

# YouTube

## BLACK BOOK

*HOW TO CREATE A CHANNEL, BUILD AN  
AUDIENCE & MAKE MONEY ON YOUTUBE*



*CHRISTOPHER SHARPE*

# **YouTube BlackBook**

**How to Create a Channel, Build an Audience and Make Money  
on YouTube**

**by Christopher Sharpe**

## How To Read This Book

There are a lot of resources and guides out there that claim to teach you all kinds of YouTube secrets and shortcuts.

The truth is, if you spend enough time online and do a little research you can find pretty much everything you need to know online for free. The *YouTube Creators Playbook* is a perfect example of this. It's excellent and if you follow its advice you will be off to a great start.

This book is a little different. *YouTube BlackBook* builds on established best practices but also incorporates an important additional layer - all the things I've personally experimented with over the past five years as I've built two very successful businesses on YouTube. This is a look behind the curtain.

I've worked hard to make this book as clear and concise as possible, but there is TON of information in these pages.

If you are new to YouTube and internet video, chances are a lot of it won't make sense on the first read through. I suggest you read through the whole thing fast the first time. Don't worry if you catch everything. Then get to work making and launching your own videos. Refer back to this book as needed.

## FREE UPDATES

YouTube is always changing and I'll be doing my best to keep the information in this book up to date at no charge to you. If you'd like to receive free updates, sign up for the BlackBook Mailing list.

<http://christophersharpe.com/ytbb>

I've also created a free LAUNCH Checklist that you can print out and use every time you launch a new video. It ties in directly with the steps I lay out in this book. You'll get the Launch Checklist immediately, and you'll also be signed up to receive updates to this book when I release them. Thanks!

## Introduction

I'm drinking an iced espresso and typing this from the 19th floor of a hotel in SoHo.

I can see the Empire State Building from my window. This trip was paid for by Google and Hilah (my partner and wife) is a few blocks away doing a cooking demonstration for the press at a 5-story "Google House" that's been turned into a showcase for their products.

When we started *Hilah Cooking* almost four years ago, it was just something we did for fun on weekends. But we've now both been able to quit our day jobs and enjoy a better quality of life than we've ever had before.

The *Hilah Cooking* brand is thriving and continues to expand its reach far beyond YouTube. We've published several books, hosted a successful live event and produced three additional series for Scripps Networks (owners of the Food Network and Travel Channel) and Tastemade.

After the success of *Hilah Cooking* I wanted to see if I could replicate its success so I launched a second YouTube Channel to implement everything I'd learned. *Yoga With Adriene* is now one of the fastest growing fitness channels on YouTube.

Even though we work more hours than we ever did before, we are spending all our time doing what we love to do.

It all seems a little unbelievable. When people ask us about what we do, I've learned to use things like "we have an online cooking brand" or something cloaked in marketing lingo. When I answer more truthfully -- "We make shows for YouTube" -- their interest is replaced by a blank look.

I don't blame them. It's a little hard for even me to believe.

## The YouTube Revolution

It's never been easier to create a video, upload it and broadcast it for the entire world to see. This is an amazing thing.

After finishing my first feature film, I vividly remember transcoding about 9 different versions of the trailer for different bandwidths and different browser plugins. In those pre-YouTube dark ages you had to install a plugin in your web browser (Quicktime, RealPlayer, Windows Media Player) in order to view video content. I then FTPed the files to my web server and hand coded

links to the files. It worked okay but the video was tiny and you had to wait for the high resolution versions to load, even if you were on a fast internet connection. Like I said: the dark ages. And this was in 2006.

It was shortly after this that I first heard about a thing called YouTube. I checked it out and thought it was pretty terrible. In its early days it really was the stereotype some people still hold about YouTube today - cat videos, people falling down, and pirated content. This was before the vloggers had arrived to colonize the space. The ability to embed videos was pretty cool, but the quality was awful. There was no way I would consider using it for a movie trailer.

Other video platforms quickly began to pop up (some of them like Vimeo and Metacafe had actually been around longer than YouTube) and most of them seemed to have better quality and a better video interface than YouTube. As a filmmaker, I liked Vimeo from the beginning and was betting on that horse. But then in 2006, Google bought YouTube for \$1.65 billion. That instantly made YouTube a lot more interesting to the press. Suddenly, YouTube was pretty much the only video platform that you heard very much about.

While the other guys are still alive and kicking, right now YouTube has become the dominant video platform. Vimeo went on to build a strong community of filmmakers who love the high quality video and it has expanded its service to target businesses. Blip.tv is now owned by Maker which is owned by Disney. Metacafe now curates original and exclusive content rather than focus on user uploads. Daily Motion is apparently the world's second largest video sharing site, but I rarely hear much about it.

By contrast, over the last couple of years YouTube has exploded. Now mega-companies are making major moves to establish audiences in the YouTube ecosystem. We've seen the rise of Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs) that have been aggressively absorbing channels in order to sell more advertising. YouTube has invested over \$200 million to fund original, exclusive YouTube content.

When we first started posting *Hilah Cooking* videos, the YouTube partner program was still relatively new. You had to qualify for it. We didn't start out with a goal of making money on YouTube. It was simply one distribution point. We wanted as many people as possible to watch our show so that we could get on the radars of people who made TV shows. Our ultimate goal was to produce a TV show.

So we posted to as many places as possible. We used a service called TubeMogul that allowed us to upload once and distribute to a bunch of different sites. Over time most of those sites went out of business or merged with other sites. We also realized that a lot of the sites were of poor quality and not presenting our brand in the way we wanted. We gradually started to dial things back and now YouTube is the primary focus for both *Hilah Cooking* and *Yoga With Adriene*.

Love it or hate it, YouTube is currently where the majority of the audience is . . . and where the action is. YouTube has their sights set on becoming the next TELEVISION. As more money and bigger names continue to pour into the space, it's going to become increasingly difficult for small businesses and independent content creators to compete. Right now there is still a wide open window of opportunity, but I sense that it is slowly closing. Or at least becoming more difficult.

In this book, I'm going to answer the question about what I really **do**. How we make our videos. How we build thriving communities on YouTube. How we actually make money.

But most importantly, I'm going to teach **you** how to do it.

Let's get started!

## ***Chapter One:***

# **My BackStory**

In this chapter I am going to share the personal story of how I became a YouTube video producer and built two profitable businesses. I'm not a traditional entrepreneur and have tended to value the creative side of things more than the business. My background has played a huge role in the types of shows I have chosen to create and the values that have shaped things behind the scenes.

If this is of no interest to you and you want to get straight to the nuts-and-bolts, skip ahead to Chapter 2. I completely understand. This chapter gets a little weird.

### **JUNE 2009**

It was the last day of production and I was dirty, sun burnt and completely exhausted.

I was at the end of a multi-year struggle to make a post-apocalyptic feature-length comedy called *The Spider Babies*. I had spent a year writing the script and a year trying to find the financing. My first feature was completed in 2006 and I wasn't getting any younger. I quit my job, sold all my stuff and was committed to do whatever it took to get this movie made.

It had all gone to hell. That story would fill its own book. On this last day of shooting, all I knew is that the movie would never see the light of day.

The last shot of the day was a party scene at the bank of a pond at a ranch in the middle of nowhere. Craig, our production designer, had taken the rest of the budget and driven to a fireworks stand. He spent all of it and came back with a trunk full of patriotic explosives. Now he was on the other side of the pond staging a damn impressive fireworks show. We got the shots we needed, but there were still fireworks left. So he kept going.

I told the camera guys to go crazy and shoot whatever looked cool. I grabbed a beer, sat down in the tall grasses and watched the explosions of light bloom over the surface of the pond.

It was the end of four hellish weeks where nothing had gone right. We were wrapping production but we had not completed the script. We were still

missing a big chunk of the third act and everybody was worn out. Also, I wasn't sure how good the stuff we had shot actually was.

As a director, this is what you call a complete and utter failure.

You failed at your primary task: you didn't get the movie in the can.

So as I watched the fireworks explode, I made the decision to just GIVE UP. Maybe forever. But definitely for a year. I had spent years trying to get movies made and so far all I had to show for it were a few short films and a micro-budget feature that got an international distribution deal, but from which I hadn't seen a dime.

I was bone-tired and broken-hearted. Maybe I could just get a job and enjoy life like regular people. I had put everything into getting this movie made and now I literally had no money and no place to live. So after I called cut for the last time, I finished my beer and did what any reasonable person would do.

I drove to my mom's house.

## **SUMMER 2009**

It's easy to get discouraged when you're in your 30's, living with your mom, have no money and no idea what you're going to do to get a job. I'd spent most of my adult life trying to make a living in the film industry with limited financial success. As far as "real jobs" were concerned, I was pretty much unemployable. This was also right in the middle of a massive recession and the economy was still shedding jobs like crazy.

I spent a few weeks wallowing in self-pity and reflecting on the journey that had brought me to this point. In hind-sight, my life and career decisions weren't looking so bright. Why the hell did I go to film school instead of Law School? Or any kind of school whose graduates actually get jobs? Why had I spent so much money making movies and comedy videos instead of investing in an IRA? Why had I never just settled down and figured out how to be happy with a normal life?

Looking back I saw that my entire life had been a strange combination of creativity and entrepreneurship, but I had never been able to find the right balance. The balance that would result in both creative happiness and financial prosperity.

But there wasn't much time for soul searching or feeling sorry for myself. I was dead-broke. All my physical possessions fit into my 2000 Honda Civic.



Luckily, I still had my MacBook.

## **RE-EDUCATION**

My most immediate concern was money.

I needed some.

I figured my best bet at getting some was to find some kind of internet job.

So I learned how to do search engine optimization. I signed up for a one dollar trial of an online class that taught you all about search engine optimization. I figured if I could learn SEO while polishing up my web design skills I could get a nice government job with insurance, benefits and a regular paycheck.

So for the next few months I did nothing but study SEO, HTML and CSS. I built a few incredibly boring websites and got them ranked for some pretty competitive terms. I put some Adsense on them and even had a little income trickling it.

Then I started sending out resumes and somehow managed to get the boring, government desk job of my dreams. I got hired as a Website Content Specialist for the State Bar of Texas. I moved back to Austin, found an apartment and started showing up to my cubicle every day.

Mission accomplished.

## **WINTER 2009**

It only took a few months at the new job to put systems in place so that everything was humming along smoothly and there was plenty of time for my mind to wander back to my own projects. The movie-making thing had been in my blood since I was a kid, and I had always loved making videos. Even in the time between my two features, I had made lots of sketch comedy videos and short films.

I was getting the itch again and the world of internet video seemed to be booming. But this time I was determined to keep it small, keep control over it and most importantly NOT lose money. I was still just getting back onto my feet financially so if I was going to do something, it would have to be cheap.

And by cheap, I really meant FREE. I didn't have any money to spend but I DID have a very basic video camera, a janky photography tripod, and my old iMac with video editing software. I wanted to try something fun and simple

that would combine my love of making videos with all the new internet stuff I had learned.

This is where Hilah enters the story. We had been good friends for several years and she had acted in a bunch of sketch comedy videos I had directed. She was also one of the leads in *The Spider Babies*. I mentioned that I wanted to start a new project and after a little brainstorming we had decided on an idea: a funny cooking show for people who are new to cooking.

Hilah is a natural on camera, hilarious at improv and a really great cook. We also really liked working together (and I really loved eating her food). It seemed like a winner all around. We decided we were going to launch *Hilah Cooking* as a web series.

My research showed that there was a potential audience of people who had never been exposed to their parents cooking. They had grown up on fast food and microwave dinners but now had a desire to learn to cook for themselves. Since we didn't have money to promote the show, we would use search engine optimization to find these people when they were searching for a recipe or topic. I figured if we could rank high enough for "how to poach an egg" or "how to make chili" we would have a constant stream of new viewers. Some would probably hate the show, but some would love it. And the people who loved it would stick around.

Our initial goal was to make 100 episodes. Then we would take a break and evaluate whether this was a business or just a hobby. We made a list of potential recipes - almost all of which were based on keywords I thought we could successfully rank for. We were looking for things that lots of people searched for but that didn't have a lot of competition.

We decided on a schedule. We would shoot every Saturday and publish a new video every Monday night.

We released our first episode on January 26, 2010.

## **FEBRUARY 2013**

I turned off my iMac, flipped the switch on a fluorescent light and – for the last time – walked out of the cubicle where I had spent most of my working hours for three and a half years. It had been a great experience and everything I had hoped for when I set out to get a job.

But lots of things had happened since we launched that first episode. I was now bringing in more money from my side-businesses than I was from my

bi-weekly paycheck. *Hilah Cooking* was thriving and I had recently launched the *Yoga With Adriene* channel which was already growing quickly. We had launched several successful products and were starting to produce additional content for outside companies. I had used all my vacation time traveling around Texas shooting a new travel show for Tastemade.

Between my real job and my side businesses I was working around the clock and everything was starting to suffer. Quitting my day job seemed CRAZY at the time. But nothing had captured my imagination like internet video and I felt like I had only begun to scratch the surface. It was time to put the pedal to the floor and *go for it*.

I turned in my security badge and walked to my car.

I was now a full-time YouTube producer.

# **PART I**

## **CREATING A SHOW**

## *Chapter Two*

# **Planning Your Channel**

Before you crank up your camera and start blasting videos into the universe, take some time and think about why you're creating a YouTube channel and what your goals are. Building a channel can be a long, hard uphill trudge and if you are completely focused on numbers and analytics, it can be disheartening at times. *(If your goal is just to make some quick cash through pre-roll ads, I can assure you there are much easier and faster ways to make money online.)*

Why do you want to create a YouTube channel?

- Showcase your creativity?
- Make money?
- Make friends?
- Build a brand?
- Market your business?
- Tell a story?
- Promote a product?
- Showcase your work and get a job?
- Increase traffic to your blog or website?

YouTube is an amazing platform for all of these things and all of them are legitimate reasons to start a channel.

### **What are you PASSIONATE About?**

If you aren't really into video games, don't start a video game channel just because pewdiepie is the biggest channel on YouTube right now.

For a great example of someone who has built a huge audience for a very niche passion, check out [The Blu Collection](#). This channel is all about a guy's toy collection with a huge focus on toys based on the *Cars* movies. At the time of this writing he has over 1 BILLION views and is adding almost 2,000 subscribers a day. I've only skimmed his channel, but he obviously loves what he is doing and this has translated into a thriving audience.

## WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

I'm convinced that the vast majority of shows on YouTube are created without even thinking about the potential audience. You can still find success, but taking some time to think about your audience in advance can give your project an extra edge.

Ask yourself honestly:

- Will anybody really want to watch this show?
- If your answer is yes, **who** are they?
- **Why** are they going to watch?
- What is the best way to **communicate** with them?
- How are they going to **find** your show?
- How are you going to **connect with** them?

Ultimately, I think there is an audience for just about everything. But by thinking hard about who your audience is, you will be able to design a show that resonates with them more immediately and you will find them faster.

## AUDIENCE VS. COMMUNITY

When it comes to our shows, I actually don't like to use the term audience. Instead, I prefer community. Audience implies a one-way communication. Community involves not only two-way communication but also something more complex.

In all honesty, interacting with the *Hilah Cooking* and *Yoga With Adriene* communities has probably been the most rewarding aspect of being a YouTube producer. We've gotten to know these people. We've met a bunch of them in real life. It is not a one-way street and in many ways it feels like we are all in this together. The show is not a success without them and we take them into account with every decision we make.

This is one of the things that really differentiates web shows and television shows.

So don't make the mistake of being a narcissistic asshole. Cultivate your community and treat your viewers with respect.

## Show Format

If you're a super creative person, you're probably going to want to re-invent the wheel on a regular basis. But trust me - you don't have time to do that. To build a loyal YouTube following, you need to produce videos on a consistent schedule. The more consistent the better.

I've tested just about every conceivable variation of upload schedule and frequency. Based on this testing, the most important factor seems to be consistency. Both of my main channels are now on a weekly schedule and we publish at the exact same time every week. Our audience is growing faster now than it was when we were publishing 3 times per week. If you're doing something that is relatively simple from a production standpoint, I highly recommend designing a show that you can produce weekly.

If you're producing something more ambitious - such as short films or animation - a consistent schedule is still important. If you can only produce one episode per month - determine a monthly schedule and stick with it.

## **Embrace Limitations**

Lots of people get hung up on all the equipment they think they need to get started. The truth is, you probably already have everything you need to at least get started. The camera quality on most smartphones is as good or better as the camera I had when we started. There are very popular vlogs that are shot with web cams. Instead of over-thinking it, figure out how you can make the most out of what you've got.

This applies to your content as well. Build your show around locations, props, talent and resources you have easy access to.

## **Let The Personality Shape The Format**

Your regular viewers (the foundation of your community) are not showing up every week to see your fancy camerawork - and many times they're not even there for the topic of the video. They're showing up to see (and connect with) your on camera personality.

Design your format so that it spotlights and reflect the personality of your on-camera personality. Take a look at all the multi-millionaire vloggers to get an example of shots that work.

- [Philip DeFranco](#)
- [Daily Grace](#)

- [Lamarr Wilson](#)

## **YouTube is NOT television**

Over the past few years, some major production companies have launched big-budget productions on YouTube. We saw a lot of these when YouTube was doling out millions to fund original content. Many of them have taken a traditional television approach to the style. Big budgets, amazing videography, aggressive editing and even some mid-list "stars" have characterized these productions.

There were a few successes but the majority of them failed. In my opinion, they failed because they were just making "TV" for YouTube rather than recognizing the unique opportunities offered by the platform.

In theatre there is the concept of a "fourth wall." The fourth wall would be the invisible fourth wall at the front of a traditional three-walled box set. This is how the audience "sees" into the world of the play. When an actor acknowledges the existence of the audience - it's referred to as "breaking the fourth wall." This concept exists in the world of film and television as well.

In YouTube, the fourth wall is pretty much ALWAYS broken. The most popular YouTube personalities talk directly to their audience. Some of the biggest recent scripted hits have come from Pemberly Digital (*Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) who have built their entire company on a broken fourth wall.

They've now produced several incredibly successful stories that all are essentially characters talking into a webcam.

When watching videos on YouTube, there is always the sense that a PERSON made the video or at least liked a video enough to upload it. Your viewers want a sense of connection and relationship with you. Embrace this, rather than obscuring it with fancy editing or flashy graphics that will look outdated next year.

## **Video Format Breakdown**

There is no perfect format for a video. There is no ideal length. There is no magic bullet that works every time for every video. The only way to get close is to get started, pay attention to the response (analytics) and then make tweaks to improve what you're doing. That being said, here are a few tips to use as a starting point.

We've always broken down our videos along the following lines.





**OPENING:** A quick introduction that tells you exactly what you're going to see in the video. For food videos we make sure to get a shot of the finished dish in the first 10 seconds. Ideally, we end it with a joke - or something that is a good lead-in to the intro music.

**TITLE/INTRO:** An introductory sequence with some music and the title. With our introductory sequences we just try to evoke the overall feel for the show. Keep it short! 7 seconds or less.

**THE MEAT:** Time has really been of the essence in everything up to this point. Now we can slow down and get into the video itself. The pacing is determined by the subject matter. Towards the end of this section, I like to use annotations and a spoken call-to-action to ask the viewer to subscribe or recommend another video they might be interested in. I'd rather have them jump to another one of our videos than to go searching for something else. Then we cut to the:

**END CARD:** This bookends the branding that we established in the title/intro but has at least one call to action if not several. If someone has made it this far into the video, they are either already invested in your show, or very interested. This is a great chance to give them something to do next. I like to send them to another video or to the main website.

Once you've launched a few videos, you can go to Video Retention in Analytics and see how things are working. See if you can pinpoint when people are bailing on your video. If people are bouncing off at the very beginning, it may be time to go back to square one. However, if you get a big drop-off at 4:30, take a look and see what's happening in your videos.

For *Hilah Cooking*, we noticed that retention was dropping as soon as Hilah took a bite of the finished recipe. Our format at the time would have her finish the recipe, take a bit and then talk a little bit more (including a Call To Action). When we noticed people were leaving after she took a bite, we rearranged so that she recommends another video after she completes the recipe but before she took a bite. She now takes a bite at the VERY end. This has increased our audience retention on every video and has increased click-

throughs on our Call-To-Action.

It's kind of creepy, but I guess people really like to see her taste the food.

## ***Chapter Three***

### **The Gear**

If you're going to produce a show, you're going to need a little bit of equipment. It's really easy to get hung up on this point and spend endless hours on camera websites and forums doing "research." Cameras are so good right now and camera technology is evolving so quickly that you really are just wasting time. By the time your camera arrives, something new and better will be announced.

Find something that works for you and your project and **START SHOOTING.**

What you need will depend on what kind of show you're going to make. Conversely, if you don't have a budget, what kind of show you make will depend on the gear you have.

We started *Hilah Cooking* with a consumer level video camera (Canon HV20); a banged up tripod designed for still photography; a very inexpensive wired lavalier microphone (Audio Technica ATR-3350); a floor lamp with three direction lights we picked up at Target; and an old (and very used) shower curtain that we hung up to diffuse the light.

But it's what we had and we didn't have the money to get anything better.

Luckily, in the short span of time since we launched the show, camera technology has improved at an absolutely revolutionary pace. If you have an iPhone, you could invest in a few inexpensive accessories and apps and shoot higher quality footage than we produced with our first setup. A new phone from Samsung shoots 4K video.

### **The Bare Minimum**

At a bare minimum these are the things you're going to need.

#### **1. A Cameras**

The release of the Canon 5D MKII started a revolution that completely blurred the line between video cameras and still cameras. Some of the best video quality is coming from DSLR cameras. We upgraded to a Canon 60D (thanks to the YouTube Next program) and after a little bit of a learning curve, I've come to love shooting with it.

Image quality is, of course, incredibly important, but audio quality is even more important. You've got to have a way to plug a microphone into your camera. You could sync the sound from an external recorder later, but that adds time in post-production. For most people, having an audio input jack is a much simpler solution.

Based on conversations and taking a look around VidCon last year, the Canon Rebel series (T3i, T4i, T5i) seems to be the go-to camera for YouTubers at the moment. I currently use a T3i as our second camera. It's got a flip-out monitor, audio input jack and is even has the same image sensor as my beloved 60D.

YouTube superstar iJustine posted an Instagram photo showing her vlogging cameras with the caption: "It all has to fit in my purse :) GoPro for all those quick wide angle shots. Canon XA10 when you need a mic input and autofocus + lots of zoom! Pink Canon SD960 = best vlogging camera - perfect audio for concerts and windy settings, quick focus! Canon S110 - better video quality than 960, audio peaks if its too loud and you can hear the autofocus lens in playback. The mic is on the front so if its windy, don't even bother - it's best for b-roll and photos! The end."

If you're interested in going the iPhone route, I highly recommend the online course "iPhone Video Hero" by Jules Watkins. I rarely recommend online courses, but I actually spent the money to get this one and felt like the cost was justified after about three of the short videos. Once you learn the "Hero Grip," your iPhone videos will never be the same.

Ultimately, your camera is just a tool. Everybody has their favorite tools and certain tools work better for certain situations. Start with a camera you already have or find one that you can afford (ideally with a mic input!) and get started.

If you're looking for a place to start:

**1. ENTRY LEVEL DSLR: Canon T5i.** *Cost: Around \$1,000 with kit lens.* I've shot hundreds of hours of footage with mine and it's still going strong. If you want to save even more money, you could buy a used T3i which is essentially the same camera. Or look for a T2i, which is basically the same camera but without a flip-out screen. The flip-out screen has come in handy every time I've used it.

**2. MID-RANGE VIDEO CAMERA: Canon XA20.** *Cost: Around \$2000.*

I've seen these in use a lot around the YouTube Space and I've shot with them several times. I really love this camera and if I could figure out a place for it in my workflow, I would definitely buy one. If you want to save a little money, look for the XA10 which is an older model but essentially the same camera. Both of these cameras have a cool detachable handle that mounts on the top that gives you XLR audio inputs and manual audio controls. These cameras also have cool infrared features that my friend Alejandro uses when shooting paranormal investigation videos for [The Dead Explorer](#).

**3. ENTRY LEVEL PRO:** *Canon C100*. Cost: \$5,000. In my opinion the Canon Cinema line continues the DSLR revolution. These cameras keep a lot of the great features and image quality we got from DSLRs, but bring back the features we'd been missing from video cameras: manual audio controls, focus peaking, waveforms, long record times, no overheating. I was introduced to this camera (and it's big brother the C300) at the YouTube Space and once I got some hands-on time with the camera I knew I had to get one. This is the first time I've been in love with a camera since my first real video camera (R.I.P. Panasonic DVX100).

## 2. A Microphone

Never underestimate the power of good audio. We've had our missteps in this department and are always looking for ways to improve. The on-camera mic is not going to cut it.

If your videos feature a lot of talking-head stuff in controllable locations, I highly recommend you pick up a wired lavalier mic. Do a search on Amazon and you can find decent ones as low as \$20. We've since upgraded to the Sennheiser Evolution G3 wireless mic system and it has been a life changer. We shot for over two years with Hilah moving around the kitchen while physically tethered to the camera. Because of the kitchen counter, we were able to hide it somewhat, but the first time we shot with the wireless mic was amazing. A wired mic would be almost impossible to use for *Yoga With Adriene*.

Another popular choice in the YouTube community is the Rode VideoMic Pro. This is a microphone that mounts to your camera and does a pretty good job of picking up whatever sounds are directly in front of it. It's not ideal but it is better than trying to use the on-camera mic.

There are a lot of affordable options for getting decent sound, but -- unlike

with cameras -- this is an area where spending more money really does make a huge difference in quality.

### 3. Something To Stabilize Your Camera

You're going to need something to keep your camera steady. Nobody wants to see shaky handheld footage. A tripod is your best bet. These can range from five dollars to tens of thousands of dollars.

If your budget is really low, you can probably find a used photo tripod at a garage sale. You won't be able to do smooth camera movements with it, but it will hold your camera still.

The Lollipop (\$50-60) is an excellent entry level tripod that is also designed to work as a monopod or light stand. These are light weight and fold down really small making them great for travel. Add on a [Glif tripod mount](#) or Universal Phone Holder and you will be all set for shooting great video with your phone.

As the name implies, a monopod is a one-legged camera support. Monopods are great for travel and event shooting where you need to move fast but want to avoid shaky footage.

### 4. Lights (maybe)

If you are going to be shooting outdoors or have a "set" with lots of natural light you might be able to get away with no additional lights. Most people are going to need a simple light setup.

We started with a floor lamp from Target. The light was pretty harsh so we hung a frosted shower curtain in front of it which diffused it and made everything a little more flattering. We also used a clamp-on work light for some fill on the other side. Our early episodes are definitely a little dark but you can at least see what's going on.

**Basic Lighting Kit.** Cowboy Studio makes some really inexpensive light kits. They come in lots of different configurations, but you can usually get a kit with 3 soft box lights from around \$250. I recommend compact fluorescent Daylight Balanced photo bulbs. They stay pretty cool and will match the daylight from any nearby windows. The build quality is not great on these kits so don't expect them to last forever but they will get you up and running and at this price you can easily replace the pieces that break.

**LED Lights.** These are more expensive but can be a lot of fun to work with.

Litepanels is the king of these types of lights, but they are out of my price range. I've used them at the YouTube Space and they are really nice. We use a much cheaper knock-off from Fotodiox as part of our current lighting set-up.

These options are definitely the "bottom shelf" when it comes to lighting. Lights and related gear can get very expensive very quickly. My suggestion is to start with the bare minimum and see if you can make it work. Upgrade only when you really need to. If you have your eye on something expensive, rent it and try it out before you buy it.

## *Chapter Four*

# **Editing & Post-Production**

Fear (or hatred) of editing is probably the second biggest obstacle to getting your YouTube channel up and running. I hear from people all the time about how much they hate editing, and I've never really understood it. It's actually my favorite part of the entire production process.

During production, just about anything can go wrong and there are often elements you have no control over. But once you're in post-production, you can focus on what you've got. It's time to take all that footage you shot and sculpt and polish it into a finished piece that your audience will love. The software has gotten so good, that it's almost as easy to edit videos as it is to make a Powerpoint presentation.

For this stage, you're going to need a computer and some editing software. Once again, there are no excuses. You can edit video on an iPhone or iPad now. Most computers come with some sort of free editing software. On Mac that is iMovie. On Window, it's MovieMaker. If you don't like those, you've got more choices than ever.

### **Screenflow**

As it's name implies, the primary purpose of Screenflow is screen recording. If you're doing any type of software demonstration videos or just want to show what's happening on your computer screen, you need to get Screenflow.

Over time, Screenflow has developed a surprisingly robust set of editing features. It's gotten so good that some video creators use Screenflow exclusively. If your show has a relatively simple format (vlogs, product demonstration, fitness videos) Screenflow could be the perfect tool for the job. It's got a great interface for editing audio and video tracks and comes packed with easy to use titles and transitions. If you're on a budget (and on a Mac) grab a copy of Screenflow and get to work.

### **Final Cut Pro X**

FCPX is probably the most controversial editing software ever. Apple's overhaul of the much-loved Final Cut Pro was not received well by the editing community and has fallen out of grace with the majority of



professional editors. That being said, this is my favorite editing software ever (by far) and this is what we use exclusively.

When I switched from Final Cut Pro 7 to FCPX, I reduced my editing time by approximately six hours a week. That alone is enough to make me love it, but the interface is particularly well-suited to short-form content.

FCPX has several core features that can take some getting used to if you've spent much time with other Non-Linear Editors. One of its key differentiating features is the magnetic timeline. Instead of a bunch of different tracks that are all of equal importance, FCPX uses the concept of a storyline. It's almost like a tube that you put the clips into in the order you want them to appear in the finished piece. FCPX automatically fills in the gaps. It's a little weird at first, but I've come to absolutely love it.

You can also throw just about any type of footage into FCPX and the software will figure out what to do with it. There are very few pop-up windows asking you to supply information. Just import the footage and get to work.

Apple has released free updates for FCPX every couple of months and some of them have included some pretty massive new features. If you haven't checked it out in a while, it might be time to give it another look.

## **Adobe Premiere**

Adobe Premiere has picked up the gauntlet from Final Cut Pro 7 and become the NLE of choice for many professional editors. It's only available as part of the Adobe Creative Cloud, so there is a monthly subscription fee. As part of the subscription you also get access to all of the Adobe Creative Suite which includes essentials like Photoshop and Audition.

For me, Premiere is a little bit of overkill for our weekly videos. It will probably be my first choice for when I get back to making short films or anything that requires more sophisticated motion graphics. If your project will have lots of motion graphics generated by Adobe After Effects, Premiere should definitely be your top choice.

This is a BIG application and it does a lot. If you've never edited before, there will be a learning curve but once you get up and running, you won't regret having learned it.

## **WorkFlow**

There are a lot of steps involved in post-production. Here's a super-simplified post-production workflow.

1. Import Footage
2. Edit Footage
3. Add Transitions and Text.
4. Customize End Card
5. Add Music
6. Balance Audio Levels
7. Color Correct Footage
8. Add Intro Title sequence

Some of those steps may only take a few minutes, but they add up. Especially when you are doing each step for a new video every week. We strive to make the format of our videos consistent from episode to episode. So pretty much anything we add into the mix, we will be repeating every week for years.

Since we shoot with two or more cameras, we are often dealing with a lot of footage. We import everything into FCPX and have the software synchronize the clips. This works perfectly 99% of the time. We have a master shot on the main track and then we basically carve away what we don't want out of the B and C cameras. Hilah does the initial cut on all the *Hilah Cooking* videos and limits herself to an hour per video. Then she hands the video off to me and I tighten everything up, do a quick color correction and check the audio levels. Then we export and upload. I try to limit myself to an hour, too, but I'm not quite as strict on myself as Hilah.

Ultimately, it takes us about 2 hours to edit, polish and export a video. If I'm feeling particularly OCD it can take up to 3 hours. This is a big contrast to the early days when it could take up to 6 hours to complete an episode. There were several factors that played into that inefficiency, one of which was a very slow computer. But the biggest one was that I didn't have a strict workflow and system in place.

As you're making your videos, think about what would happen if you had to delegate the task of post-production to somebody else. Would it be possible to make a checklist that someone else could follow and successfully produce an episode? It sounds like the opposite of creativity, but we've actually found

that having a solid system in place has directly helped us produce work more quickly and feel much more satisfied creatively.

## *Chapter Five*

# **Building a Web Platform**

*Ride on the backs of giants but always be ready to jump off.*

I'm writing this on an airplane, after just finishing a long week of shooting at YouTube Space LA with a group of about 40 other YouTube partners. It was an amazing opportunity and an awesome experience. However, something interesting happened while we were all at YouTube "camp."

Google+ and YouTube continued their slow motion collision. The YouTube comments system was stripped out and replaced with Google+ comments. Up to this point, all you needed was a YouTube account to leave a comment, now you had to sign up for Google+. There were a few problems with the roll-outs and as is typical when there are any changes to YouTube, people FREAKED OUT.

Since I was staying in a hotel with all the other YouTubers, I felt like I was at ground zero. An unseen hand somewhere in Google engineering had flipped a switch and suddenly the YouTube ecosystem was very different. Long-time viewers of *Hilah Cooking* could no longer leave comments. There were dozens of questions being posted to our videos to which we couldn't reply because the person wasn't on Google+. Every other new comment seemed to be someone complaining about the new comments system -- some of them blaming *us*. The YouTube viewers were pissed and as you can imagine the YouTube channel owners were unhappy and struggling to figure out the new system. The worst part of the whole thing is that the two new videos we just launched had a tiny fraction of the comments that we normally receive.

I was a little freaked out and very annoyed at the changes.

But the reality is, none of us really have any right to be.

When we publish videos to YouTube, we are playing in someone else's playground. For free. Google/YouTube is going to continue to push out changes whether we want them or not. They own it and that's their right.

Creating an awesome web show is only the beginning. If you are playing the long game, and want to turn your show into an actual business, you have to build a relationship with your audience that expands outside of YouTube.

This relationship can be beneficial on countless levels. Maybe you have a

product or service to sell. Maybe you want to eventually raise money for a more ambitious project. Maybe you just want to continue the conversation outside of YouTube where you are the one who controls how the commenting system works.

If your goal is to build something that you actually *own* and that you have *control over* it's critical that you build your own platform on the web.

## **Remember Friendster? What about MySpace?**

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking these services are going to be around forever. Even if Facebook manages to outlive us all, the really important thing to remember is that you don't own any of it. If you're embracing the long-term plan, you have a vision for your brand that is going to last longer than whatever the current internet fad is.

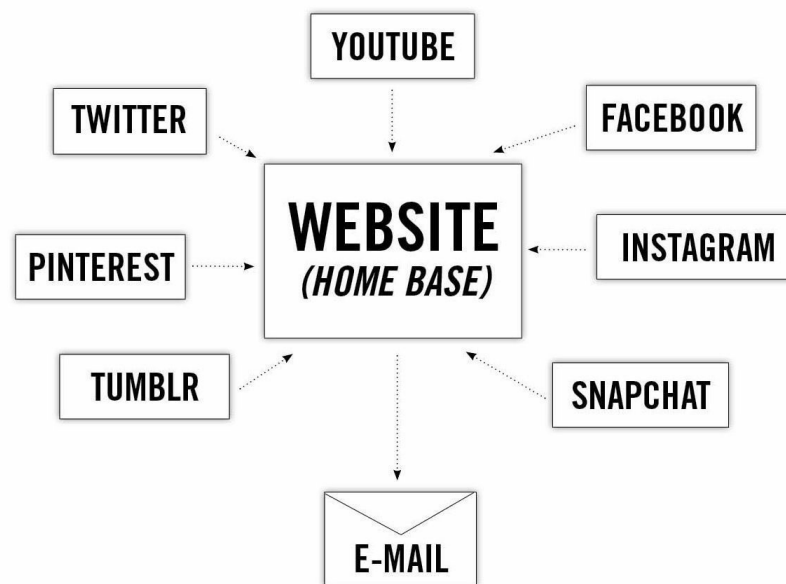
RoosterTeeth (<http://roosterteeth.com>) is an exceptional example of this. RoosterTeeth were true pioneers in the internet video and machinima industry. Their flagship series *Red Vs. Blue* launched long before YouTube and even before internet video was even a thing. RoosterTeeth has been in business for 10 years now and they've seen things like Friendster and MySpace come and go. Rather than investing heavily into another company's infrastructure, they have built their own.

RoosterTeeth currently has a huge presence on Facebook, an active following on Twitter, and is one of the most viewed channels on YouTube. They continue to use whatever third party tools are available to them but they are not dependent on any of them. From the very beginning they have funneled their fans back into their main website. They have over a million members in the RoosterTeeth community and many members pay \$10 every six months to become supporters. Supporters get special features like ad-free videos; early access to *Red Vs. Blue* episodes; and special graphics that recognize them for being RoosterTeeth Supporters. This community is absolutely thriving and has evolved into a real-world convention called RTX that is held yearly in Austin and attracts thousands of attendees.

The company is prospering for many reasons but on multiple occasions I've heard Burnie Burns -- owner of RoosterTeeth -- credit a big part of their success to the fact that they created their own platform and never became overly dependent on an infrastructure they don't control.

# What Is a Platform

Your platform is your entire online presence and includes everything from your website to your YouTube Channel to your social media profiles. The **Home Base and Outposts** strategy was popularized by social media expert Chris Brogan way back in 2008 and I've been using it ever since. It's sometimes also called Hub and Spoke Marketing and it's so simple that it might seem overly obvious. I didn't invent it and don't take credit for it, but it is at the core of all my businesses.



## YOUR HOME BASE

This is the one element of your platform that you can actually OWN - your website. You buy the domain name. You pay for the server space. You control it. Most people access the web through a social layer, so give them an easy option to subscribe for updates. Email is ideal but services like BlogLovin or RSS are great as well.

## YOUR OUTPOSTS

This is where you plant your flag in foreign soil. You don't own the space and you don't have complete control over it. But this is where the people are (until you get them back to your home base).

The concept is to build outposts on places like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest. Connect with people there and build relationships. Share your

content and see what happens. The ultimate goal is to get them back to your home base, but sometimes these outposts will take on a life of their own. That's of great value in itself.

Now let's dig in a little deeper to the various elements of a successful web platform.

## WEBSITE

Your website is your home base and the most important part of your infrastructure by far. This is the part of your platform that you have the most control over. You can start out simple or you can get ambitious. But this is the part of your platform that you can truly own. It's worth the investment of time and energy.

From the very beginning of *Hilah Cooking*, our website has been a critical key to our success. Our goal has always been to get people to come to the website and engage with the project on a deeper level than they can on YouTube. From the very first video, we have always linked back to [hilahcooking.com](http://hilahcooking.com) in the description box.

We've recently begun promoting the site as the fastest way to get your recipe questions answered. There is a lot of great information that gets exchanged in the video comments, but this becomes pretty difficult to follow on YouTube. If we can move the conversation to our own site, it becomes part of the content library there. Every comment adds value to the project. The website also gives us a way to get people to sign up for our email newsletter.

Here are the six steps I recommend you take to get a basic website up and running. This plan will take a little more time and energy than using one of the free blogging platforms, but you will have complete ownership and control over your websites.

### **1. Register Your domain name. Cost: Usually less than \$10/year**

Your domain name is your "address" on the internet. This is how people can easily find you. Your domain name can be the name of the show or your production company. If you plan on scaling your brand out with lots of different shows then go for your production company name. Register your domain name with [NameCheap.com](http://NameCheap.com) or [GoDaddy.com](http://GoDaddy.com).

I highly recommend that you register your domain name yourself. Don't use a friend or web design company. The most common problem I've seen clients and friends run into over the years is related to them not having control over their domain name. This is REALLY IMPORTANT and it's not hard. So just go do it. Trust me on this one.

Now you've got your address . . . where do you put your site?

## **2. Choose a Web Host. Cost: About \$10/month**

Once you have your domain name set up, it's time to get a host for your site. A web host is where your site actually lives. A website consists of a bunch of text and image files and a data base and some other mysterious computer things. So this is where you're going to put all your stuff and people will use your domain name to find it.

You should have your domain name registered with a separate company.

My top recommendation is SiteGround. Bluehost is also a great option.

## **3. Install WordPress. Cost: Free**

Right now WordPress is the best way to get up and running with limited technical skills. It's free, it's open source and there is a huge community of developers. If you use Siteground or Bluehost, you can install it with just a couple of clicks.

WordPress started out as a blogging system but it has evolved into a robust content management system that you can use for just about any type of site.

## **4. Choose a WordPress Theme. Cost: Varies**

If WordPress is the engine of your site, the theme is your body or "skin". There are thousands of themes out there and a lot of them are free. You can even have a custom theme designed if you have a little more cash.

I would recommend starting simple. If you're going to screw up, screw up on the side of overly simple rather than overly complicated.

My favorite theme right now is Genesis. I've moving all my sites over to it and it's increased both my page load times and my search engine rankings. It's fast, offers a ton of customization, and is easy to use.

## **5. Set Up Your Blog.**



Set-up your blog categories. There's no need to make it too complicated but definitely set one up for Videos. Every time you publish a new video you should also write a corresponding blog post. Embed the video directly from YouTube. Write a couple paragraphs of unique content here that relates to the video. Encourage your readers to subscribe to your email list (or RSS) for updates. If you're going to publish exclusive content to the blog set up a separate category for that. It's important to get your videos categorized as videos so you can display them in their own section later.

## **5. Write Your About Page.**

WordPress features both Pages and Posts. Posts are pieces of content that will appear in your blog. Pages are part of your permanent site structure. The most important page is your ABOUT page. If you have only one page on your site, this is the one. Use this page to let your viewers know about who you are, what you do and why you're doing it. Encourage them to subscribe to your email newsletter. Let them know where to find your show and what your release schedule is. Link to any social media accounts you have so people can follow you.

## **EMAIL LIST**

Coming in a very close second in importance is the email list. This may sound totally old-fashioned, but a mailing list is absolutely one of the most important tools in your arsenal. Based on my personal experience, email lists are far more important than social media when it comes to selling products and directly engaging with members of your community.

You'll need an email list management service. For legal reasons you need to make sure everyone on your list has double-opted in. For deliverability reasons, you don't want to just collect a bunch of emails and send out bulk emails from your Gmail account. An email list management service will take care of all the technical details and give you great statistics on who's opening your newsletters and where they are.

I use (and recommend) MailChimp. It's got a great interface and actually comes close to being fun to use. Try out some other email list services and you'll see what I mean. The real killer feature is that you can start using it for free. Once you have more than 2,000 subscribers to your list, you'll have to choose a paid plan, but it's still affordable. And once you have 2,000

subscribers your list will be so important to you that you'll gladly pay. MailChimp has some great default designs for signup forms and email newsletters. Pick a signup form, customize it and get it set up on your website. You can start out with something as simple as a sidebar widget. Once you get really serious you can create something free to give away when people sign up. In the early days of *Hilah Cooking*, we built our email list by giving away a free PDF copy of the *Breakfast Taco Book* to each new subscriber.

For the emails themselves, I recommend the ultra simple responsive template. Lots of people will be reading your newsletters on their phones so you want to make sure all the text flows right no matter how they are holding their phone.

Take a look at some of the junk e-mail you get from various e-tailers and make your emails the OPPOSITE of that.

When someone opens an email from you they should feel like they're getting a letter from a friend.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

I'm not a "social media expert" -- you should be wary of those people -- but I can share what has worked for us. I've always been focused on a combination of Search and Social. In our first year, most of our traffic came from Facebook, but social traffic has been slowly decreasing while our organic search traffic continues to grow. Right now our traffic is divided almost 50/50 between the two. I'm pretty happy with this split.

There are a lot of social media options and the list is constantly growing. I don't recommend you try to use all of them. Figure out the ones that feel like the best fit and concentrate your energies on a handful of them rather than spreading yourself too thin.

### Facebook

For most people, "social media" means starting up a Facebook page as soon as possible and working that angle hard. After all it's free, it's easy and it can bring in some good results.

At the time of this writing, we have over 19,000 Facebook Fans and we are gaining new ones pretty quickly. We get a lot of traffic from Facebook,

however, it is steadily declining. Facebook pages were hit hard in early 2013 and now only receive a fraction of the traffic they used to.

Facebook changes the rules all the time, just like YouTube. You can get upset about it, or you can shut up and get to work building your business. Don't let your brand be dependent on the whims of another company. Instead, use Facebook to attract new viewers and build your relationship with your existing community.

## **Basic Tips for Using Facebook**

### **1. Create a Regular Posting Schedule**

Try to post at least once per day, ideally you'll post 3-4 times a day. Facebook Insights is a great tool for figuring out the best windows of time for posting and we've found certain times that work really well. This will probably be different for everybody because not all audiences are the same. Test different times and then use your Insights to see when people respond the most. Experiment and get things narrowed down to the times that actually work.

### **2. Post Your Videos at the Same Time Every Week**

This doesn't have to be the same time you post to YouTube. Many of your Facebook followers will not be subscribed to your YouTube channel. Facebook tends to be a slightly older demographic than YouTube. We've found that posting videos to Facebook during prime time works much better for us than during the 9-5 work time frame.

### **3. Keep Your Posts On-Topic**

If your channel is about flying kites, your posts should generally be about kites and kite related things, not professional wrestling. Your posts should somehow tie back into your topic (i.e. links to other posts about kites, kite slideshows, kite festivals, etc.). Bloopers and behind-the-scenes content of making videos also work great.

### **4. Ask Questions**

Use a post to ask a question. People love to express their opinion about shit. You may not always like what you hear but this is a great way to get lots of comments which help your post get seen by more people. Ask for suggestions for new videos or if anyone has kite-flying plans for the weekend.

## **5. Post Photos**

Photo posts are currently the most liked and shared content type on Facebook. Inspirational quotes and infographics are all the rage right now. Use photos when you can and post a link in the text area of the post to let people know where to go for more information.

## **6. Respond to People!**

It's called social media because it's about being social. You don't have to respond to every comment but you should try to respond at least once in every discussion thread. This shows your community that you are a real person.

## **Twitter**

So far, Twitter has not been a significant source of traffic for either *Hilah Cooking* or *Yoga With Adriene*. But, it has been an amazing way to meet people we probably wouldn't have had access to before. It's opened a lot of doors. It's also been great for staying in contact with our community, other YouTubers, bloggers and industry people. We've pretty much stopped using it for promotion, instead we use it as a communication channel.

Use Twitter to carry on a conversation, to answer questions, or to reach out to someone whom you may be too intimidated to email. There's a good chance they will respond. Voila. Connection made.

Because Twitter is such a mobile platform, it is difficult to determine the "best time" to tweet, but overall activity is increased on the weekends. We use an app called Buffer to schedule some tweets according to what Buffer has analyzed as our best times. These are things like interesting articles or other people's videos and blog posts. Add a couple in-the-minute tweets per day and you're bound to meet some new people.

## **Google+**

Google+ is not a Facebook competitor. Facebook is still basically a destination, whereas Google+ is a social layer that ties together most of the Google ecosystem. You probably won't be using it to post your vacation photos, but it's very useful for promoting and boosting the SEO rankings of your content.

Since you've got a YouTube channel, you're already enmeshed in the

YouTube ecosystem, there's no reason not to take advantage of Google+. At the bare minimum, set up a personal profile and then a Page for your show or brand. Connect the Page to your YouTube channel and set the videos to auto-post to G+.

Join some communities related to your channel subject or any other topics you're interested in personally. There are literally thousands of communities on Google+ to choose from; some are more active than others so look around and find one that has a big group and introduce yourself. Google+ is great for effective promotion, but just like any other social network it works best if you participate sociably.

## **Instagram**

On the surface, Instagram might not seem like a huge traffic driver, but it's actually worked surprisingly well for both *Hilah Cooking* and *Yoga With Adriene*. Instagram currently has over 150 million users and 90% of those users are under age 35.

We've found that *quality* is much more important than *quantity*. Photographs of people (particularly Hilah and Adriene) are very popular as well as shots of food and drink. You also can't go wrong with photos of animals. Use Instagram Video to post a short clip or teaser of a new episode. It works great to share bloopers and behind-the-scenes clips.

If Instagram has a downside, it's that you can't post a clickable link in descriptions of individual photos. We get around this by putting a link to the website in the profile description, and instructing people to click on that to see the new stuff. It works!

Instagram allows up to 30 hashtags, but it's recommended to limit yourself to about 5 relevant hashtags. Maximum hashtagging comes across as insincere at best and desperate at worst. Using some of the most popular hashtags on Instagram (love, instagood, me, tbt, cute, photooftheday) might garner some new followers, but only if the tags actually apply to the photo. One way to incorporate one of these popular ones would be to do a #tbt (Throw-back Thursday) photo from an old blog post or video.

Hashtags on Instagram also follow through to Facebook and Twitter (though with the character limit on Twitter, they are often cut off) making the image searchable through those platforms, as well. Also try working the hashtags into the description, rather than lumping them all together at the end to avoid

your hashtags getting cut off in Twitter. Example: "Awesome #kite #flying day today!" or "#Me, with my first #kite! #tbt".

Having your own hashtag that is specific to your brand or website is a good idea, too. You can use it on your own posts but also your followers can use it to let others know where they got the inspiration for their picture, or to give you a shout-out. Go to Snapwidget.com and grab the free WordPress widget to have all images with your hashtag on them posted to a page on your website. You will not be notified of others using "your" hashtag, but you can easily search for it periodically in Instagram to see what people are sharing.

It probably goes without saying, but your images will only show up in search if your profile is set to Public.

## **Pinterest**

Pinterest is all about high quality photos. Vertical photos are best. Aim for images sizes around 735 x 1100 pixels (though this may change if Pinterest changes their format). Step-by-Step pins are very popular. Along with food/drink, fashion, interior design, DIY crafts are all very popular as are infographics (but be sure that any infographic you design is legible in a small size).

One of the great things about Pinterest is the ability to directly link to your site or video from a pinned image, though I also recommend that you add your website URL to the description box. You can also pin videos. Pinterest seems to be more time-sensitive than other social media services. Generally, the best times to pin are afternoons (2 to 4pm) and after dinner (8pm to 1 am) but that may vary depending on your community. Pinterest recently released new analytics that you can use to find your most popular pins and most active times.

Look for group boards to join, or start your own with other people in your same niche to expose your content to new audiences.

Hashtags on Pinterest work a little differently than on other platforms. For one, hashtags are only clickable when posted in the description of a pinned image -- not in your profile, on board descriptions, or account descriptions. For another, when you click on a hashtag, you will be shown not only all images with that hashtag in the description, but also any image with that word or word combo in its description or in its URL. Keep this in mind when pinning your own content and whenever possible, match the image subject to

your video subject to your URL. Another reason to concern yourself with this is that search results in Pinterest are sorted by relevancy (determined by number of recent repins, likes, and the source) rather than chronologically like in Twitter.

Once an image is posted and pinned by a user, re-pinning it with different hashtags will not affect its appearance in search. The original image is catalogued according to the original hashtags applied to it. When pinning images, keep your pins relevant and use a combination of broad and specific terms, e.g. #kite #kites #butterflykite #DIYkite though some people would argue that using hashtags at all on Pinterest could lead people away from your material when they click on a hashtag from your pin and are shown a whole new page of pins that are not yours. Experiment and see if hashtags work for you and your audience. If you do choose to use hashtags, be careful not to overdo it.

## ***Case Study:***

# **Hilah Cooking**

### **The Concept**

It all started with porch drinking.

After dinner we sat out on the front porch and drank the first in a series of whiskey cocktails. Wild Turkey and soda, if I remember it right. Drinking and talking on a porch or patio was -- and still is -- the backbone of our relationship.

This was long before we were involved romantically and that wasn't even on my mind. We were just great friends who loved hanging out, telling stories and coming up with dumb ideas. If there was any latent sexual chemistry at that time, it was funneled into creative collaboration.

The exact details are a little blurry (no doubt due to the Wild Turkey) but we explored ideas of something cool to work on together and then Hilah brought out Lappy. Lappy was a totally ghetto Dell laptop that had to stay plugged in at all times because the battery didn't hold a charge. But, Hilah is an incessant note-taker so anytime we started talking about something that was remotely a good idea, it was time to bring Lappy into the mix.

I still have the file she typed up that night. It's titled: "cooking show.doc"

We made a list of almost 100 episode ideas. We'd make it instructional but funny. It would also be simple produce so we could release an episodes every week.

We committed to producing 100 videos. After 100 episodes we would evaluate whether the project was a success or a waste of time.

This felt like something we could pull off.

### **The Format**

We got together about a week after our porch-drinking brainstorm and got started by playing around in the kitchen. I had been inspired by the *10 Minute Cooking School* videos that Robert Rodriguez created for his DVD extras. I started out with lots of fancy shots and camera moves, but it wasn't quite working.



For this project, I wanted Hilah to be on screen as much as possible. The show wasn't a showcase for my fancy shots. The shots needed to provide a showcase for her personality. To complicate matters, the original kitchen set was very hard to shoot in. It had a dropped ceiling, some weird cabinets and was pretty small and dark. Not ideal shooting conditions. I also needed a format that I could replicate on a weekly basis, so I needed it to be as simple as possible.

We shot two test episodes that were never publicly released. These were just an experiment to find out what was working . . . and what wasn't. Knowing that these were never going to be seen took some of the pressure off both of us. I found three shots that worked and decided I was only going to use those shots. Over and over and over again. By our third video we had figured out a simple format that we could use for each episode. This format allowed us to show up and do the show even when we were feeling tired or burned out and really didn't want to be making a show. Sometimes the energy and inspiration just isn't there and you need all the help you can get.

## **Audience**

*Hilah Cooking* was explicitly designed to target people who wanted to learn how to cook. We envisioned it as a male/female split with an age range of 18-35. They probably were a lot like us and enjoyed dirty jokes, tacos and suffered from the occasional hangover. With this imaginary demographic in mind our first 100 episodes were all focused on basic recipes and cooking instruction, with an irreverent style and quite a bit of cussing.

## **Gear**

I shot the show on a Canon HV30 video camera and used a rickety photography tripod for stabilization. Shooting a cooking show with one camera is not much fun. Most of the episodes were in a wide shot. Anytime we needed a close-up of the food I'd turn the camera off, walk it in to get the close up, then turn it off again and go back to the wide shot. It reminded me of making movies as a kid where we basically tried to edit it in camera as we were shooting. It was not an ideal technique, but it was either do that or waste a ton of food. It also saved a lot of time in editing because the show was basically already edited and I just cut out the junk and trimmed everything down.

The camera shot to MiniDV tape which meant a lot of extra time in post

production capturing the footage. Even compared to the micro-budget movies I had worked on, this was the jankiest set-up I had ever used for a project.

We'd shoot the videos on Saturdays and I would come home after work on Monday nights and edit the videos, trying to get it uploaded before 11:00 p.m. I edited the show on my very old iMac G5, the same computer I'd used to edit my first feature and a ton of short comedy videos. I used Final Cut Express which was the budget version of Final Cut Pro (it's since been discontinued). The computer was so slow that each episode took almost two hours to render. With each episode I tried to simplify things even more in an attempt to speed up the rendering time.

## **Launch**

We launched the show in January 2010. We didn't set any world records for number of views but people responded to it -- for better or worse! -- from the very first episode. Once we started to get actual demographic data we found out we were hitting a much wider age range than we had anticipated which was very encouraging. We established an ongoing conversation with the audience and that has shaped the way the show has evolved.

The first few months were tough, and I was never happy with the results. But we had made a commitment to a schedule and we were determined to stick with it. So we kept going. And little by little, we got better at it. It got easier. Two years later it was our full-time job.

# **PART II**

## **BUILDING AN AUDIENCE**

## *Chapter Six*

# **Making Videos That Get Watched**

So you've developed an awesome show and built an infrastructure so that your audience can engage with it.

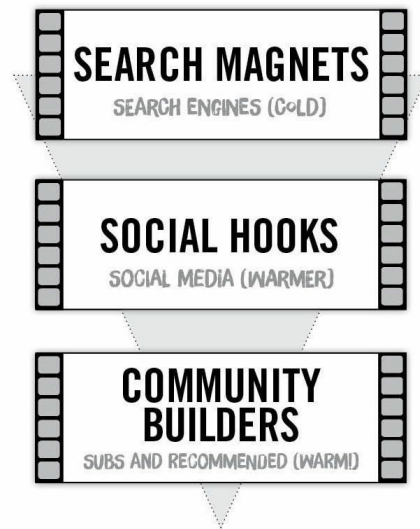
That was the easy part. Making videos is a lot of work, but it's really only about 25% of the work involved. Now you've got to get your videos out there so that people can find them and fall in love with them.

When I started out, I didn't have any money to promote my projects. My audience building strategies relied heavily on search engine optimization. Viewers found the videos primarily organically through Google and YouTube search. That was all I knew how to do when I was starting out and the strategy worked great for building our initial audience. SEO is still at the core of my businesses and probably what I am best known for.

But it's only one component of a fully fleshed out channel building strategy. And it has some drawbacks:

- It's slow.
- It's boring.
- Google can change the algorithm and take you back to ground zero overnight.
- Most importantly, you never want to have all your eggs in one basket.

So instead of concentrating all of our energies on videos that will rank well in search engines, I started to focus on a content mix that is made up of 3 different types of videos that work together but all have slightly different purposes.



1. Search Magnets
2. Social Hooks
3. Community Builders

Each of these videos is designed for a different type of viewer.

## WARM TRAFFIC VS. COLD TRAFFIC

There are two basic types of traffic: Cold and Warm.

**Cold Traffic:** people who have no idea who you are. They've never encountered you or your brand.

**Warm Traffic:** These are people who know who you are. As people watch your videos they're developing a relationship with you and your content. Ideally, those feelings are positive. These people are much more likely to take action -- whether that is leaving a comment, sharing a video or even buying a product.

The viewers that find your videos via Google Search are colder than the viewers that find one of your videos because their friend shared it on Facebook. And as viewers make it YouTube and subscribe to your channel they are getting warmer and warmer. The warmer the person is, the more likely they are to respond to calls to action like signing up for your email list or buying one of your products.

It's helpful to keep this in mind when planning your videos because your programming should appeal to people across the board.

## *Chapter Seven*

# **Search Magnets**

YouTube is the #2 search engine in the world. It might seem like if you rank well in YouTube you'd also rank well in Google, but that's not the case. I still don't know why some of our videos rank so well in Google and others are nowhere to be found.

When it comes to optimizing your content for search engines, we're all playing a guessing game to a certain extent. Google offers the occasional hints about what works, but the algorithm is top secret. All we can do is experiment, share the knowledge and guess some more.

The YouTube search engine shares some characteristics with Google, but the current YouTube algorithm seems to be a lot simpler and much easier to crack. For this book, our focus is on ranking well in YouTube.

## **Ranking Factors**

The following are what I believe to be the 5 Key Factors that determine how videos rank in the YouTube Search Engine (until they change it). This is based on my personal experience and you can find plenty of people who will disagree with me.

### **1. Title and MetaData**

They're getting closer, but as of the time of this writing, YouTube can't accurately index video content. Take a look at the default captions sometime if you don't believe me. The automated transcripts are usually pretty hilarious. Since the algorithm doesn't know what your video is about, you're going to have to tell it. The easiest way is through carefully filling out your title, description and tags. If you neglect this step, the algorithm doesn't even know where to start. You can take this to the next level by transcribing your videos and adding text captions.

Titles and MetaData are particularly important in the first 48 hours after launching your video. At this stage, YouTube doesn't have any usage data so take advantage of this critical window. After the first 48 hours, Watch Time becomes the priority.

### **2. Watch Time**

How long are viewers actually watching the videos? YouTube has officially stated that this is one of the most important factors they take into account when ranking a video. If people are bouncing off your videos within the first 30 seconds, the YouTube algorithm is going to take that as a sign that this is not a very good video (or that people are not finding what they are looking for). You can improve watch time by structuring your videos in a way that is engaging, making great thumbnails and *accurately* describing the video in the title, description and tags.

Likewise, if a significant amount of viewers are spending a lot of time watching the video, that sends a signal that this is good quality content.

YouTube also pays attention to Session Time. This is the overall time a user is spending on YouTube during a session. If your video leads viewers to another video (even if it's not on your channel), your channel will get partial credit. YouTube wants people to stick around on the site and watch lots of videos (and ads). If your videos promote longer overall session times, this will help boost their rankings.

### **3. Subscribers**

I used to think that the key factor in channel authority was the number of subscribers. Subscriber count is still important because the more subscribers you have, the faster you can get views and comments, so it ties into everything else. The first 48 hours are incredibly important and the more active and engaged subscribers you have, the easier it is to rack up a bunch of views quickly every time a video launches.

### **4. Comments**

Comments show that the video is "alive" and that people are not only watching it but interacting with it. It always surprises me when people turn off comments. They are shooting themselves in the foot when it comes to generating traffic. YouTube comments can be incredibly annoying, but take them with a grain of salt and be pro-active at responding. Now that YouTube comments are integrated with Google+, they are even more important because they have a real ripple effect across Google+ and Google search.

One of the positive things to come out of the Google+ integration is the ability to blacklist certain words in your comment settings. If abusive comments are bringing you down, use the blacklist setting to filter out recurring offensive words. You can also ban trolls as they pop up. The system

is far from perfect but it's much better than it used to be. And dealing with a few negative comments is worth it for the positive effect comments can bring to your channel.

## 5. Back Links

Back Links are links that point to your video. They are one of the most important factors in SEO. The search engines see these links as "votes." These votes tell the robots that the content being linked to is legitimate and is what it says it is.

This was a fairly easy system to scam prior to 2009. If you had a video or blog post about "How To Fly a Kite," all you needed was a properly optimized post and more links than anybody else to be ranked #1. You could buy back link packages on Fiverr and rank really well for pretty much anything. Google has gotten a lot more sophisticated at detecting these kinds of schemes and YouTube is getting there as well.

You can still build a legitimate web-of-links to your videos without doing anything shady. Look for areas on your platform to build relevant links. Links from other videos (in descriptions and annotations) and curated playlists are great places. You don't want your video to exist in isolation.

You may notice a few recurring themes here: indicators of quality and social signals. If you're making great videos most of these will come naturally.

Using the above ranking factors I've personally nudged a LOT of videos up in the rankings. Now let's explore how you can do the same.

## Keywords

Before we can move forward, it's important that we nail down the concept of **keywords**. I've found that this concept confuses quite a few people at first. I don't think "keyword" is a very accurate description, but it's industry terminology at this point so we're stuck with it.

A keyword is a word (or phrase) that people type into a search engine when they're looking for information. Certain words (or phrases) get typed in a lot of times so those become highly coveted keywords. High traffic keywords can bring in a TON of traffic if you rank well for them.

My advice is to think about Keywords in pre-production. Don't let it affect the content you're going to produce, but use it as another tool to build an audience for your project.



When people use a search engine, they have a "problem" and they are looking for a "solution." Example: Someone doesn't know how to poach an egg and they need to figure out how to do it. They type in "How To Poach an Egg" and the search engine tries to provide them with the best solution to their problem. If your video is the first result, you're going to get a lot of views to your video.

The topic of keywords may seem to apply only to How-To or instructional types of videos, but it can be a powerful tool for all kinds of projects.

## **Keyword Research**

Once you start thinking about Search Engine Optimization it's easy to get distracted by all kinds of tools and on-line classes promising awesome results in return for varying amounts of money. My advice is to keep it simple and not get side tracked. Keyword research should only add a few minutes to your production time for each video. Keep in mind that you're a video creator first and the SEO skills you are developing are there to help get your work to a bigger audience.

With that in mind, here's a quick and simple technique for Keyword Research. As an example, we're going to use a video about How to Poach Eggs.

**1. Launch the Google AdWords Keyword Planner.** It's free, but you have to sign up for an AdWords account.

<https://adwords.google.com/>

**2. Click "Search For New Keywords and Group Ideas."** Type a few words and phrases into "Your Product or Service" box. Keep it quick and don't over-think it or over-do it. I typed in "How to Poach an Egg" "poached eggs" and "how to poach eggs."

**3. Under "Customize Your Search >> Keyword Options" check the box for "Only Show Options Closely Related to My Search."** This will help keep the search narrowed down.

**4. Click "Get Ideas."**

**5. Evaluate the Keywords.** The tool will give you a list of potential keywords along with data about how many monthly searches there. You'll also notice a column for Competition. (The Competition ranking is not about how hard it will be to out rank the other terms. Instead it refers to how

competitive the term is when it comes to buying paid AdWords ads. So don't let a High competition scare you off. That just means the ads running on your video will bring in more money). I'm mainly interested in Global Monthly Searches so I prioritize by that. Here's what the results look like:

**6. Decide what keyword to target.** In this case it looks like there are quite a few searches for "How To Poach an Egg" so that's what I'm going to target. But take a look at some of the other keywords that Google is suggesting. If you're just starting out (and your channel is not yet very authoritative), I would suggest targeting keywords that have Low competition and at least 3,000-5,000 global monthly searches.

By just taking a few minutes to check the Google Keyword tool, we've discovered that "how to poach an egg" has the potential to bring in a lot more traffic than "how to poach eggs" or "poached eggs". They're all an accurate description of the video, so let's target the one that potentially will bring in more viewers.

If you have a keyword or phrase in mind BEFORE you shoot your video, work the keyword into the dialog of the video in a natural way. This will give you an extra edge if you have your videos transcribed and captioned.

## Case Study

### Yoga With Adriene

The combination of social and search can be very powerful. When we first launched *Yoga With Adriene* it seemed like we had a few advantages most channels don't when they're first starting out.

1. Adriene was already a yoga teacher in the real world and had built a reputation and a network. It wasn't a huge one but it was enough to get our social media machine working.
2. We were able to tap into the existing *Hilah Cooking* audience. Adriene and Hilah had been friends for a long time and since I was producing both shows it was a perfect fit.
3. I had learned a LOT about YouTube through both the YouTube Next program and the daily hands-on experience of building and cultivating a brand on YouTube.

I was also sure that Yoga was really hot and would be super popular. Despite all of our "advantages," the growth of the channel got off to a much slower start than I had hoped.

In hindsight, the biggest problem we had was not producing new episodes and blog posts on a consistent basis. We missed a few weeks here and there and that was something that never happened with *Hilah Cooking*. We were both super busy and over-committed, but our lack of consistency is something that definitely slowed growth.

An even bigger problem was that I still have trouble finding good yoga keywords. I just assumed this would be incredibly easy and never gave it much thought. But to this date, I've been unable to find very many high-volume keywords.

So for the first 6 months of the project, we were getting a trickle of traffic via Facebook but we were getting pretty much nothing from search. To make matters even worse, when you searched for "yoga with adriene" Google was assuming you were looking for "yoga with adrienne" and defaulting to results from yoga teachers named Adriene with two "n"s.

I've built dozens of sites over the past few years and I've never had so much trouble getting a site ranked properly.

I decided I needed to do something aggressive.

I went back to my original list of potential keywords and picked the biggest and most competitive one: "yoga for weight loss." Our "Yoga For Weight Loss" video was a tricky one because it ended up running over 40 minutes. According to conventional YouTube wisdom, that meant the retention (Watch Time) on it was going to suck. But if I was going to do something drastic, I decided to go all the way and chalk it up to another experiment. I re-optimized the title and all the meta-data for the video taking into account the factors above. I made a new playlist for "Yoga for Weight Loss" even though I only had two videos that really fit that category. I even changed the title to proudly declare this was a long-ass video "Yoga For Weight Loss - 40 Minute Fat Burning Workout." I posted the video on yoga forums, Google+ and basically anywhere I thought somebody might be interested in the content. I noticed that another YouTuber added it to one of their playlists of yoga workouts.

Views started to climb on the video. Two months later we had moved from way down on the 4th pages of results to #2 in YouTube for the term "yoga for weight loss." The video now has over 1.5 million views and actually makes a significant amount of money every month. Since hitting the #2 spot, we've added almost 4,000 new subscribers. It's completely turbo-charged the growth of the channel.

And to top it all off, retention on the video is the highest of any of our videos. I think the accuracy of the title tells potential viewers what they're in for. So don't be afraid to tell the truth!

## *Chapter Eight*

# **Social Hooks**

### **How To Make Share-able Videos**

When we share content we are doing something that is fundamentally social. In many ways, media has become a new way for people to talk to one another. It can take a lot of work for some people to articulate an idea or an emotion, but it's relatively simple to click "share" on a video that made you laugh.

Videos with elements that provoke Social Shares are a vital element of your content mix on YouTube. These videos serve a different purpose than the ones you're optimizing for search. The idea here is to build "hooks" into the video that compel people to share.

With these videos, we're looking for something urgent, provocative and with emotional force. We are solving a different type of problem than when somebody wants to learn how to poach an egg. We are helping people talk to one another.

If you've spent any time on the internet, at some point you've run across a video or article (or "listicle") from BuzzFeed. They are pretty much the gold standard for creating socially shareable content and you can learn a lot from them. Spend a little time studying not only their headlines but the type of content they produce.

In 2013 they hired pioneering vlogger Ze Frank to create a Social Video department within the company. BuzzFeed video has been a huge success, spawning hundreds of viral videos and (as of this writing) three very popular YouTube channels.

I was fortunate enough to hear Ze Frank's keynote at VidCon 2013 and it became clear that he had created something much more interesting than a video department: he had created a social media laboratory. This laboratory was designed for experimenting with different types of social video and trying to figure out what works, i.e. what types of videos get shared.

So far he's broken these videos into 3 primary types:

**Identity** -- Sometimes a piece of media expresses your identity better than you can. It can also allow you to express interest in someone else's identity,

even when you might not know much about it. Identity videos can focus on location, gender, sexuality or even an occupation. An example of an identity video is "How to Piss Off Every New Yorker in 36 seconds." If you are a New Yorker, you relate to this video and will possibly share it to express that you are connecting with the message of the video. If you are not a New Yorker, you might share this video with a New Yorker friend. By doing so you are using media to express a connection with a part of their identity.

**Emotional Gift** -- When you see a video and have an emotional response, it's natural to want to share this emotion. You feel something and you want someone else to feel it to. I am guilty of sharing cute and funny cat videos. If I'm in a bad mood, I will sometimes just search for kitten videos on YouTube. These videos cause an emotional response in me and (in weaker moments) I sometimes share them with friends. See "How To Restore Your Faith in Humanity" for an example of this kind of video.

**Social Role of Information** -- There are a lot of different ways information can come into play in social relationships. One of those roles to prove a point. If you have a strongly held belief and a video demonstrates that you are right, you're probably going to share it. BuzzFeed's "Drunk vs. Stoned" video was widely shared by advocates of marijuana legalization.

Once you have spent some time getting to know your community, you will develop a keen understanding of their shared values and interests. Create content that they will feel compelled to share with their friends. Some of these friends may become loyal viewers of your show.

## **Trends & Tentpoles**

Want to know how to get on the front-page of YouTube?

Make a really popular video that capitalizes on something that is trending.

Sounds really easy, right?

YouTube prioritizes the placement of videos based on their relevance. This prioritization shows up most prominently on the YouTube Homepage when you're not logged in.

Log out of the Google ecosystem for a moment and take a look at YouTube.com. It may have been awhile since you've seen it. Notice anything? The top part of the page is devoted to videos that are either REALLY popular or relevant to something that's trending in the news. Scroll

down a little bit and you're going to see the most popular videos on YouTube in different categories.

A majority of them will be about ... things that are trending.

Even though Google has us pretty well trained to stay logged-in, the YouTube homepage still gets a TON of traffic.

## **TENTPOLE EVENTS**

YouTube also loves Tentpoles. A "tentpole" refers to a big event that lots of people are interested in: holidays, big movie releases, Super Bowl, World Cup, Shark Week, etc. You create videos around these events that can bring in a lot of viewers. The concept of the tentpole is that these events will hold up or balance out the rest of your content.

Depending on your niche, different "tentpoles" will be easier than others to build authentic videos around. For *Hilah Cooking*, the holiday season is amazing because everybody is ready to up their cooking game. We'll create videos and blog posts around Thanksgiving and Christmas recipes. Our biggest tentpole in our early years was actually New Year's Day because our Black Eyed Peas video would go through the roof. The analytics graph actually looked like a tent! New Year's Day is also big for *Yoga With Adriene* because people are serious about their New Year's Resolutions, for awhile anyway. We see a huge jump in all our numbers in January. We decided to capitalize on this by launching our REBOOT product in January and it was a huge success.

The possibilities for Tentpole programming are endless. If you've got a geek channel, Comicon is perfect. If you have a sports channel, you've got Super Bowl, Olympics, World Cup, etc. These are already a natural fit to the interests of your audience and since they appeal to a large group of people, that means they are more likely to be shared.

## ***Case Study:***

# **Trend-Jacking**

When a video or piece of content is able to latch onto a rising trend online - I refer to it as trend-jacking. One of my most successful trend-jacking stunts was the *Hilah Cooking* Chick-Fil-Gay video. I don't like to brag, but I'm really proud to take credit for this idea.

**The IDEA:** A video that shows how to make a Chick-Fil-A style sandwich at home. A copycat recipe. But we poke fun at the company's reputation for donating money to anti-gay organizations by calling it a Chick-Fil-Gay sandwich. And if possible we can also get a joke in there complaining about Chick-Fil-A being closed on Sundays when people are hung over and really need high quality fried chicken sandwiches. This was long before there was any big mainstream controversy around Chick-Fil-A, but it was something you knew about if you had gay friends. I thought it would be a good in-joke that would resonate well with our audience.

The video was on our "to-do" list for over a year. While Hilah appreciated the joke, she had never eaten a Chik-Fil-A sandwich and wasn't interested in eating one. I actually **liked** Chick-Fil-A and knew that there were lots of other people who liked it, too. Finally, on a road trip, I conned Hilah into eating a Chick-Fil-A chicken sandwich. She begrudgingly admitted that it wasn't terrible and started working out how to crack the recipe.

## **RIDING THE TREND**

We finally made the Chick-Fil-Gay video. I expected it to be such a huge success that I even upgraded our website hosting so that we'd be able to withstand all the traffic. Our audience DID love the video, but it wasn't the huge success I had hoped for. We got to 7,000 views within the first day which was really good for us at the time. We even got a little write-up in the Advocate.

Then, a few weeks later . . .

I noticed a sudden increase in traffic to our site. A huge increase. I checked our Analytics and noticed it was coming from the Huffington Post. The day before, Chick-Fil-A CEO Dan Cathy made his infamous anti-gay marriage statements. Suddenly, the company was suddenly all over the news.

The Advocate had revised and reposted their original article and it was now



on their home page. From there, the Huffington Post picked it up and ran with it. Once The Huffington Post runs with something, it gets picked up by dozens of smaller sites. The video was suddenly everywhere, boosted by the controversy. THIS was the viral success I had hoped for from the beginning. (Unfortunately, most of the sites were using the Blip embed instead of the YouTube video. The total combined views would be over 4 million by now, but only a fraction of those are on YouTube.)

## **THE RESULT**

This video was a turning point for the *Hilah Cooking* brand. We got a huge boost in subscribers and the baseline for all our metrics rose. Perhaps more importantly, we were suddenly on the radars of a lot of influential people.

As you might expect, despite being a really tame video, Chick-Fil-Gay was (and continues to be) one of our more controversial videos. This has been great for our brand. It was an opportunity to articulate our values. Some viewers were turned off by those values and decided not to watch the show anymore. Other viewers found something that resonated with them and became even more passionate fans of the show. Lots of people just appreciated being able to make a great chicken sandwich at home.

We're not making broadcast television here and the goal shouldn't be to appeal to everybody. I would rather have a smaller community that is focused and engaged.

Controversy can be your friend.

## *Chapter Nine*

# **Community Builders**

### **YouTube is a Social Network**

YouTube is not only the second biggest search engine in the U.S., it's the second largest social network. In June 2014, YouTube actually had more unique visitors than Facebook. I'm not ready to go around calling it the top social network, because there are so many things that make YouTube unique. But it's important to keep in mind how important the social component really is. The more you engage with your community ON YouTube, the more successful you will be.

Community Builders are the videos made specifically FOR your community (warm traffic). They don't have to rank for a high-volume keyword and they don't have to have social hooks. These are all about interacting with your viewers on something and making them feel awesome about being part of something. The more excited your community is about your show, the more loyal they will be. They'll tell their friends about it. They will support your other projects. And they will feel great about doing it.

### **Vlogs**

As much as I loathe the term, Vlogs can be a great way to connect with your audience. The term "vlog" was initially used to refer to a video blog: somebody talking directly to a camera about their life. But the term has expanded to encompass a particular style of video. Basically, videos with minimal production value that give your community access to parts of your life that you don't normally show. Vlogs offer a look behind the scenes and a way to foster a deeper connection.

Vlogs can be highly effective for all types of brands. There are channels focused on short films that release their main videos once a month. They use vlogs and other vlog-style content to keep their audience engaged between their primary videos.

Although not specifically a "vlog," Q&A videos use the same format to answer questions from the audience. Q&A videos are increasingly popular and even social media pioneer Gary Vaynerchuk recently launched the *AskGaryVee* show that is quickly attracting a huge audience.

The vlog format is also perfect for Call-To-Action videos. Whether you want to promote a product, build your mailing list or ask your community to take action on an issue that is important to you, these are incredibly effective. We've used blogs exclusively to launch both *Yoga With Adriene* products. Our initial plans were to produce some flashy "commercials" with much higher production value, but we ran out of time and just shot a video that featured Adriene casually talking to the camera.

If your channel is focused very specifically on a certain type of content, you might want to consider starting a second channel for your vlogs. We made this decision for *Hilah Cooking*, because the channel is very focused on one recipe per week and we didn't want to dilute that. The second channel is far less popular, but it's still a very effective communication channel. For *Yoga With Adriene*, we are aiming for a more diverse blend of content that includes everything from workouts to lifestyle type videos. So Adriene's vlogs fit naturally into the content mix.

## **Collaborations**

In 2013, Hilah and I were chosen to be part of a new program from YouTube called the Creator Accelerator. It was an amazing experience. We were one of 35 channels that took part in the program and all the channels were chosen based on their Watch Time. The bulk of it was focused on collaborations. YouTube realized the power of collaborations in building channels and audiences so they flew all of us out to Los Angeles for three one-week trips with the mission of creating three collaboration videos per channel.

This was great for us because we've found it surprisingly difficult to find channels in Texas to collaborate with. We came up with a cocktail themed show and had a different guest for each episode. We shot eight collaboration videos in total with guests like Jimmy Wong, Maangchi and Todd Beiber from Upright Citizens Brigade. It was a lot of fun and exposed our channel to new audiences.

Our community loved seeing Hilah interact with other YouTube personalities and our subscribers got a nice boost after each of these collabs. Our most popular collaboration to date was a simple tour of the Tastemade Studios with Rob Nixon of *Nicko's Kitchen*. Since these were both cooking channels, there was already an overlap of viewers and they loved seeing Hilah and Rob together in a video.

We've also done several "remote" collaborations where we've shot a segment that has appeared on someone else's channel or just paired up with another YouTuber to create complementary videos which we cross-promote. These are fun but don't have nearly the same impact as in-person collaborations. If there are other YouTubers in your area, reach out to them, make friends and see if there is any collaboration potential.

## **Live Events & Hangouts**

Live events are amazing community builders and they've never been easier to do. Google Hangouts is probably the easiest option and allows for the most interaction. You choose who gets to be in the hangout (up to 8 people). Then you can live-stream the hangout directly to YouTube where anyone can watch it and comment to participate in the conversation in real time. This is a great way to host a Q&A for your community. The technical side of things is getting easier all the time, but you will have the best audio and least interference if everyone in the hangout wears headphones and mutes their microphone when they aren't speaking. Once you have your hangout guests chosen and the time arranged, announce it through your social platforms a couple days in advance and encourage people to watch and ask questions. If your guests have their own audiences, ask them to promote the hangout, too. This way you all cross-promote each other. It's helpful to have a friend on-hand during the hangout to screen comments for you during the hangout so you don't miss any good questions from viewers. If there are a lot of people watching, the comments will come in fast.

If you want, the hangout can even be archived on your YouTube channel for people to watch later.

You can also do live broadcasts directly through YouTube. This could be a live broadcast of an event you're attending that your community might be interested in, or just you talking to the camera vlog-style.

Meet-ups are *real life* live event that people love. It's awesome to get to meet members of your community who, until now, you've only known online.

Adriene has taught two live yoga classes now for members of the *Yoga With Adriene* community, one in New York City and one in Los Angeles and both were hugely successful. Adriene loved meeting her students and the community members really loved meeting each other. Several new friendships were cemented. These were tacked on to trips she already had

planned, so it was not a big expense but it was a ton of fun. A few years ago, Hilah and I organized a big party in Austin that raised money for a local hunger charity and allowed us to meet face-to-face a bunch of people we'd only known virtually through *Hilah Cooking*.

When planning a meet-up, first check for interest in the area. Use Facebook analytics to gauge your community size by city or state and ask on YouTube and Twitter to find out where you have a bunch of interest. Announce the meet-up two to four weeks in advance to allow people time to plan and post periodic reminders with all the details. Choose a public space to meet and set a begin and end time. A bar is always an easy place to meet. For Adriene's classes, we rented yoga studios. Because we had to pay for the space, we did ask everyone to buy "tickets" ahead of time but it was just enough to cover the rental fee and no one seemed to mind. If you have physical merchandise, bring a few with you to sell or give away and be sure to bring a camera to document the event. Get people's Twitter or Instagram handles and tag them in photos. If they have a YouTube channel, get a shot of the two of you doing Jägerbombs together and cut it into a wrap-up video, linking to their channel. This is a wonderful opportunity to get to know the people who already know you through your videos.

## *Chapter Ten*

# **Launching and Optimizing**

Once you've uploaded a video to YouTube it's time to tell the world about it. The first 48 hours are *incredibly* important in the life of any video so it's important you dedicate some time to your video launch.

## **PRELAUNCH:**

### **COMMUNICATE YOUR SCHEDULE**

Fans of your show will eagerly await a new episode, so it's important to let them know what your release schedule is. Clearly communicate your schedule in the following places:

- The videos themselves
- In your branding and artwork
- In the About section of your channel
- In the Video Description
- In the About section of your website
- In your social media profiles
- (Even consider adding it to your email signature)

After you've hit that schedule reliably for a month or two, they will start to expect new videos at a certain time each week. This is great because that will help improve your views during your launch window.

## **LAUNCHING YOUR VIDEO**

### **1. UPLOAD TO YOUTUBE**

Upload your video file directly to your YouTube account. Don't use a third-party system for batch uploading. This can cause problems and can give you less control over how your video appears. Do it manually.

### **2. USE TITLES TO GRAB ATTENTION**

Video Titles are important for grabbing attention and getting views. Strive to get your titles and thumbnails to work together to deliver a knock-out punch. As with just about everything else, consistency and authenticity is incredibly important. Your titles should have a consistent format and they should be

provocative but not misleading.

If you are targeting a Keyword, use that keyword in the title. If it's a short one, try to use it twice.

### **3. DESCRIPTIONS**

Use the description field to accurately describe your video. The first 2-3 lines are very important. This is the only part of the text that is visible from the Watch Page so give some thought to how it looks there.

Include your keyword in the first sentence, i.e. "Learn how to fly a kite with this simple kite-flying tutorial." There are different schools of thoughts on how long to make your description. This area definitely helps with search rankings, so if you're trying to rank a video you should write a detailed on-topic description.

Don't use a website URL as the first line of your description. Instead, create a template for your website and other social links and put all that information lower in the description field. This section of the description is another great place to communicate your publishing schedule. Make this section clean and easy to scan so that you can drive traffic to other areas of your platform.

### **4. TAGS**

Aim for 7-10 tags and keep them focused. Make sure to use your keyword and keyword variations. If your keyword is frequently mis-spelled, add the common misspellings.

### **5. THUMBNAILS**

Custom thumbnails are still only available to YouTube Partners, but if you're a partner, definitely take the time to create good thumbnails. If you're not a partner, you will have a choice of three thumbnail options auto-generated by YouTube. Pick the best one and don't sweat it too much. This is what I did for our first 80 or so videos. Once you have the option of creating custom thumbnails, *focus on thumbnails that will look good in search engine results.* This will result in more views.

This drives part of my brain completely crazy. When we started the third season of HC, I rolled out fancy new thumbnails that featured a picture of Hilah, our logo and a food photo. I was really happy with how these looked and from a branding perspective, I still think they work great. But guess what? Thumbnails that show the food close-up work way better. I dragged

my feet on this, refusing to believe it, but my desire to test everything won out. I was wrong.

When creating video thumbnails put yourself in the mind of the person who is searching for the content you've created. In our case, they're looking for information about how to make some kind of food. I've found that the thumbnails that result in the most views for us is a simple close-up picture of the food. If somebody is searching for something, make the thumbnail clear enough that they think clicking on it will give them the answer. And don't be deceptive or it will backfire.

An example of what I consider slightly deceptive thumbnails are those that are on pretty much every yoga video on YouTube. You know, the ones with the close-up of the yoga butt in a thong leotard? I purposely avoid any even-slightly-sexual thumbnails on *Yoga With Adriene* videos because it sends a message that is contrary to what Adriene and I both want this channel and community to represent. I do feel that this decision has helped keep our community "clean" and without a lot of the pervy comments you see on other yoga and work-out channels that are hosted by women.

## **6. ADD VIDEO ANNOTATIONS**

Annotations are another great way to attach more text (and links) to your video. I always try to get my keywords into an annotation somewhere near the beginning of a video. Use the annotations to link to other related videos or to your own site.

## **7. ADD CAPTIONS**

This would be the perfect time to add captions to your video, but we are usually behind schedule. You can caption the video yourselves or outsource this part of it. We started out using Fiverr and now use [speechpad.com](https://speechpad.com).

## **8. EMBED THE VIDEO ON YOUR WEBSITE**

Views from embeds are important to overall ranking, so embed it on your main website. The easiest way to do this is to write a new blog post. Write a little bit more about the topic of your video and paste the YouTube embed code. Publish!

## **9. SPREAD THE WORD**

Share the video on social media sites. Depending on your overall strategy, send out links directly YouTube link or the link to your blog post.



## **10. ENGAGE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY**

Now that links to your video are trickling out across the internet, it's time to engage. That means responding to comments. This is most important immediately after you launch a video. In fact, we recently changed our release schedule to Tuesday nights from Friday nights, mostly because we often found ourselves away from the computer on Friday nights and unable to respond to comments right away.

Depending on your show, you can take several different approaches to responding to your comments. Hilah takes an authentic and funny approach that's perfectly in keeping with her personality and the tone of the videos. Our regular viewers can feel that they are engaging with a real person who cares about what they think and wants to help. Typically the first viewers are the most devoted and they deserve a response, even if you don't respond to every single comment.

Set aside time to respond to comments and make it a regular part of your launch strategy.

## **POST LAUNCH**

Email relevant blogs that may be a good content match.

It's a good idea to keep a list of blogs in your niche. Blogs are always hungry for new content and this can be a great way to find new viewers for your videos. If you have a video that seems like a good fit for their audience, send it to them. Don't harass them every time you release a new video.

After you've launched a few videos on a consistent you will get a feel for the things that work for your channel. Use this as a starting point and find what works for you. That's what makes it fun.

If you'd like this checklist as a downloadable PDF - go to <http://christophersharpe.com/ytbb> and sign up for the Updates list.

## **PLAYLISTS**

Playlists have been a feature of YouTube for years now. You can do a lot of really strategic (and fun) things with them. I recommend putting your videos into a playlist during the initial launch window because this will help them get more views right away (and increase your viewer's watch and session times). However, they can also be very effective when it comes to optimizing your videos for search.

On their surface, playlists are a way to serve up a curated batch of related videos. But when you start to look at playlists with the eyes of a Google engineer, they start to look like another way to build back links to your videos. Playlist links seem to carry at least as much weight as annotation links, so this is a powerful way to pass authority to a video.

Let's get started playing with playlists!

## **PLAYLISTS 101**

A playlist is a curated collection of videos.

Once you have a video in a playlist, share the PLAYLIST link rather than the video link. As soon as the video is over, YouTube will immediately start to play the next video in the Playlist. This is great for keeping people glued to your videos. Your views AND your overall channel watch time will increase.

## **BASIC PLAYLIST**

A basic playlist is a great way to structure your content and help people find what they're looking for. Playlists also make it easy to design your channel home page.

To create a playlist:

1. Go to your VIDEO MANAGER
2. Click the NEW PLAYLIST button in the top right corner.
3. Give your Playlist a Title. (i.e. "Bad Ass Kite Tricks").
4. You have the option of a Public, Private or Unlisted Playlist. I usually keep mine Unlisted until I have finished creating it.
5. Write a brief Playlist description. If you're going after a keyword, it's a good idea to work your keyword in here. As usual, make it sound natural and conversational.
6. Start adding videos.

## **NINJA PLAYLIST**

This is a completely above-board tactic, but it works so well I call it a Ninja Playlist. If you're trying to rank for a competitive keyword this can work surprisingly well. A playlist can include any video on YouTube, not just videos from your channel. Here's how it works:

1. Make a video for your keyword.

2. Put your video in the #1 spot on the Playlist.
3. Put 5-6 other videos that rank high for that term in the Playlist.
4. Write a good description for the Playlist (make sure to include your keyword).
5. Write a sentence or two description for each video in the Playlist.

You've just created a tiny link network that over time will boost the ranking of your video. This will also help your video show up in end-slate and in related videos for your keyword.

**BONUS TIP:** After your video starts to rank well for your keyword, create more videos with related keywords and add them to the playlist. Over time, start to remove the videos from other channels, replacing them with your own videos.

# **PART III**

## **MAKING MONEY ON YOUTUBE**

Once you put work out into the world on a regular basis, doors will open and opportunities will present themselves. In the early days of *Hilah Cooking*, I never imagined that we would be producing content for companies like Scripps Networks, Tastemade and even YouTube itself.

While we have had some decent pay days from producing work for other companies, my priority has always been to create multiple income streams that we control.

I talk to a lot of people when they are just starting out and most of them have the idea that there is going to be a huge payday right around the corner that is going to change their life. I'm not looking for the big pay day. The big checks always have a lot of strings attached. I by far prefer the smaller amounts of money that seem to show up magically in our bank account every month. And by creating different sources of income that are not solely dependent on YouTube or another huge company, our small company is stronger and better able to withstand changes in the online video ecosystem which we have no control over.

There's a Swedish saying that I love:

*"many small streams will join to make a mighty river."*

We're not at the mighty river part yet, but we're getting closer every day.

In this section we'll explore the different ways to make money from your YouTube channel.

## *Chapter Eleven*

# **YouTube Advertising**

## **Why YouTube Ads Suck**

You can make money just by making and uploading YouTube videos. YouTube runs ads on your videos and they pay you a percentage of what they make. This is usually the first income stream that new YouTubers pursue. It's definitely the easiest and possibly the fastest.

### **So How Much Money Can You Make?**

We've all heard stories of people getting rich from their YouTube channels, but it's difficult to find out what people are actually making on YouTube. But I'll give you some averages for my channels. These are accurate as of the writing of this book and I will update this for future editions.

#### **Hilah Cooking**

- Subscribers - 195,000
- Average Monthly Views - 700,000
- Average Monthly Earnings - \$2000

#### **Yoga With Adriene**

- Subscribers - 199,000
- Average Monthly Views - 1,100,000
- Average Monthly Earnings - \$4000

Those numbers might be exciting if you're just starting out and have a low overhead. But when you factor in the incredible amount of time and work that goes into creating a show and building an audience, these numbers are really low. This is why I never recommend starting a YouTube channel primarily as a way to make money.

Based on my conversations with other YouTube creators, these numbers are pretty in-line with what you can expect from these two niches. Yoga With Adriene makes a little more but that's because the CPM in fitness and weight loss tends to be higher than it is for food and recipes. But, wait a second, what's a CPM?

## How Do youTube Ads Work?

The YouTube ad system is driven by the concept of CPM. CPM stands for *cost per mille* or Cost Per Thousand views. Individual views aren't worth much, but advertisers are willing to pay for them in batches of a thousand. It's really what makes the whole YouTube ecosystem work. If you have a mega-channel, you can do pretty well with this. But, unless your videos are generating hundreds of thousands of views on a regular basis, it's going to be difficult to scale this income stream up to something you can make a decent living on.

If you're familiar with Google's AdSense system, you'll have an idea of how the YouTube Ad system works. The majority of it actually IS AdSense. Advertisers set up campaigns targeting certain keywords, interests and demographics and place bids (auction-style) for ad placements. (I told you we would keep coming back to this keyword concept!) Some keywords are very competitive and can cost quite a bit.

## Why CPM is Great for Advertisers and Lousy for Creators

Let's break down how CPM works a little more. Our hypothetical "How To Fly A Kite" video has been up on YouTube for over a month. Now we've got 10,000 views. Since we've got a new channel and an average search term, if we're lucky we might get a \$5 CPM.

$$\text{So } 10,000 \text{ views} / 1000 = 10 \times \$5 = \$50.$$

Pretty sweet right? Well, hold on a second. It never quite works out that way. There are a few factors to take into account before you can make any type of projection:

Not all views are monetizable. Non-monetized views don't count. You can find out what views actually count by going into your YouTube Analytics and clicking on Ad Performance. The Estimated Monetized Playbacks is the number that counts.

YouTube defines it as: "When a viewer views your video (i.e., a View) and is shown at least one ad impression or when the viewer quits watching during the pre-roll ad without ever reaching your video."

$$10,000 - 5,000 = 5000 \text{ views} / 1000 = 5 \times \$5 = \$25$$

And of course YouTube is going to take a cut, their payment for hosting the video and maintaining the system that makes this whole thing possible.

Although the numbers on my channels don't always back this up, officially that cut is 45%

$$10,000 - 5,000 = 5000 \text{ views}/1000 = 5 \times \$5 = \$25 - \$11.25 = \$13.75$$

These numbers are purely speculative, but it should give you an idea of how it works. After you take out the non-monetized Playbacks and then take out YouTube's percentage the CPM that actually goes into your pocket is pretty low.

The part that can be discouraging is that (unless you have a viral smash) it takes a LONG time and a lot of work to make a significant amount of income. This is a long-term play.

## Why YouTube Ads are Awesome

We had been making *Hilah Cooking* for almost two years before we finally turned on YouTube ads. I realize that sounds like a crazy long time, but when we first started it was actually difficult to get into the YouTube Partner program. Plus, I had been ultra-focused on building an audience and I didn't want ads to detract from that. When we were finally accepted as a partner, we were making \$1-2 a day. That's not even enough to get a monthly check (there's a minimum payout of \$100). I wasn't all that excited about it.

But it turns out I had everything configured wrong. The advertising system was a lot more difficult to use back then and I didn't have all the ads turned on. (It took going through the YouTube Next program to get everything set up right).

So I FINALLY got everything set up correctly.

The next day our earnings went up to \$11.65.

I realize that's a pitiful amount, but it blew my mind at the time. I knew that if we could get close to this on a daily basis we would actually get a check from Google *every month*. That meant we would be making money.

Like a **real** business.

Our average daily income for that month turned out to be over \$10/day so that means we were getting a regular check for around \$300 every month.

This gave us a baseline to work from. I knew that if I could make \$10 a day from this channel then I could make \$20. I backwards engineered what it had taken us to get to that point and concentrated everything on doubling that



number. We re-optimized all of our old videos, increased our publishing schedule for new videos and started engaging more actively on YouTube. We doubled it in just a few months.

Then I knew if I could make \$600 a month, I could make \$1000 and I set that as my next goal.

We hit it a few months later.

That was a huge milestone for our business. I realize we still aren't talking about GET RICH numbers here, but for a tiny bootstrapped business, a \$1,000+ income per month is significant. Once you start to hit that number, everything looks a little bit different. You have money to reinvest into the business and there's a sense of validation that comes with it.

So even though building a decent revenue stream through YouTube takes a lot of work and time, there are benefits above and beyond just the income. Use your YouTube earning numbers as a way to set goals, push yourself further and make your channel better.

## **Networks (MCNs)**

Welcome to the worst section of this book and the one that I waited until the very last minute to write. Networks. Everybody asks about them. Nobody is satisfied by any of the answers. Let's just dive right in.

If you already have a YouTube channel, you've probably already received an email from a Network (or MCN) telling you how much they love your channel and how much they can help you make lots of money by exposing you to brands and getting you sweet advertising deals, bro! Some of these emails are from companies you may have actually heard of. Major players in the YouTube Space. Some of them you may have heard about on TV. Some of them may even be owned by the Walt Disney Company!? What should you do???

## **What is a Network?**

In the YouTube ecosystem, an MCN is a Multi-Channel Network. That means one company has a bunch of channels under their umbrella. These channels are "associated" with the company via the YouTube content manager. The idea is that individual creators are already busy enough and probably don't have time to schmooze advertisers and make brand integration deals. But these MCNs with big staffs of advertising and PR and movie

industry people can take care of all that for you. They'll help you with your channel, promote your work and help you land some brand deals so you can go full-time like PewDiePie.

But all these great services come at a price, which is usually a cut of the earnings from your YouTube channel. It seems like it could be a fair trade-off and lots of channels join networks every day.

But, should you join?

Generally, I would say "no."

The horror stories I hear on a daily basis far outweigh the good things I have heard. I spend a significant amount of time every day talking to YouTube creators and I have only heard about positive network experiences from two people. And those were both about the same network.

Both of my channels are currently with a network and due to the contracts I've signed, I can't talk about the specifics. Altogether I can say I've had one terrible, one tolerable and one good network experience. Because of these network deals, overall we have made slightly more money than we would have if we had been on our own.

I wouldn't rule it out completely, but DO NOT rush to join a network. Joining a network is not going to make a big difference in the growth of your channel. Joining a network is not going to give you an income overnight. Stay focused on making a great show and growing your audience. Don't make any commitments on the network side of things.

Eventually, you will get a good offer (something along the lines of 1 year contract, no split of YouTube revenue, non-exclusivity for brand deals, etc.). Then it might be worth thinking about.

**Always remember, you are the one who created something and you are bringing the majority of value to the table when it comes to negotiating your contract.** Don't be afraid to negotiate and always, *always* have your lawyer read over any contract before you sign it.

## *Chapter Twelve*

# Digital Products

## The Best Day Ever

We had been up almost all night working but when I woke up I was immediately alert and invigorated.

It was launch day.

This was the morning that the *Learn To Cook* e-book would finally go on sale. This was our first product and this was the moment we'd been working towards for months. I still had a day job and for once I couldn't wait to get to the office. Everything was set and I needed to sit at a computer and not leave. My day job was the perfect place for this.

We ate a quick breakfast and I warned Hilah to be prepared that EVERYTHING THAT COULD GO WRONG, WOULD GO WRONG. But that we would deal with it.

We had about an hour until the launch emails started sending out. I hurried out the front door to my car to find my passenger's side window had been completely smashed out. A paving stone sat in a pile of broken glass. Nothing was stolen, it was just a pointless hate-smash.

Instead of being upset about it, I was elated. I took this as another sign of resistance from the Universe and got in the car and drove to work. I had a fucking e-book to launch!

(Note: Don't do this. If your car window gets broken, have your car professionally cleaned before driving it.)

I parked my car in the parking garage, ran up eight flights of stairs, crash-landed in my beige, fluorescent-lit cubicle and fired up my iMac. We had set up a very simple sales page and were using E-Junkie to sell the PDF eBook plus three bonus videos. I had tested it countless times but we were about 15 minutes from launch and I wanted to make sure everything was perfect.

As I clicked through the sales process I noticed that my mouse was red with blood. My blood. Fuck! I had cut my hand on some of the broken window glass and the last thing I wanted to do was go look for a Band-Aid. I grabbed a leftover Starbucks napkin and used it to stanch the bleeding. Another sign from the universe.

Five minutes before launch one of my supervisors dropped by to get an update on a work project I had been neglecting. This was guaranteed to be a long, slow, painful conversation. The truth is, I had been letting my day job responsibilities slip -- a lot. I had been working on the book pretty much full-time at work. (Sorry, guys!) But I didn't have time for that conversation right now. I held up my bloody hand: "Do you mind if I go find a Band-Aid real quick? Somebody smashed out my car window this morning and I can't get this to stop bleeding."

Conversation averted, I went downstairs found a Band-Aid and then walked outside to the building's courtyard, pulled my phone out of my pocket and checked my email. There was an email receipt from PayPal for \$19.95. Our first sale! I was over the moon.

Seconds later there was another receipt and then another. I hadn't checked the settings so I got an email for every sale.

\$19.95

\$19.95

\$19.95

\$19.95

\$19.95

And they didn't seem to be slowing down.

It was the best feeling in the world. It felt like magic. The work was done. There was no physical product to package or take to the post office. Just bits of information being delivered via email.

I went back inside and stared at the screen as orders came in. Eventually, I used my broken window as an excuse to leave at half day. I went home and kept an eye on things there as a window repair guy fixed my car.

As exciting as the "Payment Received" emails were, the personal emails we got were even better. The truth is, most of our audience already knew how to cook. They weren't buying this book because they needed it, they were buying it because they wanted to support what we were doing. This was almost two years into the project and we had never asked for money or sold anything. I believe we had authentically earned the trust of our audience. The feedback on the book was outstanding.

We hadn't set a very ambitious financial goal for *Learn To Cook* but we hit it

on the first day. It wasn't going to make us rich, but we could finally get a decent computer for editing and a few other things. We re-invested all the money into the business.

The most important lesson of the best day ever: Now we knew how to make money online, with no shady tricks.

## **What I Love About Digital Products**

The great thing about digital products is that once they're created, your work is pretty much done. There is already great infrastructure in place for selling and delivering these products. It's like a little money-making machine.

You also don't have to store anything, pack anything or ship anything. This is great news for people who travel a lot, have limited storage space or hate going to the post office.

## **E-Books**

If you're producing How-To content I would jump on this right away. I also think there is a lot of potential for scripted series to produce e-books containing bonus content or behind-the-scenes information. E-books are an excellent low overhead way to get a product to market and start testing what works and what doesn't.

There are a lot of great resources about e-books out there but I highly recommend Pat Flynn's FREE [\*e-Books the Smart Way\*](#) guide. We followed the method described in this book for the production and launch of *Learn To Cook*.

The book you're reading right now is an e-book. For this book, I made the decision to sell it via Amazon and iBooks because I wanted to get the information out to as many people as inexpensively as possible.

## **Premium Video Content**

We launched the first *Yoga With Adriene* product a few days after Christmas 2013.

REBOOT was an online video yoga class consisting of 4 videos, a daily inspirational e-mail and a downloadable PDF guide. We set it up as a membership site. Once you paid, you got access to a members-only area of our site and a new video each week for 4 weeks. I had never done anything like this before and there were a few technical glitches, but it was still a

HUGE success.

We did a pre-launch coupon so that people who bought it before January 2<sup>nd</sup> got \$10 off. Our guilty little secret: the first video wasn't even done when we started taking orders. We had made a healthy profit before the product was even finished. And people loved it.

You're already producing video content, so why not produce some high-end focused content for your fans? You've already got the workflow in place so it might be even easier writing an e-book.

## Other Digital Products

The sky really is the limit... so start brainstorming.

- If you're an animator you could create a set of stock animations and sell them to other video creators.
- If you make a How-To channel, release plans for an exclusive project
- Make a bonus episode and sell it for \$2 or in exchange for a donation.
- Can you scale out your idea and create an app?
- If you produce art tutorials you could make a set of Photoshop brushes and sell those.

We're only beginning to scratch the surface here. Spend some time thinking about how you can expand your project in a way that your people will pay for.

## Resources

**Gumroad** - I've become a huge fan of Gumroad. It's a sales system for digital products that has stripped away everything but the essentials. If you bought this book, you probably used Gumroad to get it. Gumroad is easy to use for both the buyer and the seller. I love it. You can also sell video products as long as the individual files aren't bigger than 4GB. **Downside:** Doesn't accept PayPal.

**E-Junkie** - E-Junkie is quite a bit clunkier but does have a few advanced features like the ability to do affiliate sales. The interface is almost unforgivably ugly, but the system works great and is used by some really heavy hitters. **Downside:** Only accepts Paypal

## ***Chapter Thirteen***

### **Physical Products**

Physical products are the natural next step. They are another revenue stream, but they also have a big extra benefit of adding legitimacy to your brand. Until you have a real world product your brand is basically just air. Creating and selling a real physical product brings an added sense of connection and real-ness to your project. Physical products also work as a promotional tool and can bring in new people who hadn't heard of your brand before.

Even though the response to the *Learn To Cook* e-book was resoundingly positive, the #1 request we received was for a print version. I think we did a killer job on the e-book. It looked really cool and was optimized to work on iPads and tablets. But our community wanted a physical product. Something they could take into the kitchen with them, make notes in and spill tomato sauce on.

I resisted creating a print version for over a year. I didn't want to risk the up-front investment. I didn't want to pack and ship orders. I didn't want to store boxes of books. I also didn't think the quality of print on demand was good enough and I didn't see how we could make the profit margins work.

But the requests kept coming in and as publishers started to approach Hilah about writing new books, I thought it would be a worthy experiment to release a print version and see how it sold. Since *Learn To Cook* is a text-book more than a cook book, we decided black and white interiors with full color covers would be fine. That would allow us to hit a competitive \$19.99 price point. Hilah expanded the text and I redesigned the book completely. We hired a cartoonist for interior illustrations and even roped in a professional book editor.

I uploaded the files to CreateSpace, got a beautiful full color proof and we promoted the book to our mailing list. It's now our #1 product and continues to be a significant monthly income stream.

The print version of the book has a lot of other benefits. It works as a great promotional tool. People receive the book as a gift and then discover the show and become a part of the community. People discover the book on Amazon and then are introduced to the show and website. It is also something we can sell or give away at events.

## Shirts, Shot Glasses & other Shit

Throughout the 90s, it seemed like T-shirts were the currency of the internet. There were lots of websites that seemed to be monetized primarily through T-shirt sales. T-shirts and other apparel are a great way to make money and to further build the connection with your community.

**If** you can get the numbers right and the quality right.

I hate the majority of print-on-demand merchandise and I especially hate CafePress. I've never bought anything through any of these companies. It's nothing against the companies or the quality of the products. The quality has actually improved a LOT over the years.

The real turn-off for me are the stores themselves. They are pretty much all the same. A logo plastered on every conceivable type of products. T-shirts, hoodies, shot glasses, onesies, t-back panties . . . anything and everything. None of it is unique. None of it really resonates with the brand. None of it is limited. It's a mass market canvas to slap some branding on.

Contrast this with the website [daringfireball.net](http://daringfireball.net) which sells T-shirts once a year for a limited time. He offers two designs. You have a couple of weeks to order the shirt and then sales are closed until next year. The shirts are unique, high-quality and have an exclusivity to them. If you see somebody wearing a daring Fireball shirt, you know that they are "in the club" (or "the cult").

It seems like everybody with a website slaps up a CafePress store in an attempt to make some money but in my opinion it really just weakens their brand. And the profit margin on all of it sucks.

Contrast this to the profit margin on an actual screen-printed T-shirt. Especially a shirt that you have pre-sold so you don't have to worry about overages or estimating a print run.

Remember to keep the long-term view in mind. NEVER sell out your community or the quality of your brand for quick cash.

**Never associate yourself with shit.** Money comes and goes but once a brand is tarnished or you lose the trust of your community, it's hard to recover. Don't end up in that position.

## Downsides to Physical Products

If you've read this far you already know that I hate the idea of having a bunch



of physical products to store and that I also hate fulfilling orders. That's the major downside for me. I want to stay focused on creating great work.

However, there are ways around this. You can start with print-on-demand. Once you are moving a significant amount of merchandise, you can also use a fulfillment house to take care of all of your storage and shipping.

If you're not using a print-on-demand method, the other big downside is the up-front cost to have the products manufactured. For this reason, I highly recommend pre-sales. Design your product and offer it for purchase for a limited time. When the sales window closes, you'll have the money to pay for the items and you'll know exactly how many you need so you don't end up wasting money or having to store 500 branded pencil caddies under your bed. Make it clear to people that the orders will take some extra time to arrive, since they won't actually be printed until the sales window is over.

Definitely do some research, survey your community and start small so you can gauge what the actual interest is before you invest thousands of dollars making something nobody wants.

## **Resources**

### **Amplifier**

Amplifier is the fulfillment company for the internet. They have an amazing facility and can do everything from screen printing to print on demand to storage and order fulfillment. If you are selling a lot of merchandise and want to avoid turning your spare bedroom into a storage facility, check them out.

### **Createspace**

Owned by Amazon, Createspace is my favorite of the print-on-demand book companies. If you're selling high-end photography books or hardcovers you'll want to look elsewhere, but for everything else I recommend Createspace. The margins aren't great, but they're better than elsewhere. They also make it very easy to sell your books through Amazon. Products in Amazon can actually be really good advertising for your brand.

### **TeeSpring**

This is kind of like a Kickstarter for T-shirts. These are actually screen printed shirts and you can pick the quality of the garment. You set the price but if you don't get enough pre-sales, the shirts don't get made or sold. If

you've got an audience, this could be a killer tool for producing some limited edition shirts.

## *Chapter Fourteen*

# **Sponsorships & Brand Integrations**

If you produce a show on a consistent basis, you will start to hear from bigger companies in your niche. First they will ask about sending you free samples in exchange for talking about their product on your show. We say no to these kinds of offers as a rule, with a few exceptions made for members of our own communities who have started small businesses and are looking for promotion. Our reason for turning down these kinds of "deals" is two-fold:

Primarily, it takes a lot of work to make a video -- work that, if you are just looking at YouTube revenue, is usually not highly paid -- and companies who are looking for a product mention in exchange for a product sample are essentially asking for free advertising. From you. Would they ask YouTube for a few free pre-roll slots? Hell no. Of course, this part is very personal. If it's a brand that you really like and believe in and maybe even use already, it might be a fine way to start building bridges with them that could lead to paid brand integration later on. If it is a big company with a strong social media presence and you are just starting out, it may be a good way to get some promotion if they agree in advance to share your video through all their avenues. Just be thoughtful when choosing who you work with and always remember the value of your work and of your community.

Secondarily, the videos we make for YouTube will be around forever (or at least until the day YouTube collapses). Many companies will not. We try to keep our videos as timeless as possible so they will be relevant to new viewers even a few years down the road. Promotion of a product that no longer exists is a sure-fire way to date your videos.

Eventually, as your community grows, some of these same companies may start to inquire about paid Brand Integration or Sponsored Content.

These two things can overlap, but here's how we break them down:

**Brand Integration** -- This is basically a product placement. A company wants to integrate their brand with your show. This can be great if it's a natural fit. But if you feature a product that goes against the core values of your brand, your community will notice. We've said yes to products like Jell-O (which Hilah likes as an old-fashioned ingredient that her grandma would use) and no to things like Tyson pre-cooked chicken breasts (which goes

directly against the "Learn to Cook" purpose of *Hilah Cooking*). Even on the Jell-O videos where the product was really front-and-center, we probably only received two comments from people who noticed the placement.

**Sponsored Content** -- This is content sponsored by a brand and it may or may not live on your channel. The product might not necessarily be featured but it is definitely mentioned. It could be as explicit as "This episode is sponsored by Volkswagen."

We said no to **everything** for the first few years of *Hilah Cooking*. We still say no to **almost** everything but if it's something that seems fun or that fits naturally with the brand we are open to it. We've turned down 75% of the requests we've had in the last year. If you watch the episodes closely you can probably tell which ones feature paid brand integration, but hopefully it wasn't too obvious.

By being super selective, not only can we command a higher price and retain more creative control, we also -- most importantly -- retain our community's confidence. Your viewers trust you and trust your opinion. Don't sell them out.

I expect brand integration to ramp up exponentially over the next few years. It's really just getting started in a significant way and everybody is still figuring out how it's going to work. It will involve brands, advertising agencies and content creators (and probably YouTube networks).

I think there is a **lot** of money to be made here but it requires building a significant channel with an engaged community and getting to know the right people in the industry. Eventually you will be approached by the right people, but if you don't want to wait, VidCon is a great place to start getting to know who they are.

## THIRD-PARTY PRODUCTION DEALS

Once you've built up a community, a brand and a reputation for delivering high quality content on a consistent basis, you suddenly have a lot to bring to the table when talking to other production companies.

Production deals are great for an infusion of cash, but they are a one-time paycheck and not an income stream that you can count on for the long-term.

We've been approached by dozens of production companies and broadcast

networks (including MTV and the Cooking Channel) and are now producing a web series for Scripps Networks. Those are some pretty big players considering we are a micro-budget two person operation in Austin, Texas. We have never pitched a show idea or initiated contact with any of these companies. All of them have contacted us.

The old-school media titans are scrambling to figure out what's happening in the YouTube world. Some of them want to establish their brands in YouTube itself while others are trying to create their own walled gardens of video to hopefully compete with YouTube. These companies need people like you to figure out what they're doing. They also want to piggyback on the brand equity and community loyalty that you've built.

These deals can bring in a lot of money but they can also be tremendous pain in the ass. Be cautious about who you deal with and be very cautious when it comes to the contracts. Most of these companies are still very much in a TV mindset and will try to push a TV style product as opposed to something that is effective in the YouTube ecosystem.

**Always have a lawyer read any contract before you sign and remember that everything is negotiable.**

## *Chapter Fifteen*

# Community Funding

### Crowdfunding

Kickstarter is probably the first thing most people think of when you mention crowdfunding. It can work great when you're raising funds for a big project like a movie, but it's not the perfect model for everything. It's great for a one time goal, but not necessarily for a weekly YouTube show. Fortunately, Kickstarter's success has popularized the idea of crowdfunding and there are now some popular alternatives, including some that are more tailored to YouTube creators.

This is an area that I'm only beginning to explore, but I think it has a lot of potential. Here are three sites that could be a great fit for YouTubers with an engaged audience.

### TUBESTART

TubeStart feels the most like Kickstarter, but it is dedicated exclusively to online video creators. They have even partnered with FullScreen and are the network's exclusive crowdfunding platform.

The site allow two different types of campaigns:

- **Subscription** - Designed for creators who release content on a regular basis, this is a recurring monthly pledge ranging from \$1 - \$150 per month.
- **Flexible and Fixed Funding** - The creator sets a one-time goal and mobilizes their fan to hit it. You can choose the Kickstarter-style "all or nothing" or "Flexible" where you still get the money even if you only partially hit your goal.

TubeStart has some nice features like a community forum, an integrated content delivery system, custom thank-you videos and more. The downside is that I've been unable to find examples of people who have successfully raised significant amount of money on the platform. Based on a scan through their current campaigns and the community forum, TubeStart looks and feels like a platform for people who are just starting out and aren't setting the stakes very high.

## **PATREON**

Patreon is probably the current leader in the YouTube focused crowdfunding game. While they are definitely YouTube friendly, you can use Patreon if you create *anything* on a regular basis. They've got a lot of users -- musicians, YouTubers, web comics creators -- already signed up and earning some pretty impressive incomes through the system.

The site's mission is to "enable fans to support and engage with the artists and creators they love." Patreon gives each creator their own Patreon feed and Fans pledge a certain amount of money per piece of content the creator releases. A creator only gets paid if they deliver new work.

Creators can set different levels, so a fan who pledges more will get access to more stuff. That usually starts with access to the fan-only Patreon wall and can ramp up to include things like exclusive videos, posters and Google Hangouts.

Patreon is currently quite a bit more mature than the other systems listed here. It's easy and quick to sign up and you don't have to be approved. It also has a few more bells-and-whistles like creator categories, fundraising milestones AND they can accept pledges through PayPal. The concept that drives Patreon is pretty unique in the crowdfunding arena and an engaged community is growing around the site that reflects that.

## **SUBBABLE**

Subbable is another great contribution to the YouTube community from Hank and John Green (the Vlog Brothers, VidCon, Crash Course and lots of other projects).

With Subbable, you set a monthly fundraising goal and your viewers pledge a monthly amount. The money pledged goes into a "perk bank" where it adds up over time. The channel creator decides on some perks, and the system basically works like a small store. You can fill your store with physical or digital items and your viewers can select and purchase with the funds from their perk bank. This is a great way to offer exclusive content or early access to products. This could even replace the need for a dedicated e-commerce system.

Even though it was only announced a few months ago, I expected Subbable to be an even bigger player by now. While it lacks some of Patreon's innovative features, they are definitely making progress. And with the Green

brothers as the masterminds behind-the-scenes they've got serious YouTube cred.

We are still in the very early days of YouTube crowdfunding, but there is a lot of potential here. If you have a loyal audience that is hungry for more content, I would definitely consider one of these sites as an additional revenue stream. I'm going to be experimenting with this more in 2015. I've been very bullish about Subbable but Patreon has been impressing me on an almost daily basis.

## **Donations & Sponsorships**

After all that crowdfunding talk, donations sound totally old-fashioned, but they can be an effective way of bringing in revenue. Companies like TWiT and 5x5 have made audience donations a critical part of their businesses. Roosterteeth offers a Sponsorship where fans can become sponsors and get bonus content and ad-free episodes.

Being the stubborn Texans that we are, we've always had mixed feelings about implementing donations for *Hilah Cooking*. We always wanted to offer something special for people who donated to support the show. We had a lot of requests for a way to donate so we eventually put up a small donation button on the website. It's since turned into a tiny income stream that we've used to partially pay for our episode transcriptions.

Adding donation functionality can be as simple as signing up for PayPal and cutting and pasting a line of code. Now that you can link directly to an associated website, you could even link from your video annotations directly to a donation page.

If you're doing a good job and cultivating your community, your community WILL want to support you. This could be a low-friction way to get some cash coming in.



## *Case Study:*

# **Find What Feels Good**

In November of 2013, Adriene and I decided it was finally time to create a much bigger online yoga class. We had been talking about making a premium online yoga class for over a year at that point. For various reasons -- mainly that we spent most of our time making videos for the YouTube channel -- we had never gotten around to it.

With a new year coming up, we decided we would end up talking about it forever unless we gave ourselves a hard deadline and just went for it. We chose January 2014 as the launch date. The class would be called REBOOT. The concept was a 4 video class designed to help people get over their "holiday hangovers" and establish a consistent at-home yoga practice.

We shot the videos over two very long days after Thanksgiving and spent the rest of the year in post-production. We announced that it would be available on January 2nd.

But here's a little secret: we really had no idea what we were doing.

Christmas came and went. We still hadn't finished all the videos and I only had a vague idea about how we were actually going to sell the class. We worked pretty much non-stop between Christmas and New Year.

While Adriene was recording voice overs and picking out music tracks, I researched membership plugins for WordPress (the system that powers our websites). I found one that had great reviews and decided to go for it. I installed it and spent the next few days reading the support docs and trying to get it to work. We did lots of tests. It seemed like everything was going to work great.

On December 30th, we pushed the button and sent out an email announcing that REBOOT was available for purchase.

Thanks to our amazing community, our first orders began to come in. It was a pretty incredible experience – and not because it had anything to do with money. For me, it felt like a concrete validation of all the work we had done so far. It was a confirmation that we weren't both completely crazy.

Unfortunately, just as we were about to celebrate, everything started to break. The membership system stopped working correctly and we ended up having

to manually add every new member. Even though we were hosted with a premium WordPress host, the site started to go down. We were getting dozens of (very nice) emails from members wondering why they couldn't access their videos. It was a nightmare, and I felt terrible about it.

So we made the hard decision to close down sales of REBOOT until we had all the technical glitches worked out. It was NOT something we had planned and was initially a huge disappointment.

However, there was an awesome upside:

Because the class was available for just a few days, we had a group of people who were all going through the program at the same time. The initial month of the REBOOT kula was tremendously inspiring and a lot of fun. The sense of community that developed was more than we had ever expected. The small, focused group enhanced the experience in more ways than I could ever go into here. Despite being scattered all over the globe, it felt like we were all at yoga camp together.

It was in this group that all the elements came together and a thriving community started to take shape. This group allowed us to communicate directly with people from all over the world who were fans of the show and liked it enough to invest their own money to take part in a shared experience. Even more importantly, it allowed people with similar interests to come together and communicate with each other. The community immediately became the most important part of the *Yoga With Adriene* project.

The great thing about having a dedicated community supporting your work is that they become a partner in the creative process. Instead of just creating a project that WE wanted to make, we asked the community what they wanted us to make next.

Three things rose to the top of the list.

- *Power Yoga* – something a little more intense with a focus on weight loss
- *Inversions* – for people who want to work up to handstands
- *Pre-Natal Yoga*

We decided to tackle the Power Yoga class first. Our most popular videos are the ones focused on weight loss, so we knew there would be interest from our YouTube audience as well.

Once again, months passed and we never solidified a concept, never found a location and never booked any shoot dates. Before we knew it, June had crept up on us. The abstract idea that we had for what we wanted to make was definitely a summer-y type of project and it seemed like a huge missed opportunity to wait any longer.

We knew we could produce the course in time, but we had to figure out a way to SELL it that actually worked. I had experimented with a bunch of different options on REBOOT (iThemes Exchange, Premise, GetDPD) and none of them really solved our problem. They got the job done but even when everything was working great I was still spending way too much time on customer service and technical support.

I decided that instead of selling the courses through a cobbled together add-on to our main website, we would launch a brand-new website to hold all of our courses. I decided to build a Membership Site.

I was opening myself up to a world of potential pain here. It was going to be a LOT of work in a very short time frame. And I had never successfully done this before. But I felt like the risk was worth it. And I got to work.

## NUTS & BOLTS

These are the specific pieces I used to build it:

**Content Management System:** WordPress. You already know how much I love WordPress so this is still the foundation of the new site.

**Theme:** Divi from Elegant Themes. Divi is a drag-and-drop theme.

Basically, it allows you to set up columns and areas of a page into which you can drop different modules. I didn't expect it to work as great as it has so far. I wanted each course to have a different "feel" and Divi allowed me to quickly create course pages and sales pages with their own unique layouts. I'm not confined to pages that look like Blog Posts. Plus, it's a lot of fun to work with.

**Membership Plugin:** MemberMouse. I had several people recommend MemberMouse to me. Unlike a lot of plugins, this one comes with a monthly charge. The cost increases depending on how many members you have. The plugin seemed to have all the features we would need and they had a recommendation for great tech support. For me it was worth paying the monthly fee just to have somebody to contact if something went wrong. I also paid \$299 for their Quick Set-Up option. Looking back, the system was

actually incredibly easy to set up, but I wanted the peace-of-mind of knowing everything was right BEFORE we opened for business.

**Hosting:** SiteGround. After more investigation, I learned that the problems I ran into with the initial launch were due to cache-ing issues with our web host, NOT with the membership plugin I was using at the time (iThemes Exchange). I was already frustrated with our current host and switching to SiteGround would actually save us hundreds of dollars per month. They also will transfer your site for you -- for free. I signed up and had them transfer over the barebones FindWhatFeelsGood site that I had already set up. They took care of it quickly and their customer service has been outstanding.

**Facebook:** We use a Closed Facebook Group for the primary community section of the course. There isn't an automated way to add people to Groups, so this is the only component of the platform that requires some hands-on attention. We also have a Forum as part of the site, but nothing compares to Facebook for engagement.

**Mailchimp:** We use a Mailchimp's Autoresponder to send out an email for each day of the program.

## TESTING

A few weeks before the launch of EMPOWER, I tested the system by importing all of the people who had purchased REBOOT so far. I exported all the previous members from our WordPress database and our GetDPD account into an Excel spreadsheet and spent a little time cleaning it up. Then I ran the MemberMouse import "wizard."

It looked like everything worked, so I used MemberMouse to send out a welcome email letting everybody know that we had launched a new site and that there was a new, easy way to access all their videos. The response was great and our tech support emails decreased to almost zero.

Feeling pretty good about it, I got back to work editing EMPOWER videos.

## LAUNCH

It seems to be a recurring pattern that we are always working on things until the absolute last minute, and EMPOWER was no different. We had already announced the class would be available on the 15th and our community was already eagerly awaiting it. It was a pre-sale. So, once again, the product wasn't even complete when we sold it. This pre-sale strategy has proved time

and time again to be our best motivator.

There are a lot of different pieces that all have to work together during an effective product launch. My preference is always to launch a new product on a Tuesday but we were so far behind schedule this time, we weren't able to send out our promotional email until Friday, July 11th. I pushed SEND on the email campaign and sat back to wait -- fingers crossed.

Amazingly, nothing broke.

There were a few tiny glitches, but I was able to take care of them quickly with help from MemberMouse tech support. I kept waiting for the tech support emails to start coming in. But they never did. They were all sales confirmation emails. It was a very similar feeling to the day we launched the *Learn to Cook* book.

Except this time, the confirmations emails were for \$99 instead of \$19. It adds up a lot faster.

In our 4-day launch period, we made more money than I made in an entire year at my awesome, comfy day job at the State Bar.

## SUMMER 2011

We had been producing *Hilah Cooking* for a little over a year and things seemed to be going pretty good. We both still had full-time jobs, but a tiny stream of income was beginning to trickle in. Our numbers were climbing and our audience was very engaged. We were starting to plan the first eBook and were excited about the future.

We attended a networking event at the headquarters of a hugely successful internet video production company. I was blown away by the size of this company and their facilities. It was like a mini-movie studio with a giant green screen studio, cameras everywhere and dozens of employees hovering over editing stations. They had only been in business for a few years and were so successful they were actually having trouble keeping up with the growth.

We got a tour of the facility from one of the first employees of the company. My eyes were practically popping out of my head at all the school stuff and my brain was exploding at the potential. I casually mentioned that it was really exciting to be in on the ground floor of a new medium. He paused the tour and basically told me that I was wrong... that internet video wasn't a new medium but just a new distribution system for the same old video content.

I pushed back a little bit, arguing that the ease of production and distribution was unprecedented. There were no gatekeepers. There was also the ability for fans to interact with and directly support creators of content they loved.

He agreed with me on those points, but basically told me that I was too late. He argued that his company was a success because they had had viral hits before YouTube even existed and had built an audience when there was less competition and everything was much easier. Also, big companies were now aggressively getting involved internet video in general and YouTube specifically. They were pouring tons of money into the space and it would essentially be impossible for anyone just starting out to compete.

Then he resumed the tour.

That's what I call a "doubt inseminator."

It definitely made me think twice. I didn't pay very close attention to the rest of the tour. My enthusiasm and optimism had taken a blow. Maybe this guy was right. He was obviously making a decent salary from a cutting edge company while I was spending my days in a boring cubicle. He obviously

had a better vantage point to see what was really going on in the industry. Maybe I really was an idiot. Maybe we had started too late.

But then I decided: "*Screw that guy.*"

Even if he *was* right, I wasn't going to stop now. I put it behind me, drank their free beer, went home and got back to work.

I've never seen him or heard anything about him again. Now, I produce two very profitable channels that continue to grow steadily. We've just moved into our own pretty rad office with the realization that we are probably going to outgrow it in just a few months.

Most importantly, I love what I do.

You are going to encounter lots of people like this as you build your channel and create awesome work. I call these people "doubt inseminators." Most of them have day jobs that look pretty great from your current vantage point. Some of them have trust funds. Others will be well-intentioned family members.

Ignore them all.

It's not too late.

You are part of the beginning of something amazing.

If you want to make it happen and you are willing to put in the hard work, you can have all the success you are dreaming about right now.

I wrote this book with the sincere desire to help you accelerate your success on YouTube.

I've worked hard to give you a big picture view of what's working right now, but ultimately it's still up to you. You're going to have to make a lot of decisions yourself and do a lot of experimenting to find out what works best for you and your audience. I would love to hear about your experiments, successes and even your failures. I will be continuing my own experiments so check out [christophersharpe.com](http://christophersharpe.com) for regular updates.

Thanks for reading. Now... get to work!

Chris

## About The Author

**Christopher Sharpe** is the producer of *Hilah Cooking* and *Yoga With Adriene*. He lives in Austin, TX with his awesome wife, two crazy dogs and upcoming baby boy. For more information, visit:

<http://christophersharpe.com>.



# Table of Contents

[Foreword](#)

[Introduction](#)

[BackStory](#)

[I - CREATING A SHOW](#)

[Planning Your Channel](#)

[The Gear](#)

[Editing & Post-Production](#)

[WorkFlow](#)

[Building a Web Platform](#)

[Hilah Cooking](#)

[Launch](#)

[II - BUILDING AN AUDIENCE](#)

[Making Videos That Get Watched](#)

[Search Magnets](#)

[Social Hooks](#)

[Community Builders](#)

[Launching and Optimizing](#)

[III - MAKING MONEY ON YOUTUBE](#)

[YouTube Advertising](#)

[Digital Products](#)

[Physical Products](#)

[Sponsorships & Brand Integrations](#)

[Community Funding](#)

[Find What Feels Good](#)

[Authors Bio](#)