

The Freedom Ladder

5 Tactics 4 Principles

for achieving independence through products.

Say "hi" on Twitter:

@mijustin

Official sounding bio:

I started working in SaaS in 2008, worked at a few startups, and eventually became the Product Manager of Sprintly.

In January, I quit working for other people. Now I make a full-time income from the digital products I create.

You might have heard my podcasts, Product People and MegaMaker, or read something I've written on Lifehacker, Inc, and Fast Company.

But really...

**I'm just an idiot that Mike and
Rob found on the internet.**

**I understand where a lot of you
are at right now.**

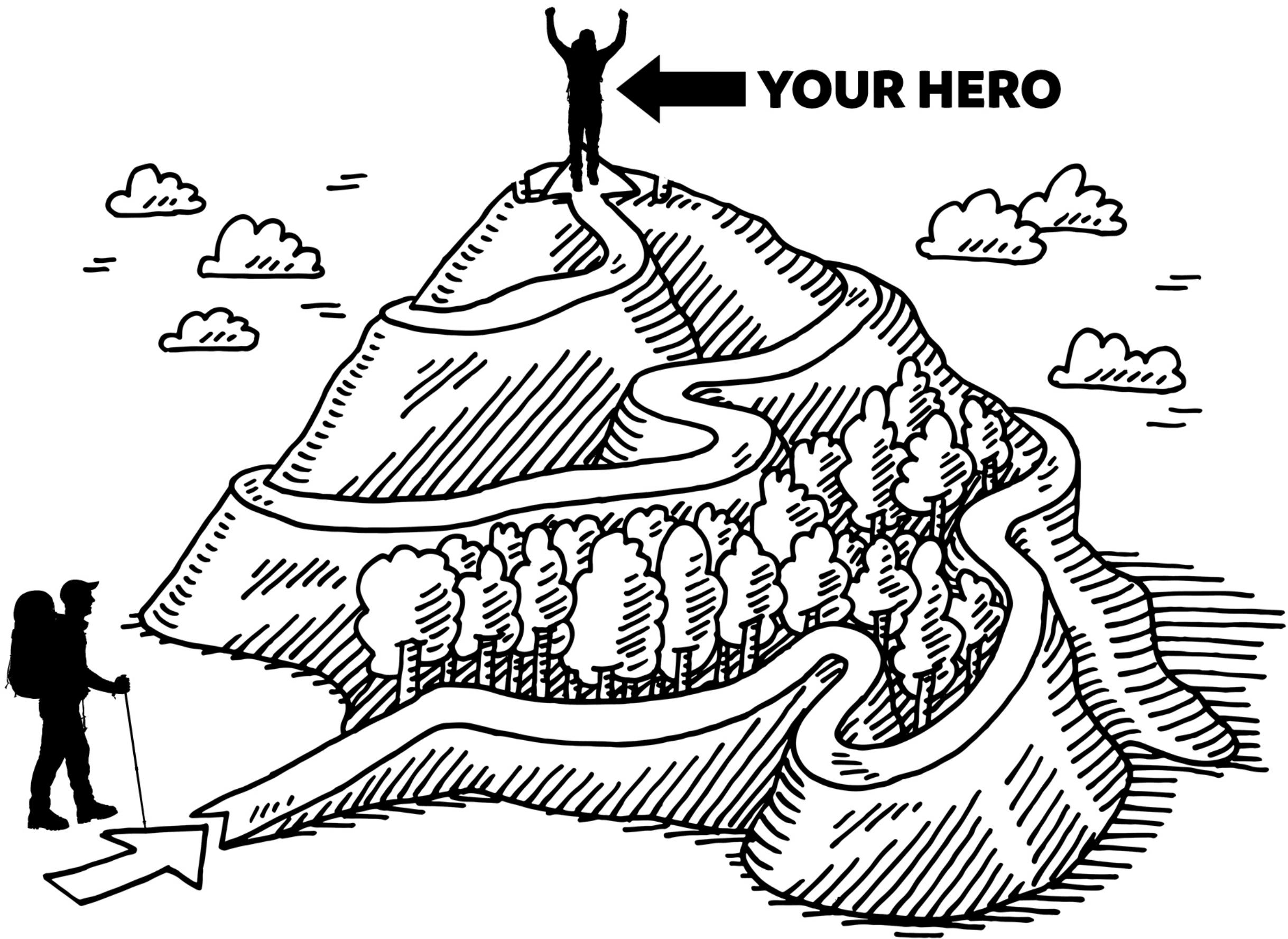
**You're not satisfied with the way
things are.**

You want life to be better.

You're tired of being stuck in traffic for two hours a day. You're tired of working on projects that never ship. You have a new baby in the house, and you're not quite making ends meet.

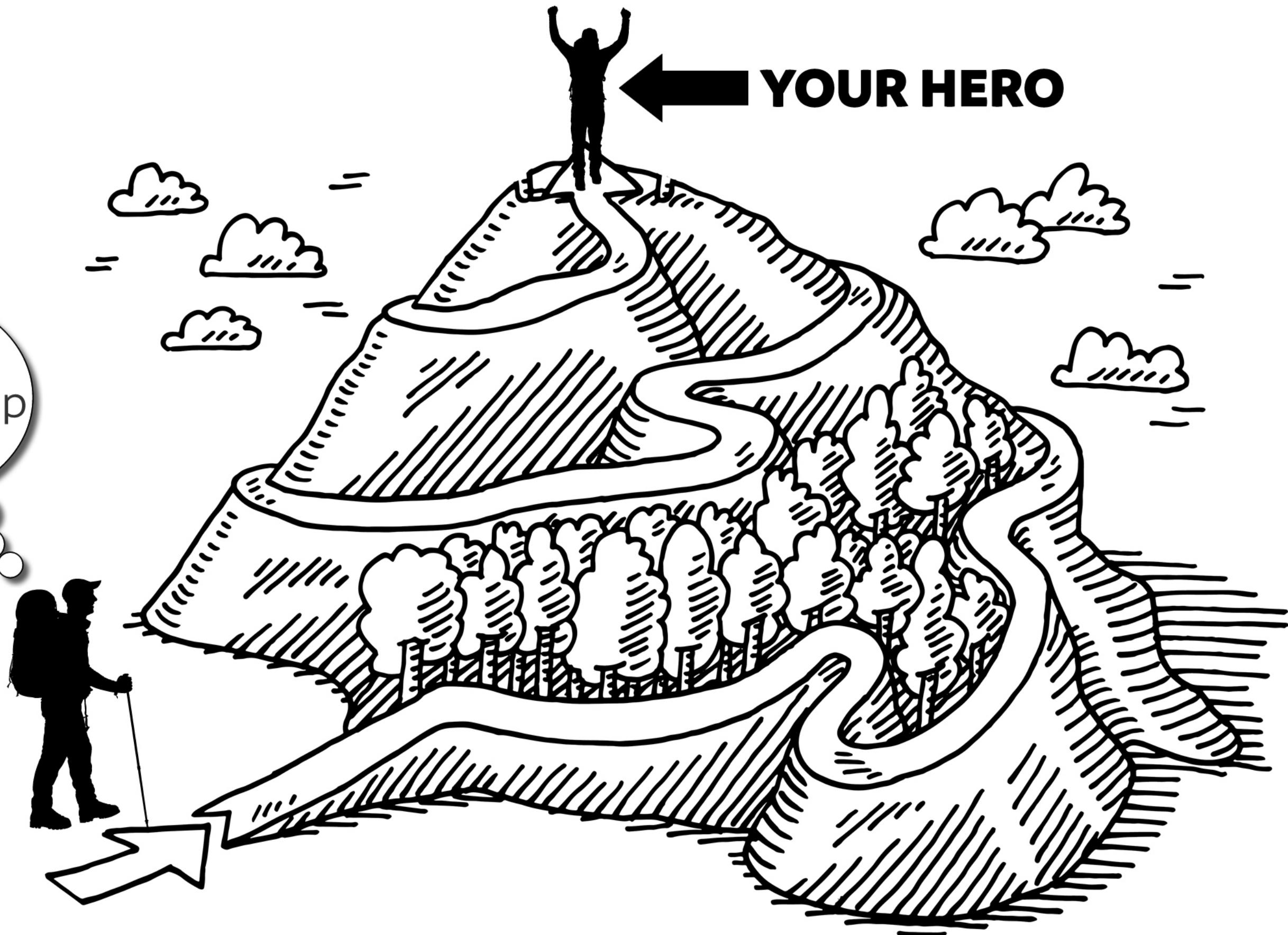


**You discovered someone who's
making an independent income
from digital products.**



YOUR HERO

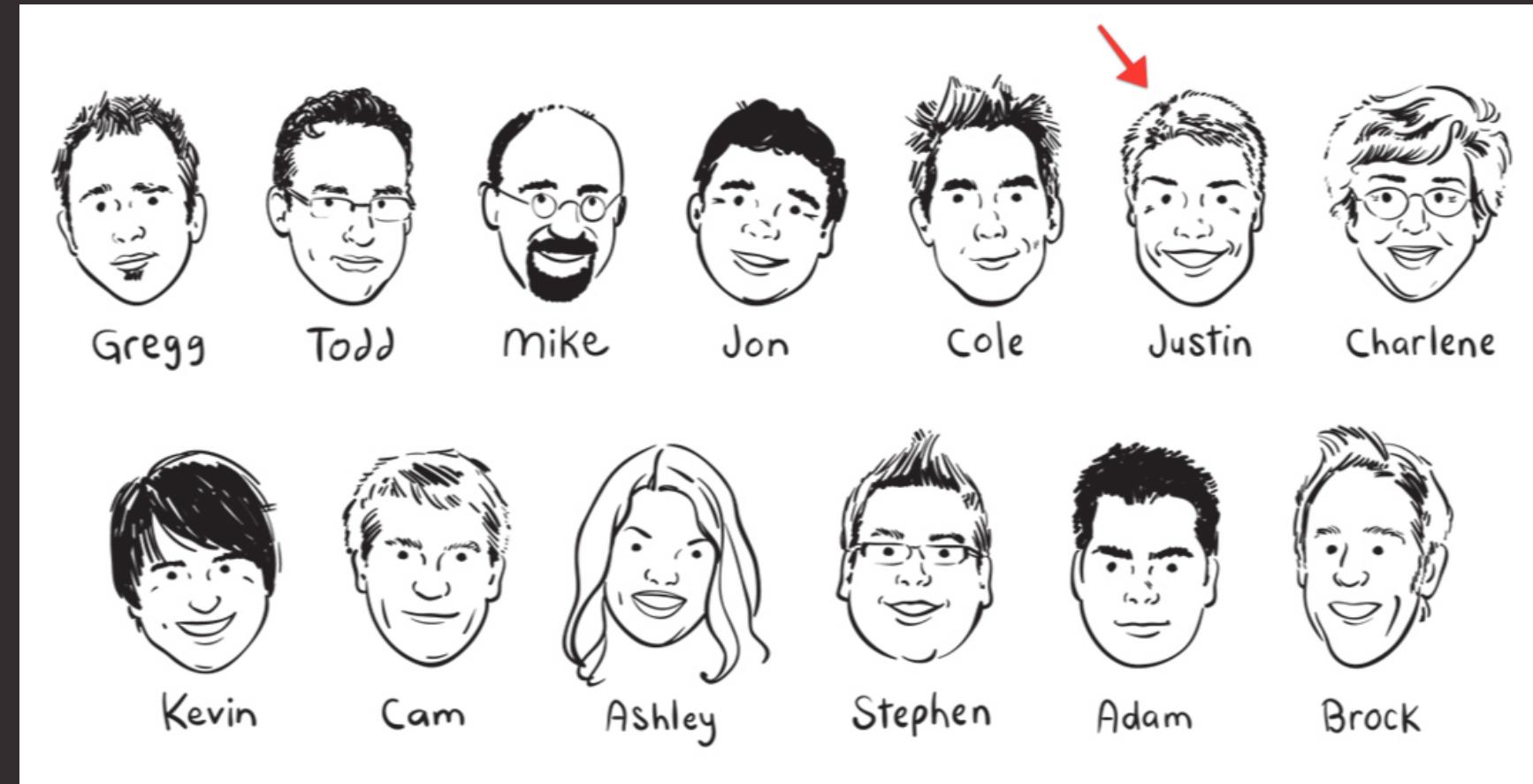
How did
they get up
there?



How do you get from no audience, no idea, and no revenue to quitting your day job?

My journey

2008 (28 years old): got my first startup job



Working as a customer support person for Mailout.com

**In 2008 I discovered two things
that would change my life...**

Getting Real by 37signals

[About 37signals](#) [Why web-based software?](#) [Tech/Design Job Board](#) [Extras & Add-ons](#) [37signals !\[\]\(3162acc54a9e52827eb76a0fef2fa2e2_img.jpg\)](#)

Getting Real

Discover the smarter, faster, easier way to build a successful web-based application. A book by 37signals.

"Every once in a while, a book comes out of left field that changes just about everything. This is one of those books. Ignore it at your peril."

- [Scott Kauffman](#)

[More reviews and buzz](#)



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The complete book, 16 chapters and 91 essays. Completely free to read online.

BOOK REPORT
Getting Real is the business, design,

WHO IS 37 SIGNALS?
We're a privately-held Chicago-based

Startups for the Rest of Us



**For the first time in my life, I
realized life could be different.**

I had two big obstacles in my way:

1. NO TIME

A scenic landscape featuring a large body of water, likely a lake or river, with a winding road along its shore. In the background, there are several layers of mountains under a cloudy sky. In the foreground, a group of people, including four children, are standing on a grassy hillside. One child is sitting on a wooden bench. The scene is bathed in the warm light of either sunrise or sunset.

2. I have four kids

- **Get kids to school:** 7am
- **Drive to office:** 8am
- **Work:** 9am - 5pm
- **Eat dinner:** 6pm - 7pm
- **Help kids with homework:** 7pm - 8pm
- **Put kids to bed:** 8pm - 9pm
- **Hang out with spouse:** 9pm - 10pm
- **Collapse in an exhausted heap:** 10pm

Two things to overcome:

1. Find more time
2. Make enough \$\$\$ to support my family

Things I tried to find more time:

- Waking up early
- Staying up late
- Working on the bus
- Working during my lunch hour

What worked?

2012: got a remote job



The remote job gave me more freedom to pursue side-projects:

It eliminated my 2-hour daily commute

Started podcast with my friend Kyle Fox



Focused on "people who build digital products"

Started a newsletter at the same time

Get my newsletter for product people

To improve your reading experience, I don't use popup forms.

Want more from someone who hates popups as much as you do?

Email Address

Subscribe!

I noticed:

People were asking me the same questions over and over again.



R

Startups in London

Startups in Europe

Failure

Motivation

+3



How can I keep myself motivated as a sole founder?

I've been working on our startup (a SaaS-based enterprise solution) with a small team for last couple of months, we built a minimum viable product and decided to do a private beta release a month ago. We received some good response but we never had sufficient resources to support the growth. I've... [\(more\)](#)



Justin Jackson 

@mijustin

 Follow

@patio11 @robwalling as solo-founders, do you have some sort of support group that keeps you motivated?

8:02 AM - 15 Aug 2013



2



Patrick McKenzie

@patio11

 Follow

@mijustin Like @robwalling , I have a Campfire where some similarly situated people hang out daily. Best thing ever, only started this year.

1:41 PM - 15 Aug 2013





Nathan Kontny

@natekontny

Follow

@patio11 @mijustin @robwalling I would like to join one or more of these Campfire groups, if anyone is looking for more members :)

2:11 PM - 15 Aug 2013



Hypothesis

"Give me a support group so that I can stay motivated as a solo-founder."

JFDI

A Campfire chat for solo-founders, bootstrappers and anyone else launching their own thing.

"Having someone to be accountable to greatly improves your chances of getting things done." - @mijustin



You don't have to work alone

Human beings are social creatures. When you work by yourself and for yourself, you don't get the benefits of interaction and collaboration.

This chat room is a simple solution to a problem we all have: it's hard to stay motivated when you're working solo in a cold, dark basement.

The room is hosted by Justin Jackson, and will connect you with like-minded product entrepreneurs.

~~We're capping the room at 12 members. There are only 6 spots left. There is only 1 spot left.~~

~~We've opened up 10 new spots. There are currently 8 spots left.~~

\$10/month

We're sold out!

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2013

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\$10/month

We're sold out!

My first spots sold out in an hour.

Built with:

- HTML (landing page)
- MailChimp (email)
- Campfire (chat)
- Stripe (credit card)
- Memberful (billing)

**Since 2013, I've kept iterating on
this idea.**



all categories ►

Latest

New

Unread

Top

Categories

+ New Topic

Topic	Category	Users	Replies	Views	Activity
How do you become a maker for an already listed Product on Product Hunt?	General		4	14	3h
Anyone running their life totally from an ipad?	Tools		13	38	9h
Launched my iOS app	Show Your Work		8	57	1d
What are you working on this week? January 30 2017	General		19	84	2d
Chat modals are the new “sign up for our newsletter”	General		8	59	3d
Twitter Campaign Results	Tools		3	40	3d
Hey there! I'm Landon from Seattle, and I'm a developer, designer and entrepreneur	Introductions		7	45	3d
Pricing of SaaS, where do you start?	SaaS		8	59	4d
Trying to compile a list of productivity systems	Tools		7	40	4d
Has anyone had an luck using something like Fiverr for basic market research?	General		5	36	4d
Feedback Wanted for Subscription Box Productized Service	Show Your Work		2	30	4d
Dock.com as a customer communication tool	Tools		0	15	5d

[all categories ▶](#)[Latest](#)[New](#)[Unread](#)[Top](#)[Categories](#)[+ New Topic](#)[Topic](#)

Category

Users

Replies

Views

Activity

[How do you become a maker for an already listed Product on Product Hunt?](#)[General](#)

4

14

3h

[Anyone running their life totally from an ipad?](#)[Tools](#)

13

38

9h

[Launched my iOS app](#)[Show Your Work](#)

8

57

1d

[What are you working on this week? January 30 2017](#)[General](#)

19

84

2d

Evolved into ProductPeople.Club

[Twitter Campaign Results](#)[Tools](#)

3

40

3d

[Hey there! I'm Landon from Seattle, and I'm a developer, designer and entrepreneur](#)[Introductions](#)

7

45

3d

[Pricing of SaaS, where do you start?](#)[SaaS](#)

8

59

4d

[Trying to compile a list of productivity systems](#)[Tools](#)

7

40

4d

[Has anyone had an luck using something like Fiverr for basic market research?](#)[General](#)

5

36

4d

[Feedback Wanted for Subscription Box Productized Service](#)[Show Your Work](#)

2

30

4d

[Duck.com as a customer communication tool](#)[Tools](#)

0

15

5d

Built with:

- HTML (landing page)
- MailChimp (email)
- Discourse (open source)
- Digital ocean (hosting)
- Slack (chat)
- Stripe (credit card)
- Memberful (billing)

This was a side project

Overview

Total volume

02/05/2013

to

02/04/2017

GROSS VOLUME

\$72,807 CAD total

\$7,400.00

\$7,400.00

\$3,700.00

\$3,700.00

Feb

Jun

Oct

Feb

Jun

Oct

Feb

Jun

Oct

Feb

Jun

Oct

Feb

SUCCESSFUL CHARGES

1435 total

140

70

140

70

CUSTOMERS CREATED

377 total

62

31

62

31

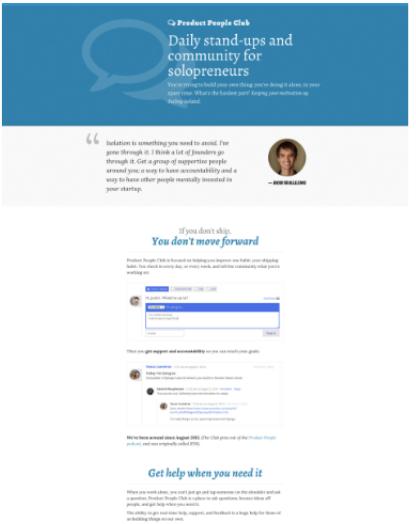
- Very little custom code
- Created by one person (me)
- Built on the side

Provided real value

"Having people you can ask questions to is extremely valuable. Product People Club was literally the birthplace of my startup. They helped me start it a year ago and continue to help me improve it today."

Robert Williams, LetsWorkshop.com

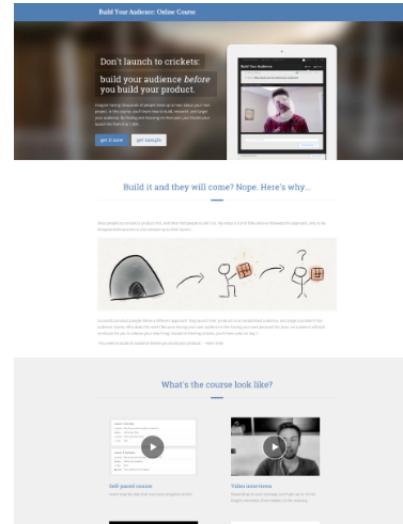
**Since then I've launched a bunch
of other projects**



Product People Club

Daily stand-ups and community for solopreneurs

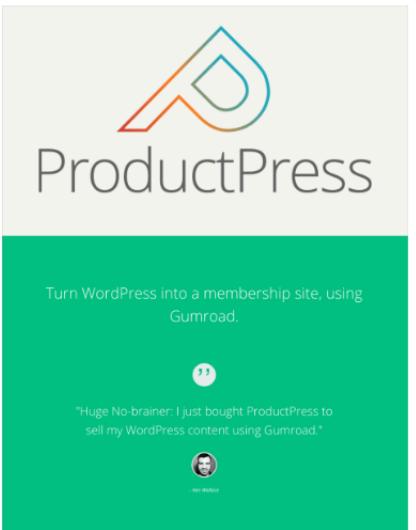
[Buy Now or Learn More](#)



Build Your Audience

Don't launch to crickets: build your audience before you build your product.

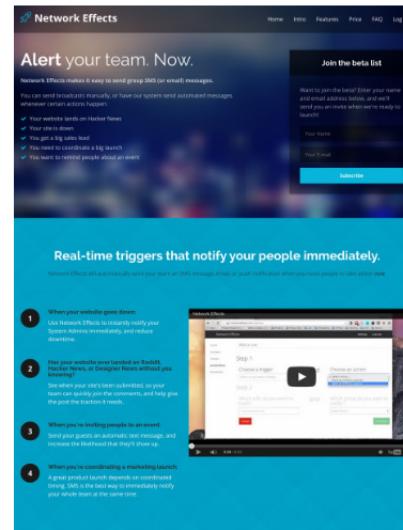
[Buy Now or Learn More](#)



ProductPress

Turn WordPress into a membership site, using Gumroad.

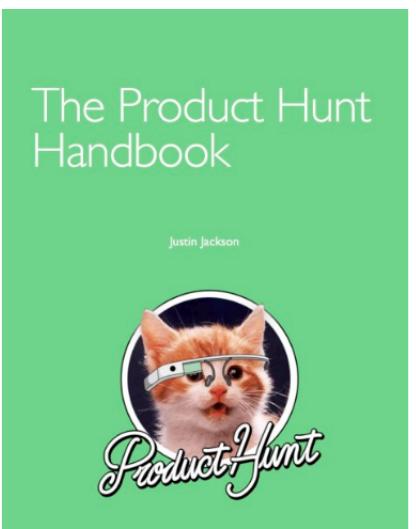
[Buy Now or Learn More](#)



Network Effects

Network Effects will automatically send your team an SMS message, email, or push notification when you need people to take action now.

[Buy Now or Learn More](#)



The Product Hunt Handbook

Learn how to effectively launch your own product on Product Hunt.

[Buy Now or Learn More](#)



The Hacker News Handbook

Hacker News is confusing. Learn how to use it to reach a bigger audience.

[Buy Now or Learn More](#)

Two got traction

Marketing for Developers

A guide to marketing your software, apps, and digital products

“I wish I'd had this before I started my last two projects.”

Marty Dill @codemarty

Marketing for Developers

Does this story sound familiar?

It's 1am, and you can't sleep. You've been struck with a brilliant idea and you can't get it out of your head. After fidgeting in bed for an hour, you go down to the basement and start coding.

By 7am you have a working prototype. You keep working on it evenings and weekends; creating new features, refining the design, and building out the billing system. Soon, the whole thing is ready for launch. You deploy it to

demarketing.xyz

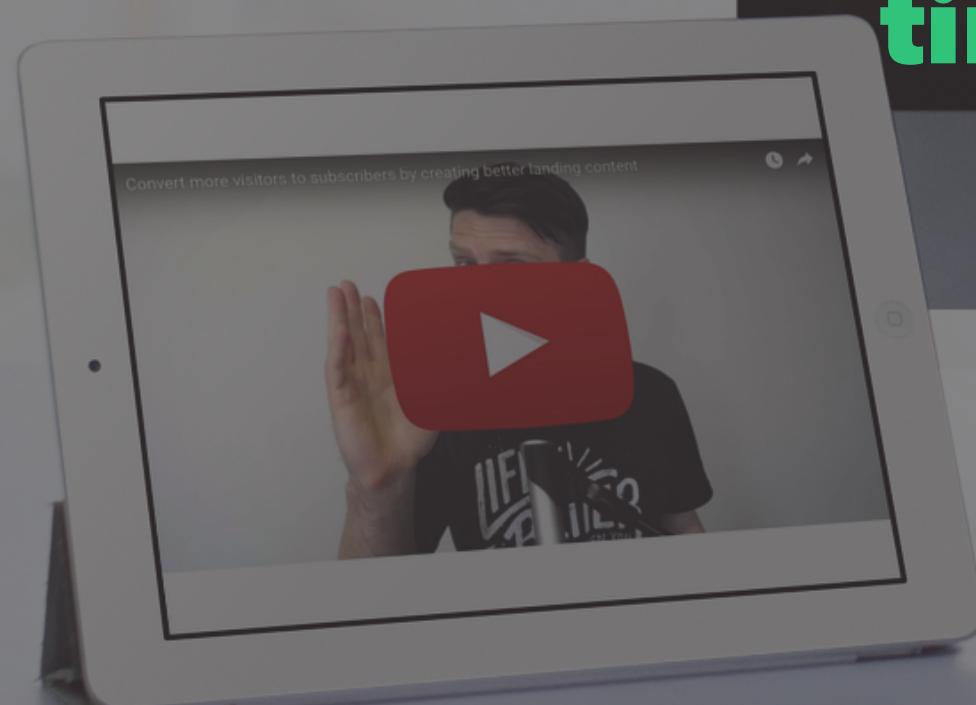
Marketing for Developers

by Justin Jackson



Tiny Marketing Wins

tinymarketingwins.com



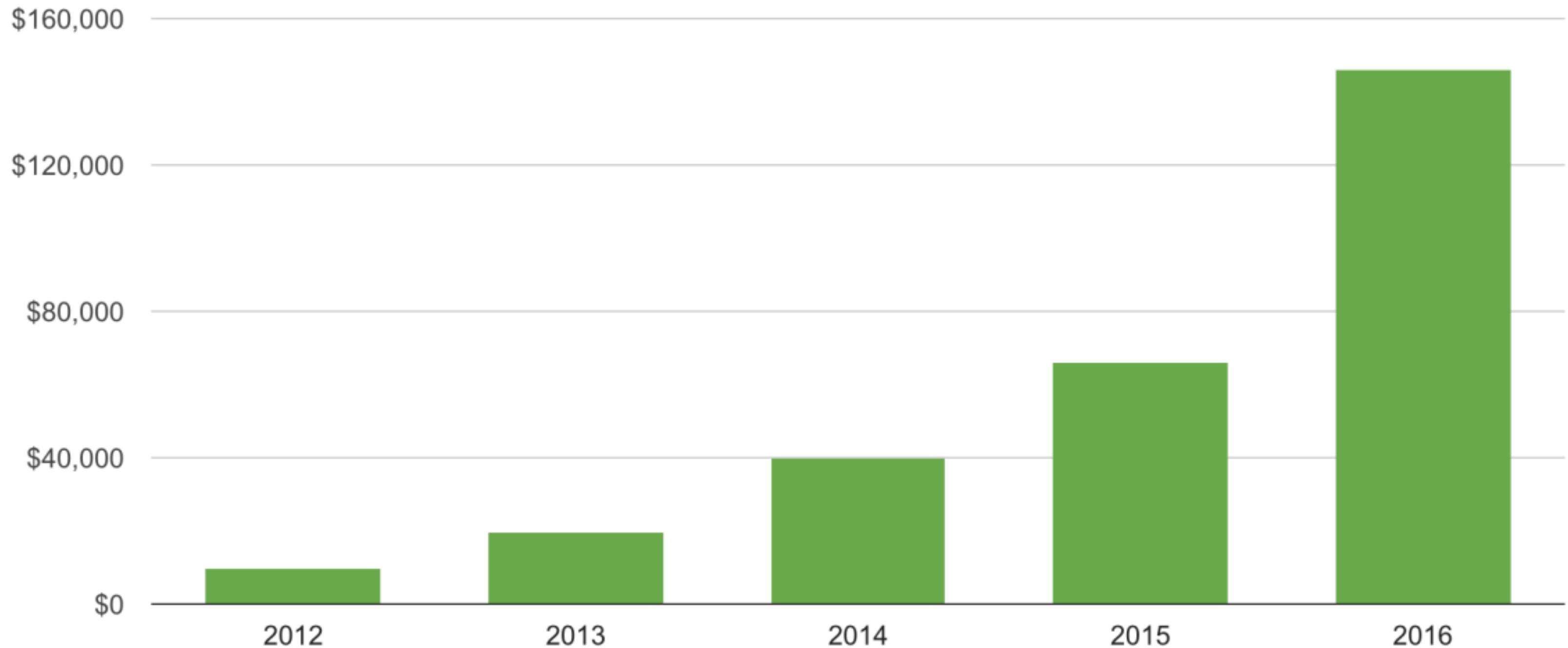
The image shows three overlapping windows illustrating marketing tools:

- Top Left Window:** A browser window showing the "Tactics" section of the [tinymarketingwins.com](https://tinymarketingwins.com/tactics/) website. It displays a progress bar indicating "17%" completion of tactics. Below the progress bar, there's a section titled "Tactics:" with a sub-section "Month 1: Get more email subscribers".
- Top Right Window:** A PDF titled "Get More Traffic.pdf (page 1 of 2)" from "TINY MARKETING WINS". The page contains text about getting traffic to a landing page, mentioning the need to piggyback on a bigger audience. It also includes a section titled "What you need" and a note about needing two things for more traffic.
- Bottom Window:** A browser window showing the [ConvertKit](https://app.convertkit.com) interface, featuring a bar chart with data points ranging from approximately 10 to 120.



**I gradually built up my side
project income, until this last year
I went full-time.**

Indie income by year



**I now make a full-time
independent income from the
things I make with computers.**

How can you do this?

First: find more time

Ideas

- Take a 1-week sabbatical from work to focus on your project
- Wake up early (put in 1 hour before work)
- Work from home one day a week
- Negotiate shorter work hours
- Get a remote job

5 Tactics 4 Principles

for achieving independence through products.

Tactics

1. Choose your audience.

What group are ***you*** best
equipped to serve?

Examples:

- Parents with kids in diapers
- Folks starting a podcast
- Freelance designers
- F# developers
- 40+ joggers
- Commuters

Characteristics of a good market

- Easy to reach (existing marketing channels)
- Highly motivated to solve their own problems
- Ability and willingness to pay
- A group you're excited to serve
- A group you're personally connected to

*"Where am I already
being paid for my **skills**
and expertise?"*

Example: Darian Rosebrook

**Occupation: designer
working in the banking
industry**



You can go vertical, or horizontal

Darian could focus on serving:

- **Banking** (vertical, serve your industry)
- **Designers** (horizontal, your peers)

Case study

My friend Francois had a consulting business where he helped Shopify store owners.



Instagram just got INSTAGREAT

YOUR CUSTOMERS SEE YOUR PRODUCTS ON INSTAGRAM BUT
CAN'T BUY. IT'S TIME TO CHANGE THAT!

GET STARTED

HOW IT WORKS

NOT SURE WHAT WE DO? HERE'S THE LO-DOWN.



SNAP



SPARKLE

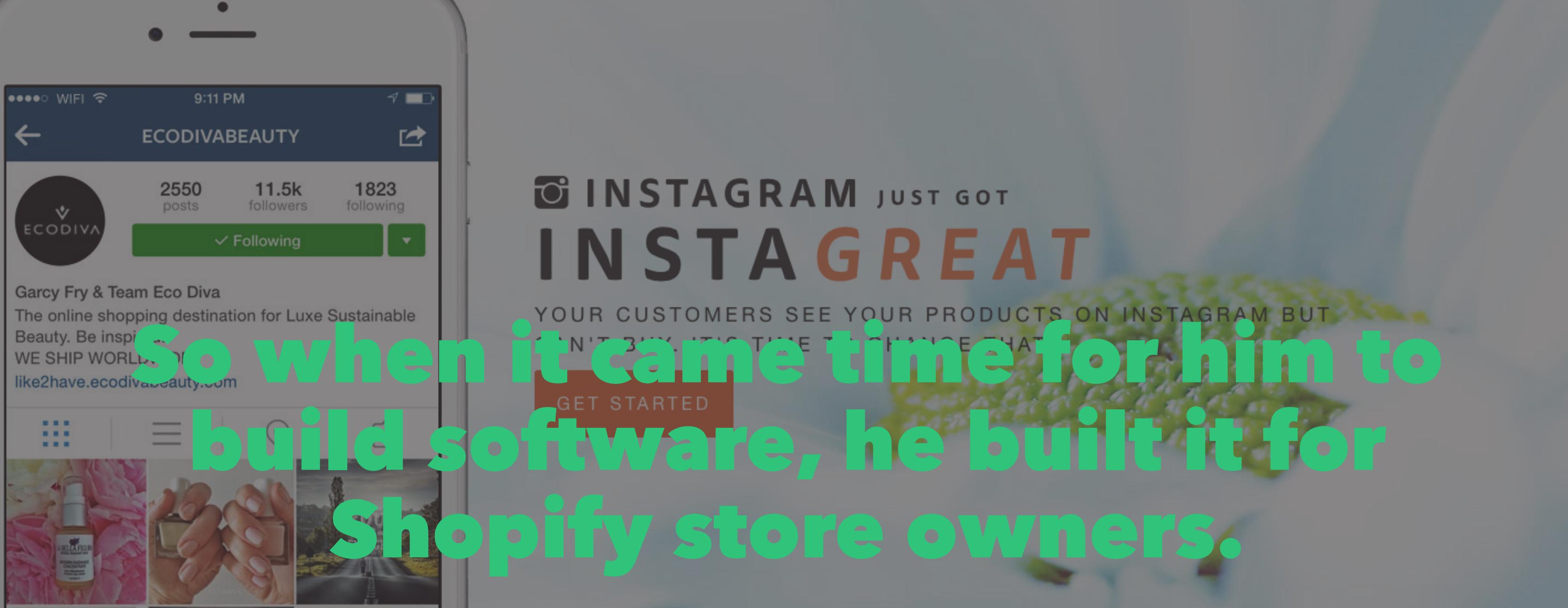


SHOP

Upload your photos to your Instagram account.

Add your product URLs to your LIKE2HAVE IT

Watch as users work these fingers and tap their



HOW IT WORKS

NOT SURE WHAT WE DO? HERE'S THE LO-DOWN.



SNAP



SPARKLE



SHOP

Upload your photos to your Instagram account.

Add your product URLs to your LIKE2HAVE IT

Watch as users work those fingers and tap their

Freelancers / consultants have a built-in advantage

- They're already being paid for their skills and expertise
- They're already connected to customers
- They can observe patterns: what requests do they get, most often?
- They can get their first product sales from existing customers

2. Research your audience.

**How do you find good product
ideas?**

**You want to hit a nerve that
makes people say...**

SHUT UP AND TAKE MY MONEY



Observe your audience

Listen. Take notes. Look for the gaps. Try little experiments. Get feedback.

*Understand the **progress** customers are trying to make **and** what **struggles** stand in their way.*

People buy products for
one reason only: ***to make
their lives better!***

People buy products for
one reason only: ***to make
their lives better!***

– @mijustin

Case study: jewelry store

How do you find the right incentive for competitive physical products?

[Answers](#) › [Category: Email subscribers / leads](#) › How do you find the right incentive for competitive physical products?



[Mario Berger](#) asked 2 days ago

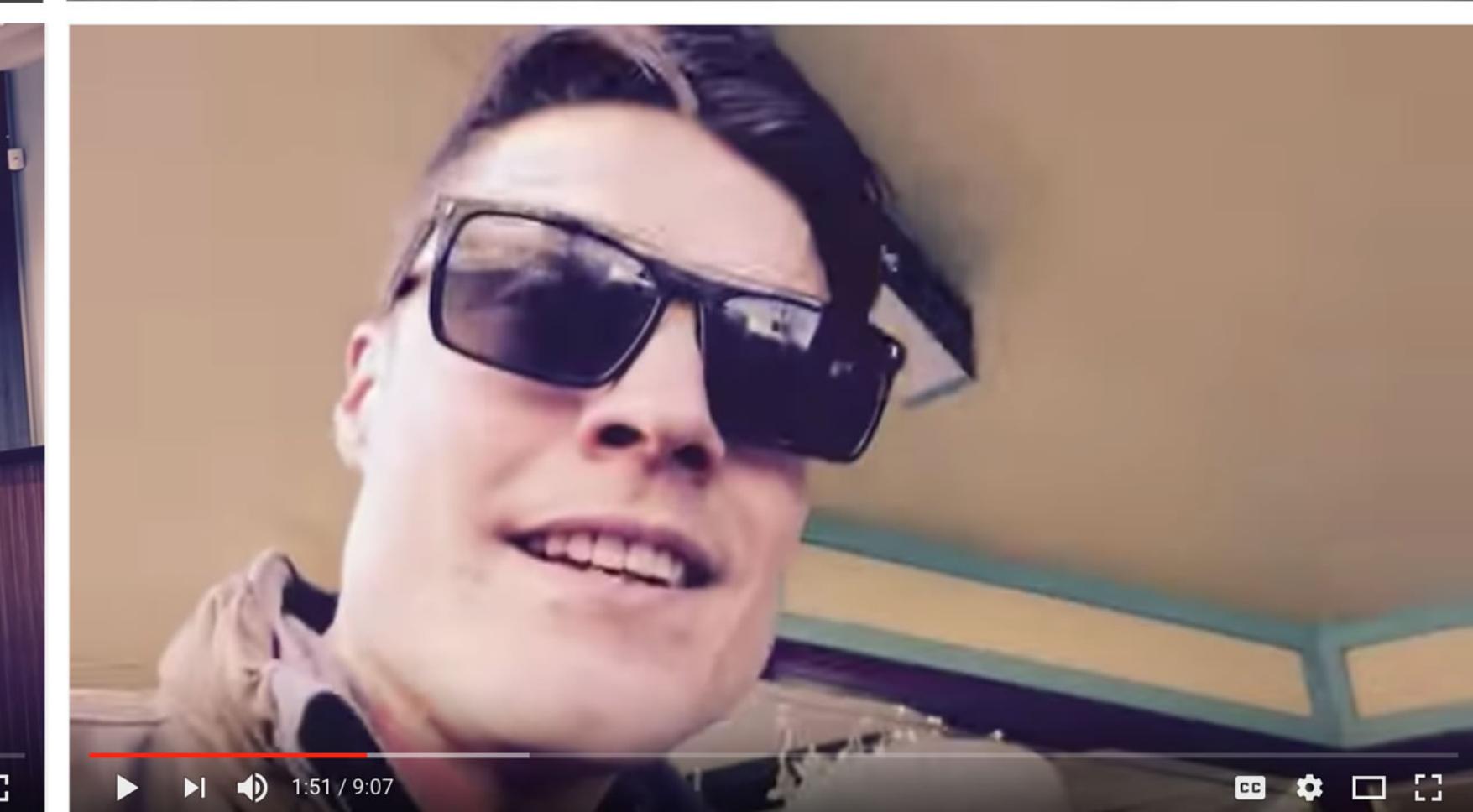
Subscribe [Edit](#) [Delete](#)

I got my first gig in the luxury jewelry industry. I went through your first tip, and in general, I understand the concept. But I find myself having troubles adapting this to luxury products like earrings, rings, etc.

1
▼

How would I find incentives for that niche?

(from tinymarketingwins.com)

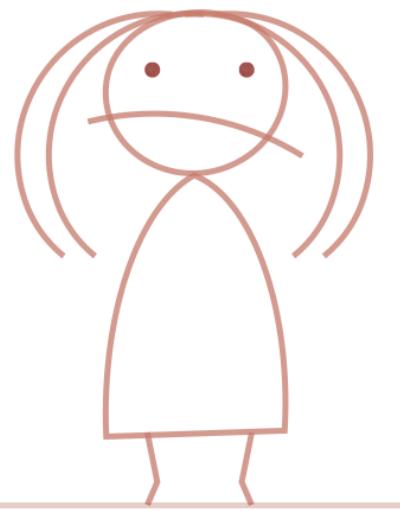


What did I observe?

- 90% of the products in the store were for **women**
- 100% of the people in the store were **men**
- 100% of the purchases were **men** buying jewelry for **women** (they're not buying jewelry for themselves)
- The men all looked **really nervous**.

Find the answers to these questions...

1. Where are they now?
2. How do they want their life to be better?
3. What obstacles stand in their way?

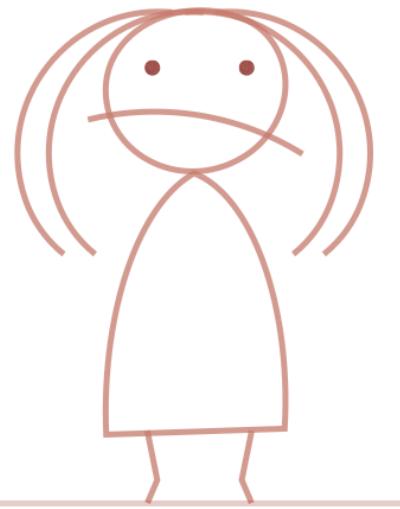


Who is this for?

Where are they now?

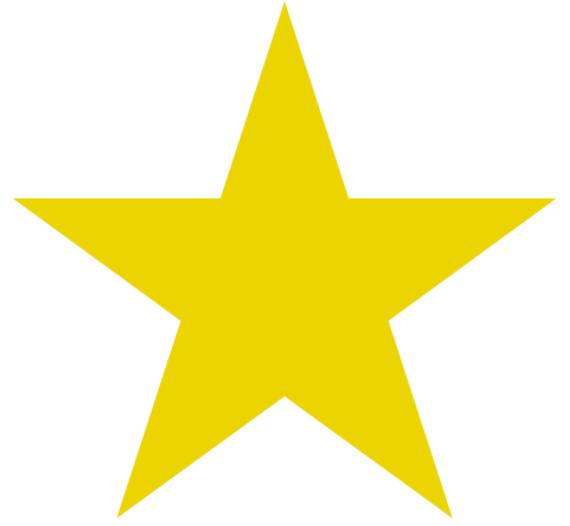
What's their dream?

How could their life
be better?



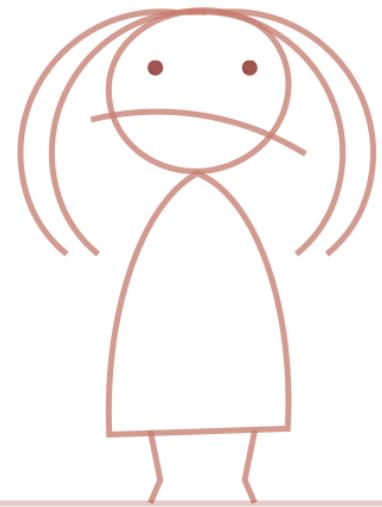
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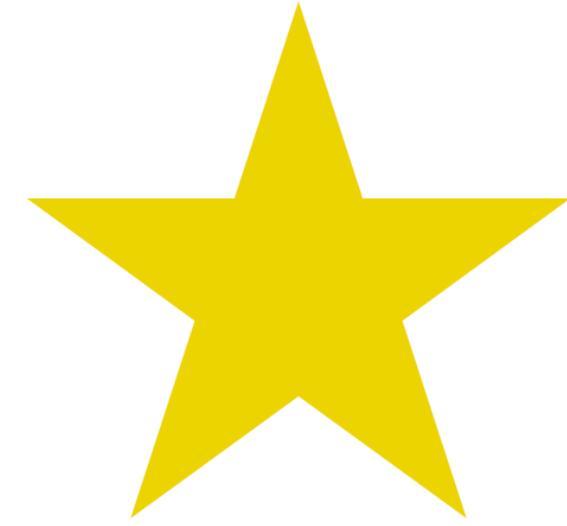
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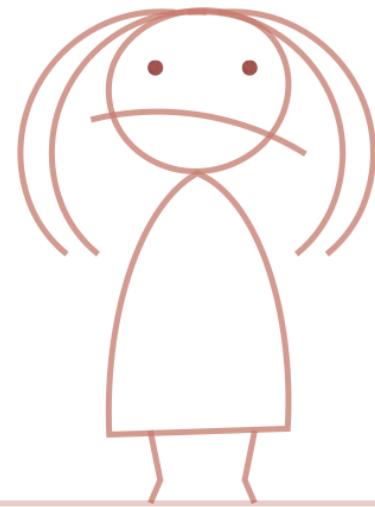
Who is this for?

Where are they now?



What's their dream?

How could their life
be better?



Who is this for?

Where are they now?



What's their dream?

How could their life
be better?

- **Who:** boyfriend
- **Super power they want:** impressive romantic boyfriend
- **Obstacles:** they don't know anything about romance or jewelry

Places to do research online:

1. Google (look at related keywords)
2. Twitter
3. Reddit
4. Facebook Groups
5. Facebook search

Places to do research offline:

1. Current consulting clients
2. Retail stores
3. Meetups
4. Conferences
5. Tradeshows

3. Create a hypothesis.

"Free me from the anxiety of wondering what to get my girlfriend so I can be an "impressive" romantic boyfriend."

Jewelry Gift Guide For Your Girlfriend

Written by: Lavalier | Thursday, October 16, 2014 | [Jewelry](#)



The holiday season is fast approaching, and you want to be on your game when it comes to gift giving. Even if you start out with the best of intentions, picking out a personal, statement-making piece of jewelry for your girlfriend can be a difficult road to tread. Lavalier has come up with a few guidelines to help you avoid any pitfalls, so you come out looking like a king!

Get a Jewelry Insurance Quote

Takes under a minute. No contact information required.

Your zip code

[GET A QUOTE](#)

About Lavalier

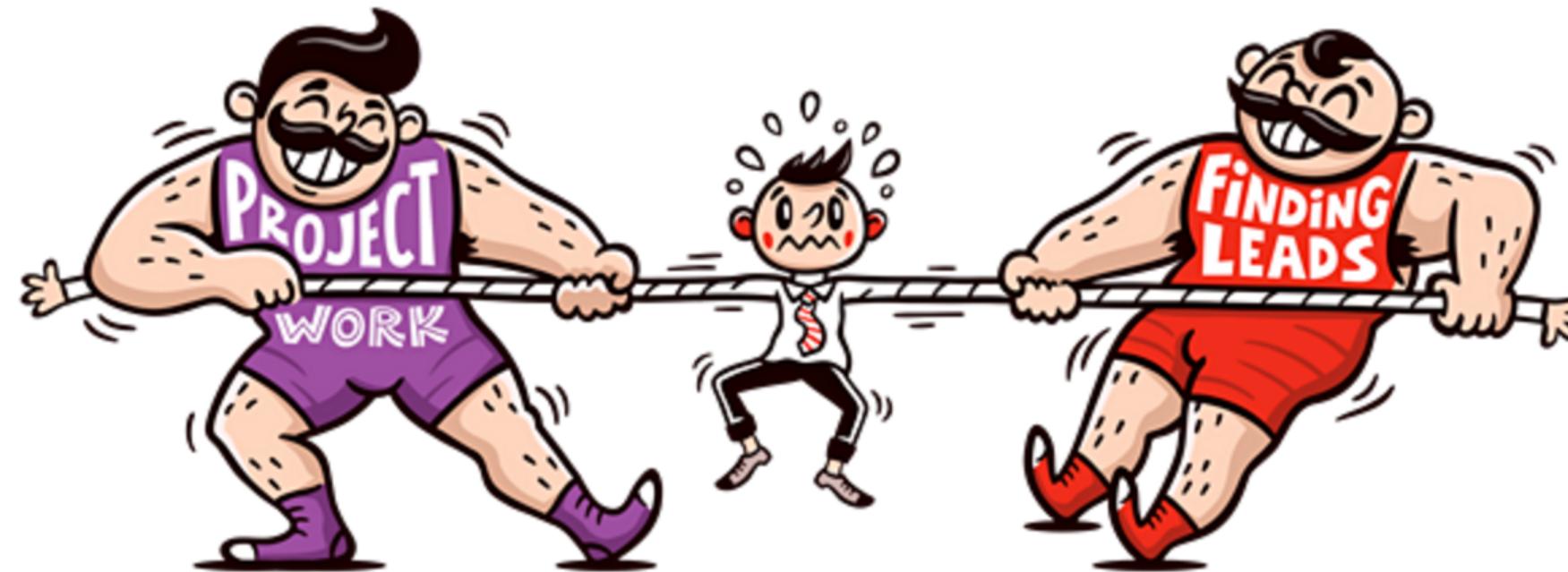
Jewelry insurance to protect your valuable jewelry and what it stands for. Receive customized and comprehensive coverage. Get back to what matters most.

Categories

[Giveaways](#)

[Insuring Your Jewelry](#)

More examples



Does your consultancy have more leaky dry spells than you're comfortable with?

There are thousands of businesses out there right now that could transform their company forever by hiring you to improve their website. You know this. The problem is, they don't. That's why it's your duty to find them.

But it's not always easy to find the right opportunities – especially when you're already working too much.

*"Free me from the anxiety
of **finding new leads**, so
that I have **steady stream**
of clients."*

What ***super power*** do
they need?

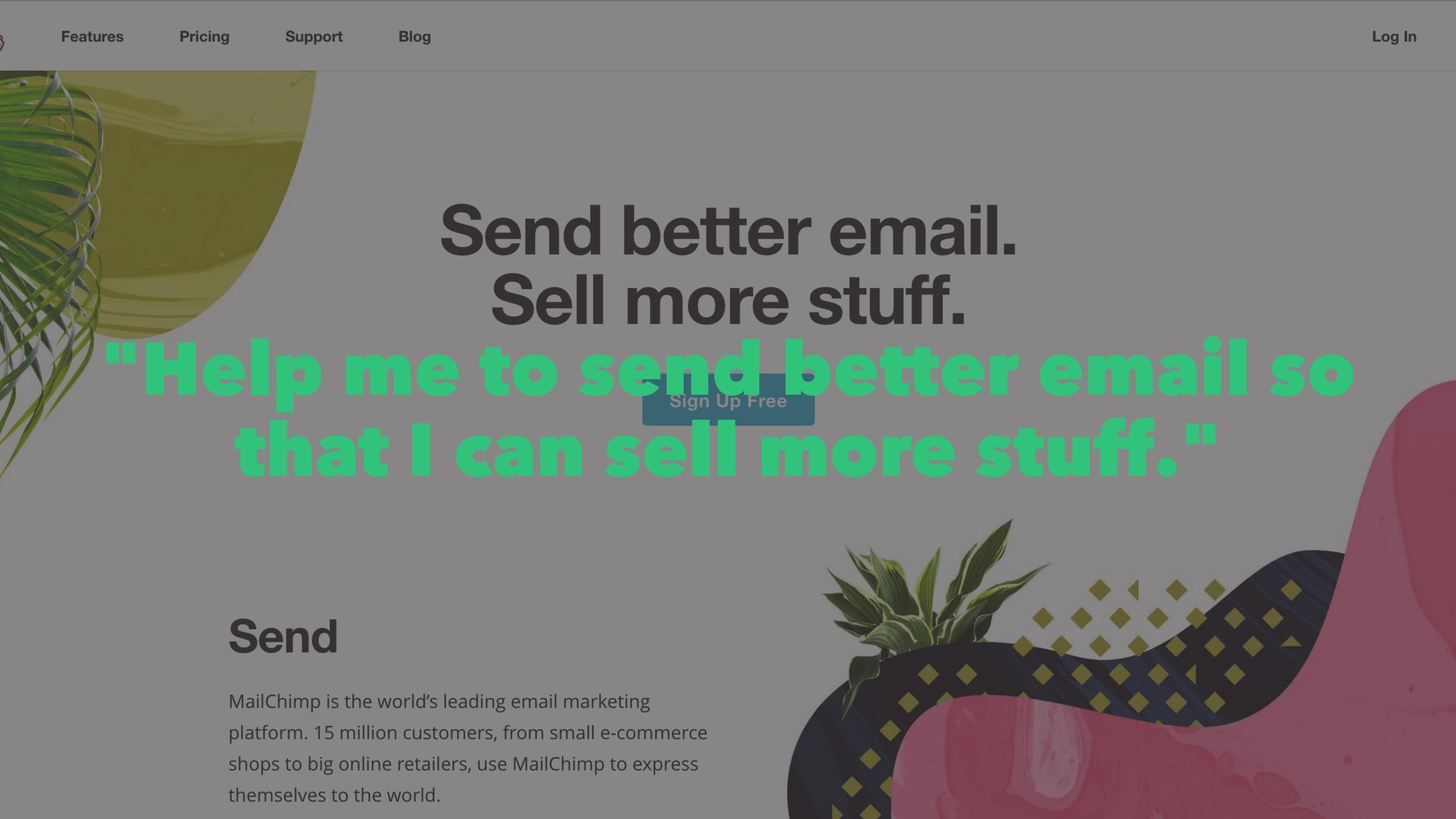
Send better email. Sell more stuff.

[Sign Up Free](#)

Send

MailChimp is the world's leading email marketing platform. 15 million customers, from small e-commerce shops to big online retailers, use MailChimp to express themselves to the world.





Send better email.
Sell more stuff.

"Help me to send better email so
that I can sell more stuff."

Send

MailChimp is the world's leading email marketing platform. 15 million customers, from small e-commerce shops to big online retailers, use MailChimp to express themselves to the world.



Magic words to use in your hypothesis

- give me
- help me
- free me
- make the
- take away
- equip me

Help me [with this
obstacle] so that I can
achieve [this dream].

**4. Create a tiny product to test
your hypothesis.**

Example: useronboard.com

Onboarding teardowns

How Basecamp Onboards New Users

<<

2 / 50

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Home Page



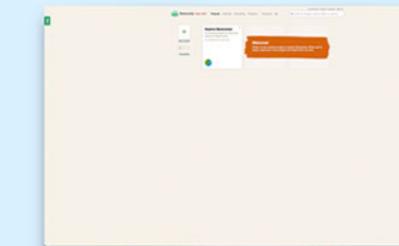
Pricing Page



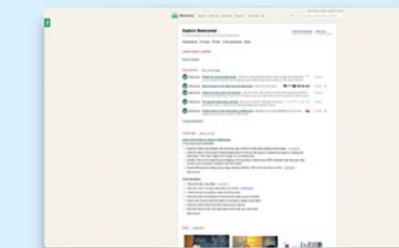
Signup Confirmation



Getting Started



Tutorial Project



New Project Form



How Basecamp Onboards New Users

<<

1 / 50

>>

Thanks for reading!

If you enjoyed it, how about getting a nice,
crisp update whenever new ones come out?

Your email

Stay Up to Date

p.s. There will probably be other occasional delights like articles & videos, etc.
Not too many, though, because I know you're busy.

**Put something out into the world,
and see if you can get conversion
(dollars or email addresses).**

Tiny product ideas

- Workshop (online or in-person)
- Email course
- Coaching calls
- Excel sheet
- Ebook

My advice?

Start with a workshop.



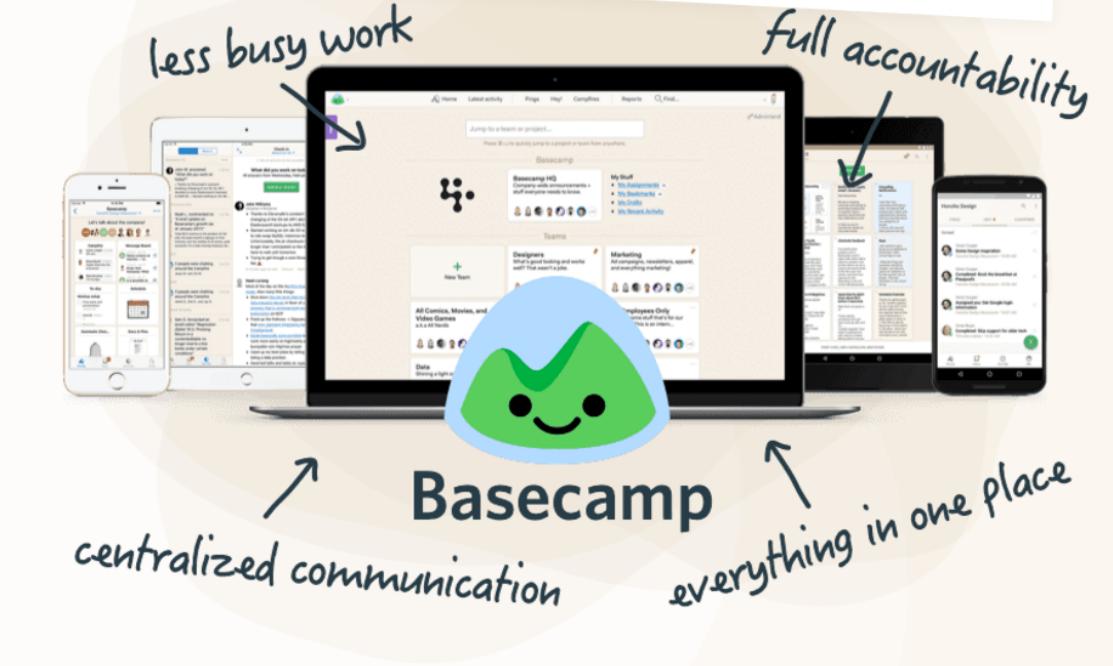
Basecamp

2017 is the year to get it together

Why use a bunch of apps...



when you can just use Basecamp?



Replace all over the place with ONE place. Basecamp's all you need to organize work & teams, communicate company-wide, and make sure *absolutely nothing* slips through the cracks.

Instead of this:

- ✗ messy email chains
- ✗ stuff slipping through the cracks
- ✗ constantly playing catch up

Try Basecamp with your team

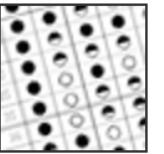
Enter your email address to
start a free 30 day trial:

Our workshops, custom on-site training presentations, and research reports provide you with powerful knowledge you can use today.



Usability Workshops

37signals' popular 1-day, Chicago-based workshop series will inspire and arm you with real world usability and design solutions that can improve your site immediately. **Our next workshop:** "[The Building of Basecamp](#)" (behind the scenes of the building of a web-based application) on June 25.



Research Reports

37signals in-depth [Research Reports](#) reveal how the Web's leading sites handle common usability and customer experience issues. The reports are richly-illustrated, buzzword-free, and full of practical information you can put to use today. [Our first report](#) (published January 2003) analyzes, reviews, and rates the search engines and search results at 25 popular e-commerce sites. The report also includes 22 best practices to help you improve search at your site.



Custom On-site Corporate Training

37signals can visit your offices and teach your designers, project managers, or executive team how to improve your site. Sessions are custom tailored to your organization's needs. Presentations can be as short as 2 hours or as long as 2 days. [Get in touch](#) and let's talk about setting up a presentation.

"The seminar was truly amazing and we learned a great deal of applicable information."

— **Charles Plath**, Workshop attendee (November 8, 2002)

Spotlight



E-Commerce Search Report

Having trouble finding what you're looking for? In this detailed report, 37signals analyzes, reviews, and rates the search engines and search results at 25 popular e-commerce sites.

[Learn more](#)

Companies

We've trained folks from a wide range of companies including:

- Wells Fargo
- National Public Radio

Schools

We've trained students & faculty from institutions including:

- Cornell University
- Northern Illinois University

States

People have traveled from these states to attended our workshops:

- Arizona
- California

Our workshops, custom on-site training presentations, and research reports provide you with powerful knowledge you can use today.

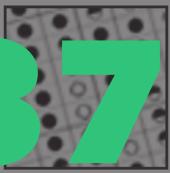
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Usability Workshops

37signals' popular 1-day, Chicago-based workshop series will inspire and arm you with real world usability and design solutions that can improve your site immediately. **Our next workshop:** "The Building of Basecamp" (behind the scenes of the building of our own web application) to be announced.



Research Reports

37signals in-depth Research Reports reveal how the Web's leading sites handle core usability and customer experience issues. The reports are richly illustrated, buzzword-free, and full of practical information you can put to use today. Our first report (published January 2003) analyzes reviews and relevance search results at 25 popular e-commerce sites. The report also includes 22 best practices to help you improve search at your site.



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Want to know what's working well with your search? Looking for a detailed look at how other sites are doing? 37signals analyzes, reviews, and rates the search engines and search results at 25 popular e-commerce sites.

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Basecamp (the product) started after 37signals (a design agency) was teaching workshops.

*"Starting small puts
100% of your energy
on actually solving real
problems for real
people."*

– Derek Sivers

Start small!

**5. If the feedback is good,
iterate!**

What you learn when you launch a tiny version:

1. How hard is it to find customers?
2. Did I hit a nerve? Did I identify their #1 struggle?
3. How hard is it to get people to pay?
4. How satisfied were people with the solution?
5. Do I like the customers?

If the answers are all
 then keep iterating
on the product.

Examples:

- Excel sheet (\$19) → web application (\$39 / month)
- Local workshop (\$99) → online course (\$199)

The steps

1. Start with a group of people.
2. Research + listen.
3. Identify their #1 struggle.
4. Make a tiny product that helps them with that struggle.
5. Iterate.

Principles

1. Your personal context is important!



[–] **dan_tao** 4 points 2 years ago



Do you think it's reasonable for someone with a full-time job and a family to start a small business on the side, without negatively impacting their performance at work or the quality of their family life?



[–] **friedster** Jason Fried [S] 10 points 2 years ago

▼ I'm the wrong person to give advice on this since I started my businesses when I was a single idiot.

Don't try to be like your hero

Embrace your personal context

Where you're at **now** will
determine what type of
product you launch (and
how long it will take).

That's OK.

2. Momentum is everything.

People in motion make mistakes, but they also move forward. Keep moving, keep trying new things, keep experimenting. Be persistent!

3. Choose your market carefully.

Everything starts with the group you want to serve. Profitable products are born out sizable markets (with money) who are highly motivated to improve their lives.

4. People use products for one reason only:

**To make their lives
better.**

Thank you!

justinjackson.ca/slides
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