or your team) a hack day. Create something fun and creative, then share it with the world.
- **What tools have I created that give me a lot of utility?** Maybe you have a swipe file full of good sales letters you've used. Or, perhaps you've developed a really good Excel spreadsheet for calculating SaaS metrics like churn. If you find value in it, it's likely someone is searching for that right now.
- **What valuable knowledge do I have?** Like 37signals, you can turn the lessons you've learned into a book, video tutorial, or workshop series.

Make them the Star

I'd been using ConvertKit for my email newsletter for about four months when the owner, Nathan Barry, reached out. "Hey Justin, do you want to give us a testimonial?"

I'm a big fan of what Nathan and his team are doing, and I was happy to give him a quote. After a few weeks, I forgot about it.

One day, I opened up my laptop and logged into Twitter. I was greeted by a new tweet from ConvertKit:

We love the content from @mijustin — it's good to have him as a ConvertKit customer — <http://convertkit.com/stories>

ConvertKit @ConvertKit · Jun 30

We love the content from **@mijustin** — it's good to have him as a **ConvertKit** customer — convertkit.com/stories/



Justin Jackson
PODCASTER

Justin is a prolific blogger, author, and host of the Product People podcast. Justin uses ConvertKit to reach a dedicated following of over 5,000 designers, developers, and marketers. His typography-focused design is even available to other ConvertKit customers for their own landing pages. Join his newsletter at justinjackson.ca.



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Since then, my profile continues to pop up on Facebook Ads, on Twitter, and in their newsletter.

I love it. It feels good to have someone saying nice things about you publicly. Instead of making themselves the focus, ConvertKit is making their customers the hero.

Social proof

We human beings are social animals. We like to move in packs.

This is why the idea of social proof is so important. When we're considering a new product or service, our first question is: "Who else is using this?" Hearing from other customers sets our minds at ease.

This is why I love ConvertKit's example: they've taken the concept of the testimonial and moved it past a simple page on their website. They're taking user endorsements and sharing them on other channels.

Double the exposure

What happens when you make the customer the star of your ads? They share it with their network! On top of the clicks and impressions you're paying for, you get free word-of-mouth advertising.

This is win-win. You're promoting your brand, but you're also promoting your customer. You're paying for ads that feature their logo, photo and business name. Everyone loves free advertising.

Your turn

Ideas

How can you implement this idea with your business? Here are a few ideas.

- **Ask new customers if you can follow them on Twitter.** This can help you identify customers that have a significant following online.
- **Do meetups when you travel.** Visiting a city for an event? Set up a local meetup for your customers. This gives you a chance to interact with the people using your product. It's

also a great opportunity to get testimonials. Film them on your iPhone!

- **Profile your customers in your podcast, newsletter, or publication.** Getting interviewed and published is a great honor. It also helps you promote how your users are benefitting from the service you provide.
- **Automatically identify influencers when they sign up.** I've worked for startups who've built internal tools that automatically detect customers with large audiences. Using a variety of tools (see below) they alert the marketing team, who can then get in touch directly.

Tools

- **Buzzsumo (buzzsumo.com).** Identifies when influencers are talking about you online, and what they're sharing.
- **Mention (mention.com).** Similar to Buzzsumo, but specifically focused on helping you "identify the most important people talking about your company."
- **Connect (connect.clearbit.com).** A great Gmail extension that shows you contextual information about the people emailing you. This includes their Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles.
- **Klout (klout.com).** In the past people have been cynical about Klout and its social ranking algorithm. However, their database can help you see which networks a specific person is active on, and how much influence they have there. They also have an API, which enable programmers to query this database from their own applications.
- **HubSpot (hubspot.com).** You can get HubSpot to notify you by SMS whenever someone with a specific Klout score signs up for your app.

Give before you Ask

I get emails every day from people who want me to promote their project, review their app, or pick my brain.

These are people I've never met before in my life, whose first words to me are: "can you do something for me?"

I usually delete these emails when I see them. It's not that I don't want to help; it's just hard to respond to cold messages like this.

Asking for a favor is like withdrawing cash from the bank. If you've never made a deposit, you can't make a withdrawal.

How to please the coffee man

Almost every morning of the week, you can find me at Ratio Coffee, sitting at the bar. Often, I'll be chatting with my friend Andrew, who is the co-owner. He's slinging espresso shots, and I'm drinking them.

One thing about owning a local business: you get asked for donations constantly. About 3 days out of 5, I'll see Andrew getting solicited for something. People want him to donate a gift card for their silent auction, contribute a pastry basket, or provide coffee at their event.

One day, I was sitting at the bar when a young man named Troy came in and ordered an Americano. While his drink was being made, Troy asked:

"Hey Andrew, can you make coffee for an event I'm hosting up on the mountain?"

Andrew's really good at saying no. I waited for him to rebuff the request. Instead, Andrew replied: "Sure, what date is it?"

I waited for Troy to leave, before turning to Andrew with my eyebrow raised: "Wow, you said yes to that one quick."

Andrew looked up from behind the espresso machine and smiled. "You've got to take care of your guys," he replied. "Troy is in here every day, like you. He's always telling cyclists and skiers about our shop. So when he asks for a favor, it's easy to say yes."

About two hours later, a stranger came in and asked Andrew for a gift card. He said no.

Want to get a "yes"? Don't be a stranger.

Your turn

Building a rapport isn't difficult. It just takes time, care and attention.

Here are some simple ways you can connect with influencers:

Be a fan

Read their stuff. Show up to their talk. Listen to their podcast. If you like what you're seeing, tell them! Write a nice email, or compliment them on Twitter. Making stuff is hard; having people who appreciate it makes it worthwhile.

Be a regular customer

What's even more impactful than being a fan? Being a fan who supports the art with their wallet.

Which cold email would you respond to?

- "You should talk about my product on your podcast."

"I bought your book a few months back. It's great! I'm wondering if you can help me with something you talked about in Chapter 2."

When you buy someone's book, album, or software, you're helping the creator make a living. I'm indebted to my customers. They've enabled me to feed, clothe and house my family. If they ask me for a small favor, and I'm able to help, I'm more than happy to assist.

Offer your service

I spoke at conference in Barcelona. The next day, I got a lovely email from someone who had been in the crowd:

Hey Justin, great talk yesterday! I especially liked the part about using Twitter cards. I took some photos of you on stage. Feel free to use them however you'd like!

If you're a speaker, getting professional photos taken is a real treat. It's immensely helpful.

You likely have skills that are valuable. When you share your talent for drawing, photography, music, video, writing, design or programming with someone, they're bound to take notice.

How to ask

Once you've built a rapport with someone by being generous, it's OK for you to ask for a favor.

Send them a message that follows this format:

Hey [influencer name],

I hope those photos I sent you from your talk in Las Vegas were helpful! I noticed you put them on your website; I'm glad you're putting them to good use.

I'm wondering if you could do me a favor.

My [project] is almost finished, and I'm looking for people who can help me spread the word on launch day: January 1, 2020.

128 Jolt

Would you be willing to send out a tweet with this URL?
[yoururl.com]

Thank you,

Your Name

Sell Something People Want

If you heard the premise of Drew Ackerman's podcast, you would never predict that it would be a hit.

There are no interesting guests. Drew rambles, stutters, and meanders through each episode. Some can last up to two and half hours. Even when he has a topic, he rarely finishes a thought.

Listeners admit that they can't make it through an episode without nodding off. One reviewer at the *Globe and Mail* called Drew "a human sleeping pill."

And yet, his show, *Sleep With Me*, has a five-star rating on iTunes. Over 1,300 people have left positive reviews. Drew's fans have set up a Facebook Group and sub-reddit to discuss their love for the show. He currently has 1,720 people who donate monthly on Patreon.

How come this weird show has so much traction? Because Drew Ackerman is selling something people want: a good night's sleep. The whole point of the show is to lull insomniacs into a deep slumber.

Emily Moyer was so moved by the show, she wrote this note on Drew's Patreon page:

Your podcast has helped me face the Deep Dark Night without fear or anxiety. I listen every night and you've always been there, giving it your all. You have no idea what it means to me to have your lulling soothing tones and pointless meanders there with me when the world is quiet

and my brain bots have just drank a triple espresso. I love what you do, the compassion you have shines through, and I'm so grateful!

This podcast changed my life. As someone who's always struggled to fall asleep, I was willing to try anything. It only took one episode for me to become a believer. I've been listening every night for three months, and now I can't shut up about it. I talk about it on social media, at the coffee shop, when friends visit, and on my own podcast.

Once people experience it, they talk about it. In fact, I found out about the show from someone on Twitter.

 **Justin Jackson**
@mijustin

Someone teach me how to go to sleep. 😞

 **Kevan Gilbert**
@kevangilbert

[Follow](#)

@mijustin You gotta try the Sleep With Me podcast.
Glorious, mind-numbing, babbling nonsense.
3:17 AM - 1 Mar 2016

↪ ↻ ❤ 2

So good they can't stop talking about you

The truth is, 90% of marketing is about making something people really want. When people find something they love they can't keep the secret to themselves. They have to share it with their friends.

This is why I've always believed that product and marketing need to work together.

How do you create something that elicits this response? Build your product around a **burning desire** or a **hair on fire**.

Burning desire

If you were alive in the '90s you might remember a women's haircut that swept North America by storm. It was called "The Rachel," named after Jennifer Aniston's character on the TV sitcom Friends. Seemingly overnight, women all over the globe sought out the layered shag hairstyle. It's estimated that over 11 million women donned "The Rachel" during that decade. Talk about burning desire!

Most often, you see this effect in the consumer market. A new product is released, and it awakens a deep desire in them that they must satisfy.

Apple, the electronics company, is the master of building products that elicit this reaction. I was in college when the first iPod was launched. All my peers had to have one. Everything from the click-wheel to the signature white earbuds became objects of desire.

These purchases are motivated by our yearning to impress our friends, be entertained, experience pleasure, or find happiness.

Hair on fire

People aren't just motivated by desire. We're also motivated by pain.

"Hair on fire" describes a problem so severe, it becomes a person's top priority to solve.

A great example is a toothache. If you've ever experienced the pain of a dental abscess you know what I'm talking about. You can't sleep. You can't eat. You can't think. With pain like that, you'll do almost anything to solve it right away.

If "burning desires" are most evident amongst consumers, "hair on fire" pains are most visible in the business market.

What keeps the boss up at night? What painful issue is consuming all of a manager's time? These are the types of problems you want target. Your product or service should be the ultimate pain reliever.

MailChimp is one of the world's most profitable software companies.

They targeted one of the messiest problems in the tech industry: mass delivery of emails. Regular email accounts limit the number of emails you can send during a day. Gmail, for example, only lets you send 100-150. If you need to send your newsletter to 15,000 customers, it's a big pain. MailChimp solves all the technical headaches (compliance with email clients, adherence to spam laws) so the business owner doesn't have to.

Your turn

When you build something that elicits a strong response it's much easier to stand out and get people to buy your wares.

What to do with an existing product

If you've already created a product or service, and have customers, it may be possible to pivot. Follow these steps to identify opportunities:

1. **Make a list of your best customers.** Who loves your product and pays for it? Make a list.
2. **Call your best customers.** The best way to learn is to listen. Get on the phone (or Skype) and talk to your best customers. Hear about why they signed up. See where they're currently getting the most value. Finally, ask them where they're currently struggling. Write down everything you learn.
3. **Compare what you learned to your analytics.** Does your product have usage metrics? Take what you learned in your customer calls and see if it aligns with what you're seeing in the data. Are people really using that feature?
4. **Create three columns.** On one side, write "What's working." In the middle write "What people really want." And in the final column write "What's not working."
5. **Double down on what's working.** This applies to both promotion and product development. Focus your energy on marketing channels that are yielding results. Improve the best parts of your product; make them even better.
6. **Identify the number 1 thing people want.** Look at your middle column. It likely contains a lot of ideas. Your job is

to identify the one “burning desire” or “hair on fire” issue on that list. Don’t try to do them all; choose one.

7. Stop doing what’s not working. Great product people know how to cull features that aren’t working. Don’t keep something around just because you built it. That just adds bulk to your product. You want a lean machine that provides immense value for customers.

Building a new product

When you’re creating something new, the process is similar. Here’s the process to follow:

1. **Make a list of potential customers.** If you can’t think of 5–10 people in your target market, you’re either in the wrong market or haven’t been building enough relationships.
2. **Call (or meet with) potential customers.** The objective is to learn as much as you can about their world by listening and observing.
3. **Create three columns.** On one side, write “Products they love.” In the middle write “Big struggles.” And in the final column write “Strongest desires.”
4. **Identify the number 1 thing people want.** After doing your research, you need to create a hypothesis. What issue comes up repeatedly with the people you interviewed?
5. **Test your hypothesis.** How do you know if you’ve found the topic to focus on? Create a tiny solution. Instead of immediately building something big, find the smallest form factor that addresses that pain (or desire). For example, you could create an email course, a blog post, or do a workshop. You may want to test multiple ideas, so you can compare the results.
6. **Focus on what resonates.** Once you’ve found that “burning desire” or “hair on fire” problem, keep iterating on your small initial version. Don’t go from tiny to big. Climb the ladder one rung at a time. Make sure each iteration does a better job of solving the problem for the customer.

Focus your marketing

If you're listening to your customers, they'll give you all the marketing material you need. Focus your promotional efforts on these three points:

1. **Who are they?** Identify your target customer has narrowly as you can. They should feel like you're speaking directly to them.
2. **What's their biggest desire?** Outline the central problem. What do they want more than anything else? Many times, you'll be describing a pain they've felt, but have never been able to articulate.
3. **How do you solve their problem?** Describe the outcome you're going to give the customer. How does your product make them better? What superpowers does it give them?

This is a framework to apply to all the tactics in this book. When you're trying something new, use it as a checklist before you launch.

Having customers is a great gift. If you stay attentive to their needs they'll reward you with their patronage. Every maker needs to come this realization:

It's not about us. It's all about them.

About the Author

Hi, my name is Justin Jackson, @mijustin on Twitter. I've done product marketing for startups like Sprintly, as well as consulting for clients around the globe.

I love marketing, and I love making things. I've married these two passions, on projects like MegaMaker, F*cking Webmaster, Text Me Slacker, Nerd Mullet Propaganda and the Secret Makers Society.

You can email me at words@nerdnorth.com.

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I'm a pain in the butt to live with. When I'm in the midst of creating something, I'm often distracted, moody, and exhausted.

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The first readers

To those of you who bought the initial version of this book and helped me make it better: thank you.