

PROFITABLE PLAYBOOKS

Real Advice From **Entrepreneurs** Who
Turned **Words** into **Wealth**



R O D N E Y D A U T

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INTRODUCTION:

FINDING YOUR PATH IN A SEA OF OPTIONS

Here's a story I hear all too often:

A writer starts building an online business. They're talented and motivated. They dive into podcasts, YouTube videos, and endless Twitter threads promising the "secret" to success. Six months later, they've tried a dozen different strategies, spent thousands on courses, and feel more confused than when they started.

Sound familiar?

If you're nodding your head, you're not alone. I've witnessed countless creators trapped in this cycle—jumping from one shiny tactic to another without a clear map of the terrain.

This is exactly why I created *Profitable Playbooks for Writers*.

Why This Book Exists

The online creator economy isn't lacking advice—it's drowning in it. What's missing is **context**. Without understanding the full landscape, how can you possibly know which path is right for *your* specific situation?

Most creators don't fail because they lack talent or work ethic. They fail because they:

1. Don't know what they don't know (the full range of options)
2. Try to implement everything at once
3. Follow advice that's wrong for their current stage
4. Listen to unvetted "experts" with flashy promises but little substance

This book solves these problems by organizing hard-won wisdom from proven creators into clear categories based on what your business actually needs right now.

How to Use This Book

Think of this collection as your personal reconnaissance mission. Before you charge ahead with any particular strategy, you need intelligence—a clear view of the battlefield.

The interviews are organized into five critical areas where creators typically need support:



Growth: Building your audience from dozens to hundreds or thousands



Productivity: Creating systems that help you produce consistently (including AI tools)



Monetization: Converting readers into paying customers



Connection: Building genuine relationships with your audience



Distribution: Getting your content seen by the right people

As you read, I encourage you to follow the CODE methodology developed by Tiago Forte:

- **Collect:** Read broadly across these interviews first
- **Organize:** Note which strategies align with your current needs
- **Distill:** Identify the 1-2 areas where you need the most help right now
- **Express:** Implement just those specific strategies before moving on

I learned this powerful framework from Tiago's program, then refined it further while serving as a facilitator in his Building a Second Brain program. It's transformed how I approach information and implementation, and it's perfect for navigating the wealth of strategies in this book.

The goal isn't to do everything—it's to do the right thing at the right time.

Unexpected Discoveries

These interviews revealed strategies I never would have discovered on my own. For instance:

- How top Substack writers are using chat features to build vibrant communities beyond their newsletters
- Strategic approaches to email segmentation that I'd never considered (like Mark Wills sending special offers only to 4-5 star subscribers)

- Josh Spector's content repurposing techniques that squeeze maximum value from everything you create

Each creator in this book has found their own unique path to profitability. Their approaches often contradict each other—and that's the point. There's no single "right way" to build a profitable writing business, only the right way for you, right now.

Why Trust These Voices?

In a world where anyone can claim expertise, finding trustworthy guides is challenging. I've done the vetting for you. Every creator featured here has demonstrated consistent results—not just for themselves, but for others they've taught or mentored.

These aren't overnight successes or theoretical experts. They're practitioner-teachers who have built sustainable businesses around their writing and are transparently sharing what actually works.

A Final Note Before You Begin

As you explore these playbooks, remember: your goal isn't to copy anyone's exact path. It's to understand the principles behind their success and adapt them to your unique voice, audience, and circumstances.

Don't try to implement everything at once. Instead, identify where you're currently stuck, focus on the interviews that address that specific challenge, and implement one strategy at a time.

Remember: Collect. Organize. Distill. Express.

Now, let's explore the profitable pathways these writers have blazed—so you can find yours.

Rodney Daut
Course Builder Coach



GROW YOUR AUDIENCE FASTER

*These experts will show you how to get
more followers and subscribers*

David McIlroy - Your creator orbit: Being the content people subscribe to

Reading time: 5 minutes

RODNEY: All right, so today we have here David McIlroy, a solopreneur, and writer who helps fellow creators turn their words into income-generating assets with years of experience building audiences and products.

David has grown his flagship Substack, How to Write for a Living to over 21,000 subscribers. When he's not riding or mentoring, you'll likely find him hiking Northern Ireland's mountains with his dog, his idea of the perfect day. Welcome, David.

DAVID: Thanks, Rodney. Great to be here.

RODNEY: Yeah. Okay. So the question I'll ask you is the question I've been asking everyone, which is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

DAVID: I think something that's worked really well for me recently is, I don't want to sound narcissistic about this, but talking about myself in an online space in the sense that I'm sharing a deeper insight into what I do and why I do it and what's shaped my journey to this point. I like to think of this as forming and maintaining your creator orbit and bringing people into that space around you and having a gravitational effect on the people around you.

I've mentioned this to you before and I put it on Substack, but I like the idea of we as creators being the content that people subscribe to. They're not subscribing for our courses or for what we've written necessarily or the content we've created, and they're subscribing because of us, because of who we are. So I think that's something that's really impacted my outlook on being a creator online and being a writer and I think it's going to impact and inform how I go forward in future but yeah, that's what I'm really into right now.

KEY INSIGHT: People subscribe to YOU, not just your content—you are the gravitational center that attracts your audience when you share authentic insights about your journey.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. And how does that impact what you do and how you do it?

DAVID: Yeah, I think it makes me consider everything very carefully. So anything I post online, anything I write, I want to be really sure that it's coming from a place of authenticity, that I am accurately reflecting who I am and what I believe, and that I'm not just churning out the kind of thing I think people want to hear. Because anybody can do that.

Anybody can put something into ChatGPT or whatever and spit something out and it'll sound really good, but it's not necessarily going to reflect who they are. And I think people want to connect with other people online, and if you can be the kind of person who has that gravitational effect around you, you're going to naturally draw people to you and they're going to want to follow you, and support you and ultimately, and they will support you financially by trusting you and then buying the things that you have on offer if it's courses or coaching services or whatever.

RODNEY: I love that. And you really make a point when you talk about people using ChatGPT to spin out something that the issue I think people have with that is, is it really reflecting that person? So how much did ChatGPT help? Did it help you come up with the idea or did it just help you express it?

But people want to feel like they're connected to the person who said those words, and did it really come from you? So I love that. And then the whole idea of authenticity. Does this accurately reflect who you are and what you believe, which I think is really important there? And so how would you suggest somebody, if there were steps to doing this, to using this in someone's work, what would those steps be?

DAVID: I think simple things you can do like looking back through your phone and your photos and reminding yourself about things you went through and situations you experienced, and being able to then draw stories from those and then find ways to weave those stories into the content that you're creating. Again, if that's a written piece or a video or a podcast episode or even the intro to a course, that sort of thing.

I think if you can just find ways of making those things you've experienced relevant and making them universal enough that somebody else can connect with the emotional core of what went on there. So if you experienced something that was very stressful or scary or made you sad, if you can just make other

people feel that as well, that is really what's going to resonate with them, what's going to make them want to connect with you as a person.

And it's not something that's easy to do, and there's a certain level of vulnerability involved with that that I think can scare people. They don't necessarily want to put themselves out there because the internet's a scary place.

It's getting scarier all the time, but I think it's really important to be able to find a way to do that and to learn how to do it and it's a muscle that you can exercise and get better at over time, and it's something I feel like I'm getting better at and I'm having to learn more about every single day. So important. Authenticity is the keyword in all this, and that involves a certain level of fear and vulnerability, I think.

KEY INSIGHT: Authenticity requires vulnerability—sharing experiences that connect with the emotional core of your audience builds a deeper relationship than any polished, impersonal content.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. I love that because there's two things you've mentioned authenticity, but also vulnerability. And I think they probably go together because if you're being authentic, are you only sharing authentically everything that goes well, or are you hiding half of it and are you only showing us the light and never the shadow?

So I think that's really important to know that to be authentic, you really should share some of the things that don't go well. The thing I have is about that though too, is how do you select what to share that's vulnerable and share it in such a way that it works. It's almost like there's a... Every once in a while I've seen something that's almost like an overshare or a share that kind of hits wrong. So how do you do it so that it works out well?

DAVID: Yeah, I think overshare is the operative word there. I think you have to be really careful that you're not just sharing for the sake of sharing, but there is a point to it and that there's a core central message in teaching learning outcome people can draw from it.

Yeah, I mean, there's lots of stories I could tell that are probably would have a lot of emotional depth to them, but if there isn't a real core message within that, then it's not really any point putting it on the internet.

But if there is a core learning point that people can draw from and they can learn from it themselves and take from that, then all the better. And I think that's the difference between social media and just a personal blog and an article that is packed with value and is worth following and subscribing to you and that sort of thing in terms of the creator behind it.

So yeah, I think you can definitely overshare it and it's a major issue. I think you have to learn where that line is and how far you can go and how much your audience actually wants to get from you. Some audiences will really want that. They'll want to hear about all the bad, and I think there can be an addictive aspect to that because we get addicted to negativity sometimes.

So I think as a creator it's our responsibility to ensure that we don't just expose our audience to things they don't need to hear and only give them what is going to be edifying and valuable to them. But as you say, a great phrase that you used, Rodney, was sharing the light as well as the shadow and sharing the shadow as well as the light, should I say, because I think people need to hear about the bad things as well as the good because that's what's informed you, what's shaped your approach and your journey so far?

RODNEY: Right. And I think you gave the principle that helps us define what to share, which is there a message or a lesson here. I could just share how I was doing too many tasks and spilled something and whatnot, and then I could say, "Well, is there a lesson there?" Well, actually, maybe there is. I'm trying to do too many things at once, trying to rush through things and there's a lesson there maybe.

So that actually could be useful. But then sometimes there's things which are indulgent. Let me just talk about the things that happened. And if it's entertaining, then that might be entertaining for some people, or if it's just soul searching and deep. But ultimately, if you're a creator, then people are coming to you because they want something practically as well. And I think that's why when you said that, "Is there a lesson here?" I was like, "Ooh, I think that's the thing." Yeah, yeah.

DAVID: Definitely.

RODNEY: And do you have any particular way of approaching the content that helps you shape that or is it just intuitive for you how to do it?

DAVID: I think if I feel strongly about it and it comes to me in the moment and it feels fully formed as an idea, then I know that's the kind of that I should share. If I have to really eke it out and really try and draw something out of it, then it's probably not something that's going to resonate as strongly. If it resonates with me personally it's probably going to resonate with my audience as well.

So whenever those moments happen, I write them down straight away, even post them straight away, depending on how well I can articulate it. But yeah, I think it's about clarity in that sense. If it's clear to me, if it makes sense to me what the point of it is, then it's good to go. And if it's not clear to me, if I can't define it immediately and say exactly what it's supposed to be, then it's not ready to go and I shouldn't share it at that point.

You can file it away as an idea, write it down as a note, or even as an article headline you can maybe come back to. But the ideas, the notes that I posted, the articles that I've read and I've done the best are the ones that I just went with in the moment and just didn't really think about it too much. I just knew that it was right because it was clear to me in my mind, and I knew it was going to reach my audience in the same way. So clarity's really key I think in that.

KEY INSIGHT: Share what resonates with you personally—if it moves you and feels clear in your mind, it's likely to connect with your audience as well.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. Clarity's key. I love that. Fantastic. All right, so I think this has been really great what you've shared here, and I think it's a really kind of important idea. You are the content idea, which I think is unique and a part of your own point of view. And if people want to get more of that and get deeper into your world, where should they go?

DAVID: Well, yeah, Substack is kind of where I mainly am at the minute and you can follow me on, [How to Write for a Living](#) or just [look me up on Substack](#) and follow my profile from there. I'd also love more YouTube subscribers because I've got pitifully few on that platform. I like to get a few more. So if anyone wants to [follow me on YouTube](#), that's a good place to get me as well. But yeah, Substack is my main platform right now, so that's where I'll spend most of my time.

RODNEY: Awesome. Fantastic. And we'll put a link to the Substack, your Substack as well because they might find it [How to Write for a Living](#), but they might not from just that. And your YouTube channel, does it have a particular name or is it just your name?

DAVID: It's just my name.

RODNEY: Okay, awesome. Fantastic. So before we go, is there anything you'd like to share that maybe popped in your head or something you'd like to add?

DAVID: I just think the idea, Rodney, that you brought up of sharing the shadow as well as the light is really key in all this. I think we're tempted to only share the Instagram version of our lives sometimes, and we share the outcome, but not how we got there.

And I think that's really, really important increasingly is we talk about how difficult the struggle was and how much we had to learn along the way, and those are the things that people are going to connect with the most anyways. So it's really important to share, it's really important to show our work and not just the outcome of the equation. And yeah, I think that's a really good important lesson to take from this as well.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM DAVID MCILROY

On finding clarity: If an idea resonates with you personally and feels fully formed in the moment, it's likely worth sharing. If you have to force it or struggle to articulate the point, it's probably not ready yet.

On showing your work: People connect more deeply with the journey than the outcome. Sharing the difficult struggles and what you learned along the way creates stronger bonds with your audience than just displaying the polished results.

Want to develop your own creator orbit? Follow [David McIlroy](#) on Substack at "[How to Write for a Living](#)" where he helps writers turn their words into income-generating assets. His approach to authentic content creation has attracted over 21,000 subscribers who connect with his journey and insights.

Mark Wils - Email subscribers: The consistent path to online growth

Reading time: 4 minutes

RODNEY: So we have here, Mark Wils, a seasoned content creator who empowers writers to expand their audiences and monetize their expertise. With years of experience in online content creation, Mark has cultivated a community of over 1,500 subscribers, providing them with actionable strategies for growth. He candidly shares his journey, including mistakes and successes to help others navigate the digital landscape. Welcome, Mark.

MARK: Well, thank you. Thank you. That's so nice. Thank you.

RODNEY: Yeah. Yeah. So I'm so glad that I could have you here today. And the question I'm asking you, that I'm asking everyone, is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

MARK: As far as writing?

RODNEY: Yeah, writing, business.

MARK: Oh, yeah. One thing that really works for me now is getting email subscribers and I started writing on Substack, it's been almost a year now, I started nine months ago. That was summer last year. And what I love about Substack is you get email subscribers, and with this you can easily get right into the mailbox, into the inbox. You can talk to them directly. So I used to do social media. I used to market my stuff on social media, but the algorithm changes all the time. So with Substack, always I get the subscribers and it's easier.

KEY INSIGHT: Email subscribers represent the most reliable audience—unlike social media followers subject to changing algorithms, your newsletter list gives you direct access to your audience's inbox.

RODNEY: Got it. Fantastic. Well, what do you do that helps you get the subscribers on Substack?

MARK: Yeah. I write a newsletter called Creator's Playbook, and I also do Substack notes. I've been writing these notes almost daily now for nine months. So it really helps with growth. On average, I'm getting 10 to 20 subscribers a day, sometimes 30 subscribers when I get a viral note and it really adds up, it really adds up. I'll be hitting 1,600 subscribers soon.

And when I get this, I always send them, sometimes I send a message, either a DM or I just send an email to ask, "How are you doing? Thank you for joining my mailing list," and stuff like that. And it just goes from there. So I'm talking with my subscribers and I get to know them on a personal level, and it helps building that trust and community sense.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. I love that, that you reach out to each one individually. Yeah. And which do you find works out better, the DMs or directly emailing them?

MARK: I find DMs are more personal, but email saves time because with DMs you have to start going one by one, one by one. But both of them works. Both of them work. Now, what I really like is the fact that you can send a DM and then at the same time you can send an email. So you're talking, you are doing mass emailing at the same time you're going personally in the DMs. Yeah. So DMs work better for me. I really like DMs.

RODNEY: I like that. Yeah. Because with emails, yeah, you can clearly send it to multiples at the same time and it might not be as personal, but with DMs there's no automation in Substack, so you have to write each one. Yeah, that's true.

MARK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RODNEY: That's true. And how do people tend to respond to the DMs or the emails when you welcome them to join?

MARK: Well, I just take it light. I'm not going like a salesman trying to sell something. I just try to get to know my subscribers, who they are, what they do, what's their goal for the newsletter, how long they've been writing, stuff like that.

I don't go around trying to sell something from day one. When I get to know my subscribers better, "Okay, I know maybe this is your goal, you're trying to monetize or you're just doing this as a hobby." And I can take it from there.

KEY INSIGHT: Build relationships before selling—reach out personally to new subscribers through DMs to learn about them, not to immediately pitch your products or services.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. That makes a lot of sense. You can make a lot more from just a few coaching clients. It takes a lot of small ticket sales to add up from even one coaching client.

MARK: Exactly.

RODNEY: Yeah.

MARK: Exactly. Exactly.

RODNEY: Awesome.

MARK: And that's why I always do the DMs because you never know what someone's struggling with. Maybe someone just finds your newsletter and they've been reading your stuff and you just reach out and you ask a few questions and you figure out what they struggle with and you can take them from there.

RODNEY: Got it. Yeah, that's a good point. And you finding out, I think that's one of the main things that makes business hard is when people assume they know what people need. And through those DMs and asking questions, you find out what they need, and so then you can actually serve that need because you know what it is, but you can't if you don't.

MARK: Exactly. Exactly. I just don't want to go out there trying to sell something to somebody whom I haven't really talked to to figure out what they really want.

RODNEY: Exactly. Exactly. Fantastic. Fantastic. And do you have something that you use to entice people to subscribe? Do you have a lead magnet or a freebie that you offer?

MARK: Oh, I haven't even used one since I've been on Substack. I just write my notes and then my subscribers, they find my newsletter there and that's it. I'm still thinking about getting one, but I don't think it's too necessary on Substack.

RODNEY: Yeah. One of the reasons I joined Substack was for that very reason. I was getting some traction on Twitter, which is now called X, and I didn't have

time to create a freebie, and I said, "Oh, if I put it on Substack, then they can just see the writing I've already done and then they'll know what they're going to get."

And so I did that and I stayed on Substack, even though I could have left to go to ConvertKit or the other things, but I thought, "Oh, this is really working out really well." There's so many ways to communicate with people on Substack. Yeah.

MARK: Yeah. I've been using ConvertKit, which is now Kit myself, for a while. I started getting subscribers there from Medium and social media, but I really find Substack to be kind of an all in one platform. You've got the social part, you've got a newsletter, you've got everything, emails, everything.

RODNEY: Right. That's one of the beauties of substack is that you don't get penalized in notes for talking about Substack.

MARK: Yeah.

RODNEY: Because in other places, if you put a link to some other place, then you're going to get penalized. But of course, they don't penalize you for talking about Substack as you grow your Substack.

MARK: Exactly. The platform is still in good mood, so they're trying to get more people, more subscribers. So I think it's good marketing for them.

RODNEY: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. I agree. I agree. Awesome. So if people want to find out more about you, if they want to get into your world, what's the next step for them?

MARK: Well, subscribe to my newsletter. That's really the first step.

RODNEY: Got it. And do you have a URL for your newsletter or the name that they can find it?

MARK: Oh yeah, it's [THEcreatorplaybook.substack.com/](https://thecreatorplaybook.substack.com/)

RODNEY: Oh, very easy to remember there.

MARK: Yeah, that's it.

RODNEY: Awesome. Fantastic. It's a good name too.

MARK: Oh, thank you.

RODNEY: Yeah. Yeah. So before we end it, is there anything you want to say maybe that you haven't said that might be useful people to hear from you?

MARK: Oh, yeah. You say you're writing a book, so I would love to read it when you're done, maybe when you publish it. And I just want to say email is probably one of the best forms of marketing right now because social media is so noisy. So if you're a writer or you're a creator online, do everything you can to build an email list. It's so vital right now in 2025.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM MARK WILS

On personalized outreach: Direct messages to new subscribers create a more personal connection than mass emails. Starting genuine conversations helps you understand what they're struggling with before offering solutions.

On platform selection: Using an all-in-one platform like Substack simplifies your workflow by combining social interaction, newsletter publishing, and email marketing in one place without penalizing you for cross-promotion.

Looking to build a reliable, engaged audience for your writing? Subscribe to Creator's Playbook at <https://thecreatorplaybook.substack.com> to learn Mark's strategies for growing your email list and building relationships with subscribers that lead to coaching opportunities.

Niharikaa Sodhi - Consistent writing: The straightforward growth strategy

Reading time: 4 minutes

RODNEY: Niharikaa Kaur Sodhi is a prolific writer and solopreneur who helps people grow their online presence and attract opportunities through powerful writing. After leaving corporate life in 2021, she built a thriving personal brand, becoming a 22-time top writer on Medium and amassing over 3 million monthly views.

She's taught 150 or more students from 30-plus countries through her cohort-based courses, and was selected for the LinkedIn Creator Accelerator Program. She recently gave her first TEDx Talk. Here's a charming detail, she collects postcards and proudly displays her growing collection on a wall in her home.

NIHARIKAA: Oh.

RODNEY: I'm so glad to have you here, Niharikaa.

NIHARIKAA: Oh, this is a great intro. Thank you for that.

RODNEY: Yeah. The question I'm asking everybody is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

NIHARIKAA: Writing consistently, showing up consistently, and that could mean anything. If you're showing up zero times, then show up once a week. If you're showing up once a week, try to amp it up twice a week. It's okay, you can take time.

It doesn't have to start this week, but the showing up often helps. It helps you get more traction. It helps the algorithm work in your favor. Helps you write better because you're showing up more, so that means you're writing more, and it also helps you attract potential clients and get work.

KEY INSIGHT: Consistency is the foundation of online growth—start where you are and gradually increase your publishing frequency to improve both your writing and visibility.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. People have talked about that before and I think it makes a lot of sense. What makes it so hard for people to show up consistently?

NIHARIKAA: I think it's one of those things that you know have to do, so this is a no-brainer, but it's just the effort of doing it. It's like hitting the gym that you know should be doing it, but then you just leave it for another day and that another day doesn't come.

I would say a more pragmatic issue is lack of systems. For instance, if you are working a full-time job and then you have responsibilities or activities during the weekend, then there's kind of no time to show up, and the only way to combat that is to actually carve time in your schedule.

How I used to do is I used to edit before work and write after work, that really helped me. It's so much better to do that instead of sitting one day and taking two hours to write an article, because that sounds hard, but too, showing up for 45 minutes twice, that's easier than showing up for one-and-a-half hour during your full-time job.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. That's right, because you started when you still had a full-time job.

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: Yeah, so you understand that, yeah. Yeah, and it makes a lot of sense to me to break up your writing sessions instead of trying to write for 90 minutes or two hours and break it up into 45 minutes. Okay.

How did you actually get started with the writing? A lot of people struggle with figuring out what they're going to write about, so how do you make sure when you sit down and write you actually have something to say?

NIHARIKAA: I always have something to say, I'm talkative. Even if somebody hangs out with me and I like their wife, I'll have a lot to say. That's just me. How I started was I was kind of always writing. I've been writing since I was a kid.

I've always been writing, but I just started writing online. How do you know you have something to say is that you just write about what's happening in your life. That's usually really easy to write as compared to trying to sound like some perfectionist and some guru. I don't do that. I just write about what's going on.

RODNEY: Got it. I think that's one of the reasons why your writing has taken off is you actually talk about what's happened in your life and you don't just say, "Here's all the things I do perfectly, but here's the things I struggled with. Here's what I do to overcome those things."

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: Got it. Awesome. Awesome. You do a lot of writing on LinkedIn-

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: ...and I think you're still writing on Medium too, right?

NIHARIKAA: Now I am writing about travel once in a while, but I'm using Medium more as a repurposing place. Let's say I write for LinkedIn or I write for my newsletters and then I copy paste out on Medium.

Earlier when Medium was paying me really well, I would write on Medium first and then repurpose that, but right now, prioritizing other platforms. But I'm still putting my stuff out there on Medium.

KEY INSIGHT: Break consistency barriers with systems—divide writing into smaller sessions (like 45 minutes before and after work) rather than trying to find large blocks of time.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. That makes sense. That makes sense. Yeah, because Medium seems to have changed from what it used to be.

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: It's not quite the priority that it used to be, okay. Couple things, just to recap some of the things you said. One of the things that gets in people's way of showing up consistency of lack of systems, and one of the systems that helps is schedules like consistent schedule like, "I'm writing at this time, I'm editing at this time."

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: Yeah, and that makes a lot of sense. Are there any other systems that you use to help you write consistently?

NIHARIKAA: I would say don't just blatantly copy what other people's systems are, because what works for me or what worked for me may not work for you. But try to learn about as many systems as possible and see what works well for you.

You know how for Tim Denning, batching works really well even when he had a full-time job, but for many of us writing three articles a day is rather daunting. See different things, note down your ideas. Always outline your ideas because even somebody sort of seasoned like me finds it difficult to write on a blank page, but when there's already an idea out there, it's so much easier to write. Please outline.

RODNEY: Do you have a certain process that you use for outlining?

NIHARIKAA: Yeah, I literally just use a pen and paper.

RODNEY: Oh.

NIHARIKAA: I'm not invested into any note-taking tools or anything fancy. Nothing at all.

RODNEY: Got it. You use pen and paper. Do you have an outlining process too that you use on pen and paper?

NIHARIKAA: It's the typical bubble diagrams we used to use in school.

RODNEY: Oh.

NIHARIKAA: You make bubble and then make more bubbles. It's either that or it's the point one this and then these other three bullet points. Then I make three bullet points that these are the few points I'll cover under that topic.

Just to give me an idea. An outline more it helps with is it gives me clarity on what do I want to write about. Because if I don't do this and I start on a blank page, I think I'll just move here and there.

KEY INSIGHT: Outline before writing—even simple bubble diagrams or bullet points create clarity that prevents you from staring at a blank page or wandering off-topic.

RODNEY: Got it. I like that that you have two outlining process, one that's the bubble diagrams, kind of mind maps type of thing, and then another one that's point with sub points there.

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: I think that's another thing that's really important is that people have more than one method of doing something. Not 10 methods, but you might be in a more logical frame of mind at one time and another time you're really having to figure out the ideas and so you need something like a bubble map that lets you play with it a little bit more.

NIHARIKAA: Yes.

RODNEY: Awesome. Fantastic. Very cool. If people want to find out more about you and get into your world, what's a good entry point?

NIHARIKAA: I think LinkedIn is good right now.

RODNEY: LinkedIn is good?

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: To find you on LinkedIn?

NIHARIKAA: Yeah.

RODNEY: Got it, okay.

NIHARIKAA: If you want to learn about everything we spoke about right now, then [Side Hustle Saturdays](#), which is my weekly free newsletter, is a great place to start learning about side hustling, making money online writing, everything around that.

RODNEY: Is there a link that they can go to get to Side Hustle?

NIHARIKAA: Yeah, it's niharikasodhi.com/newsletter. I'll send it to you.

RODNEY: Okay. All right, awesome. Yay. Fantastic. Well, thank you for doing this and giving us this information. I think it's going to be really useful to a lot of people.

NIHARIKAA: I'm glad.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM NIHARIKAA KAUR SODHI

On finding your system: Don't blindly copy someone else's writing system—explore various approaches and find what works for you. Some writers thrive with batching, while others do better with smaller, more frequent sessions.

On starting simply: Write about what's happening in your life rather than trying to sound like a "guru" or perfectionist. Authentic, experience-based content is both easier to write and more engaging for readers.

Want to build a consistent writing practice? Find Niharikaa on LinkedIn or subscribe to her [Side Hustle Saturdays](#) newsletter at thesidehustleschool.substack.com/ to learn how she grew from corporate employee to prolific writer with over 3 million monthly views.

LEVERAGE AI FOR QUALITY AND QUANTITY

*Curious about how to use AI to grow your
business without losing your soul?
These creators show you a way*

Ev Chapman - Using AI as a creative co-pilot for faster, better content

Reading time: 6 minutes

RODNEY: Today, we're joined by Ev Chapman, a creative entrepreneur who helps knowledge workers transform their ideas into impactful content. Ev is the creator of the Tana Fast Track course and the Spark Method, both designed to help you nurture your ideas and create insightful content.

Since 2021, she's been sharing practical insights on productivity, note-taking, and digital workflows across platforms like X, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Her mission is to help creators build systems that work as hard as they do—without the overwhelm.

I'm so glad to have you here, Ev.

EV: I'm so happy to be here.

RODNEY: All right, so here's the question I'm asking everyone. It's, what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

EV: Yep. Okay. So I think I do want to talk about the voice workflow along with Creative Copilot because that's the one I just use... I use it all the time now.

RODNEY: Awesome. Okay.

EV: And I don't think I could create another way now. I just immediately go straight to recording a voice note, getting everything out of my head, that kind of thing. So I think, yeah, I think that's the one.

RODNEY: All right. So tell me, let's have everyone understand how this workflow works.

EV: Yeah. Great. So I think I basically... Well, I guess there's setup and then there's just using the workflow, right? So I think the biggest thing for me came by creating a... I have it in both. I have a Claude project and I have a ChatGPT, like CustomGPT and I just loaded it up with all the stuff about me.

So I think in the past, I've had things like a writing style guide, but it still didn't get me and so I ended up loading it up with things like my core values. And I even

put some history in there and some little stories and things like that. And so I feel like it now doesn't just sound like me, it kind of knows how to think like me with those little things.

So, I guess where I start then in the morning or whenever I need to create something in case if I've got an idea, I literally just grab my phone, open up Claude or ChatGPT. They both have voice modes. And I think this is funny because I feel like, I mean, I've been a writer all my life and I thought that was my main mode of thinking. Right?

But since having voice combined with AI, I feel like either I changed, or actually I wasn't a writer all that time. I was just interested in ideas, and writing was the only way to get them out. Whereas now all I do is I just kind of jumble out of my mouth, the kind of idea. It's always fuzzy.

KEY INSIGHT: Voice + AI creates a powerful workflow that frees you from the limitations of keyboard writing, allowing ideas to flow more naturally and be refined through conversation.

And even just before I was like, "I think I kind of want to talk about this thing. I don't really know what it's about yet," but I just get it out the same as... I have the same concept as when I didn't use voice, I basically have... If it's in my head, I have to get it out straight away, right? And I've always had that rule even before using this workflow.

So I'll just quickly switch on voice, capture it into my Creative Copilot and then I can come back to it after, or if I've got time, then. So basically what happens from there is I have in the custom instructions for my Copilot, to ask me questions and dig a little bit deeper with me.

And so it ends up almost being a bit of a conversation. It feels like if we were talking here about, "Okay, let's develop an idea." You might ask me some questions. I might ask you some questions. And so it ends up just really, it feels kind of natural.

Funnily enough, I don't use voice mode, as in the back and forth voice because I find it so annoying. You know, this is a funny thing actually because this goes into a bit of when you send people voice notes, it's like people hate receiving voice notes. They would prefer to read it, but we all prefer to send voice notes.

So I basically just switch on the microphone, I talk and then I can read what the AI comes back with. And I find that works better for me than the pure voice mode, which is quite... I mean, some people might be different. They might be auditory kind of, but even when I'm out on a walk, I'm like, "Wait, what was that long answer that you just..." I can't remember it all, so I much prefer just to read back what AI comes up with.

And so the whole thing just happens so naturally now, like it's just a conversation to kind of clean up the idea and really delve. And then all of that kind of... I think one of the things that people, or one of the pushbacks I always get is that, "Well, you can't have AI think for you," or they're concerned that it's not yours, right?

Whereas I feel like that conversation part actually sparks my own ideas. I'm not necessarily saying, "Give me three ways to write content or do this." I'm asking it to prompt me with questions so that I'm coming up with the ideas. That's kind of how I tend to use it.

Once I'm done, then I basically just ask it to write out the content and it acts like my ghostwriter. And I think I was a bit worried at first, coming from being a creator for a long time, being a writer, I was like, "Oh, I'm kind of offloading a majority of that writing part." But now I really see that as the idea is the seed. The idea is what I want to get across and the ghostwriter is crafting that together into a way that makes sense for an audience. So, yeah, yeah. I mean, that's the basic workflow.

RODNEY: And the thing, I think is really important for everyone to get is, it is your idea not only just the seed of it because someone could say, "Oh, write a..." I remember, I don't know a year ago, someone I ghostwrite for sent me an article.

They said, "Oh look, this article I've written," and I said, "No, no, you didn't," because it was like Wikipedia, but what did she do? I was like, "What did you type into it? Oh, I told it to write an article about XYZ topic." And I'm like, "No, that's no good. That's not even your ideas. It's nothing of yours." Right?

Whereas what your process is, "I have an idea." You tell the AI the idea. The AI then asks you more questions about the idea, then you answer them. Then maybe it asks you even more questions back and forth until it's got enough information like a ghostwriter would. And then it says, "Okay, I got it. Let's write."

And that's a completely different thing because it's still your thinking, but it was doing the work of organizing it and typing it out for you in a way that makes sense and in a way that fits your style because you've already trained it on your style.

I think that is really powerful because I mean, you're still going to judge the final product too, and edit it, and-

EV: That's exactly right. Yeah.

RODNEY: So just like you would a ghostwriter. No matter how good they are, I'm still going to look at what they wrote and see if it works, you know?

EV: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And I think that was the light bulb for me when I thought, "Well, let's say I hired a human ghostwriter. What would I need to tell them to write really good copy for me?"

And that really changed my thinking on how to deal with AI, because then when you think of it like a ghostwriter, you're like, "Okay, well, they need to know context. They need to know why would I say this, not just how would I say it."

KEY INSIGHT: Think of AI as your ghostwriter that needs to understand your context, style, and values—this mindset shift helps you use AI as a tool for expression rather than replacement.

So yeah, it just made me kind of really change how I started to think about using AI, especially as a writer and creator. Yeah. And I think you're right about the idea and I think I've always been obsessed with the idea. For me, that's the thing. I love ideas. I mean, if you look into my notes, there's like loads of ideas just sitting there ready to explore.

And then I think I learned the craft of how to write and communicate. And I think that also helps me then, when I'm looking at the finished product because I know what I'm looking for. I know what sounds cliché and what I would usually say and things like that. So it's much easier to edit and that kind of thing, already knowing. Yeah.

RODNEY: And I think that's another important thing too, is I had another client who was having ChatGPT write emails for him, and I looked at some of them. I said, "You know, no, I wouldn't send this to your audience," because he was like,

"Well, I figured the AI writes better than I do." I said, "Well, I mean, you still have to be the final judge."

And anyway, we made some better copy for him to send out. In any case, that's why it's so important to train it on your taste. Taste is so important. Now taste becomes even more important because just like if you hired someone, if I was paying someone \$2,000 a month to write for me, I would make sure, darn sure that it fits my taste, right?

EV: Yeah, absolutely.

RODNEY: And that's how I think people ought to think about it. Think of it as a high-paid ghostwriter, not, "I'm lucky that I get to have this help." No, imagine that you paid them \$1,000, \$2,000, \$5,000 a month. What would you want? Demand that because it's only going to do what you teach it to do, what you demand it to do. And if you let it go to low standards, it will do low standards.

EV: Yeah, and I think that's such a great point, is the expectation that we put on it. And I think a lot of people get frustrated with output they get from ChatGPT or Claude, and not realizing that actually, once you train it, it's actually really good. I've been so surprised once I give it that idea.

And I think the more you use it, those first couple of times I did this process, it was still not quite right. And so just at the end of our conversation, I'd say, "Hey, can you sum up this conversation and rewrite the style guide with some of the tweaks that I've made?" And so that really helped as well because then you keep iterating on what your style actually is.

RODNEY: Right. Yeah, that's a good point. When you notice that it puts something in cliché, now you can say, "Hey, I don't like this type of cliché." Or when I have it reformat my text for LinkedIn and it puts all these emojis and I'm just like, "No emojis. It's okay to use special characters, but no emojis, or don't use this many, more than a certain number of emojis," because sometimes it would just go nuts with emojis and I'm like, "I don't do that."

EV: I know. You know I always wonder, "On whose posts did they originally train these models?" Because I was like, "No one's reading those kinds of posts."

RODNEY: Exactly. Nobody writes like... I mean, hopefully nobody writes. Actually, I shouldn't say that. I have seen somebody who wrote like that. I had a couple. I even had a student who wrote like that and we were always like, "How

do you find the time, because even if you use text expander to make all your emoji things," I'm just like, "That's still..." He had so many emojis in a regular forum post, just dozens. And I'm just like, "Wow. Yeah."

EV: Yeah. Some people just like emojis.

RODNEY: He was in love. And people actually said, "Just so you know, it's so hard to read your posts because too many emojis." And he says, "I don't do it for everyone else. I do it for me." And I'm like, "All right, well just know that whatever floats your boat, I guess."

All right so Ev, if people want to find out more about you and get into your world, what's a good way for them to do that?

EV: Yeah. I mean, look, I'm on most of the platforms, but probably the best place is just to go to my website, evchapman.com. And then you can find me on all the other places. Most of the time, these days I'm on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com). I'm not doing a lot of short-form content, but yeah, that's it.

RODNEY: Awesome. Awesome. So go to evchapman.com. That's very easy to spell and remember.

EV: Well, I had to shorten my name because my full name is a bit harder to spell. So I just went with E-V.

KEY INSIGHT: In content creation, training AI on your values and personal stories leads to better results than just giving it a style guide—it understands not just how you write, but how you think.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM EV CHAPMAN

On iterative improvement: The first few times you use AI with your workflow, it won't be perfect. Take time to sum up your conversations and have AI update its understanding of your style based on your feedback.

On maintaining quality standards: Think of AI as a high-paid ghostwriter you're demanding excellence from, not a lucky convenience. You get what you expect, so maintain high standards and the AI will rise to meet them.

Want to create faster, better content with AI as your creative copilot? Visit evchapman.com to learn more about Ev's workflow and approach to using AI as a thinking partner rather than just a writing tool.

Matt Giaro - Voice + AI workflow: Creating more content in less time

Reading time: 5 minutes

RODNEY: All right, so today I have Matt Giaro, a creator who helps overwhelmed experts turn their knowledge into income with simple no-fluff systems. After burning out from e-commerce and recovering from a spinal injury, he built a lean approach to content that powers his daily Substack: *Ideas to Income*. Along the way, he's created over 90 online courses and generated more than a million in course sales all while working in just a few hours a day. So welcome, Matt.

MATT: Thank you much for having me Rodney.

RODNEY: Yeah, yeah. So the question I've been asking everybody is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

MATT: That's a tough question because I usually like to say that it goes back to a few principle or a few strategies that just simply apply very well and really take the time to really mastering these. So yeah, if you have, let's say, any specific thing that you want me to talk about in terms of perhaps in terms of audience acquisition, perhaps it's in terms of monetizing content, perhaps it's in terms of okay. What kind of business model should you choose? It's up to you.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. Well, I mean, there's a lot of really interesting things that you do, and one of the things I was really curious about is because you had the spinal injury, you couldn't work a certain number of hours, so you had to figure out how to get all these things done in the minimum amount of time, even creating daily content, creating courses, all that. So it'd be really interesting to know what are one of the things that you do that allows you to produce so much in a small amount of time?

MATT: Okay, that makes perfect sense. So really the first thing, what I like to tell my clients is, the first thing is you actually want to understand or you want to figure out what things do you enjoy doing? What are you perhaps not necessarily good at, but willing to get good at so that you can stick to it for a long amount of time?

Because this then triggers flow. And when you're in flow, you are more inclined to basically do the work without you having to constantly watch or track your time. So that's basically the first thing. And sometimes this is going to, you'll be able to find out things fast, and sometimes it just takes some time.

Sometimes it just takes a little bit of tiptoeing like, "Hey, is writing my thing? Perhaps it's video, perhaps it's podcasting." And even though, let's say when it comes to writing, there are different forms of writing.

KEY INSIGHT: Finding work that puts you in a flow state is key to high productivity—discover tasks you enjoy enough to stick with long-term and they'll feel less like work.

There is short form, there is long form, there is perhaps writing emails, perhaps. Perhaps it's writing books, like whatever. So this requires a little bit of tiptoeing. So I've been experiencing, and I've done a lot of different businesses in the past, so I right now know, okay, this is the stuff that I like and this is the stuff that I hate, and this then allowed me to kind of focus on exactly what I enjoy, what I'm good at.

And the interesting thing is when you actually enjoy what you're doing, you just don't see the time pass by. The only thing that kind of gets me, it reminded of, "Hey, you should stop working right now." It's basically, as you mentioned, the back pain. So I've been creating content for a long time. Every kind of content or every kind of business that I launched online was kind of based on content.

So e-commerce first was based on content because I was driving traffic to a niche site. I was also doing a lot of freelancing. And again, I had a site that actually where there was content that actually got people from Google onto my website and where I was then selling my services. So I've been doing this for a lot of time.

So right now really, the systems that I use are all based on templates, but I'm not following templates anymore because they are kind of burned into my neurons. So it's just like we're just getting started. Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Just take psychological templates that have been proven to work and then take your ideas, put them into these templates, and if you actually combine templates with your ideas plus AI, you'll be astonished about how much you can get done in just 30 minutes or even just one hour a day.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. I love that idea of using templates because in the beginning it kind of reminds me of the classical methods of learning. They would always give the students some kind of form, whether they were learning logic or how to put together an argument or something.

They'd give them a form, show them excellent examples of it, and then have them try to put their own content into that form. And it kind of makes sense, which is nowadays, modern days, we call that templates, and it makes sense because if you're just learning something, trying to do it from scratch is just, that's a lot to put on a beginner. So I love that idea. And where did you get the templates from? How did you find the templates that were going to help you?

MATT: So basically I'm studying and I'm always on a hunt to actually find ways to create systems. I'm a little bit obsessed about creating systems and creating this kind of template just to make things smoother, especially on the bad days. So usually what I do is I study old school copywriters. I copy their writing by hand, and I'm also always looking at people who are doing things extremely well and just see, okay, what can I take from here and how can I deconstruct that?

And then I just create the old templates that actually makes sense to how I think about this. So just to give you some context, I took a writing course from someone who was quite successful on Medium, and actually they were also templates in that course. I went through the templates. I was just looking at these templates, and even though it was actually working for that specific writer, I just look at the templates and I mean, this just doesn't make sense to me.

KEY INSIGHT: Using templates with AI dramatically increases productivity—study proven formats and combine them with your ideas to create high-quality content in as little as 30 minutes a day.

They work for that specific person, but for me, actually, it didn't work. And I have this kind of aversion where let's say, when I don't enjoy using something or where I just don't see the logic and just don't understand it, I just stop using it. So I really think that templates can help you write things, become good at doing anything faster, but it ultimately how you're going to learn things better is by start, being able to develop that, seeing what's happening in the Matrix kind of thing.

It's like you look at a piece of content and you just try to, like a piece of content, let's say, hooked you, and then you just try to kind of deconstruct it, "Okay, why

did this actually work?" And then you just try to create and develop that pattern recognition so that you see, "Oh, I see exactly what this writer did right here. Oh, I see exactly why this is working." And then you just create kind of your own thing, and that way you kind of merge theory and practice.

RODNEY: Got it. I love that thought of creating your own templates by looking at the people who are the masters, especially since you're studying the old school copywriters, it's like studying old music, the stuff that's still listened to today is the best. People say, "How come they don't make good music like they did 30 years ago, 20 years ago." It's like "They made bad music then too, it's just we don't remember it."

Then the copywriting legends, the reason those things are legendary is because they survived, because they were profitable and they kept being reproduced and copied over and over again.

MATT: If you actually look at how they, I think there's this big misconception writing about, or in creating content at least, it's like, yeah, you need to rely on, or it's all about creativity, right? It's like you being inspired and just coming up with something interesting.

But if you actually look at let's say, content, what it really is, it's basically an idea that you just rub into something, and that's basically it. And the rubbing is something that you can figure out with templates that follow just how we think as humans. And where the creativity really kicks in is in you coming up with the ideas. And I remember we talked about second brains a few years back, and that's really what most people read.

What I think at least many people miss is that they think that the creativity goes into a structure and then they just leave the ideas as an afterthought, whereas it should be completely the other way around. It's like spend some time coming up with interesting ideas, make connections, draw connections between all your different points of interests and things that you've learned, and then just freaking template just to express these ideas. And then, I mean, you could then add an extra idea or creativity of let's say changing this or that sentence, but all within a structure that has been proven to actually work and hook the reader.

RODNEY: Right. I love that because there's something that I've called the playground principle. They did studies where they watch kids on playgrounds, and if the playground has no fence around it, the kids don't use as much of the playground.

But then, when there's a fence around it, they get all the way to the fence, and our creativity works better inside of some kind of box. You're still being creative, but you're saying "No, there has to be a hook, and then there has to be the offer, and there has to be these elements in between."

And when you restrict yourself that way, then you have way more freedom to play. Because the thing that I find is if you give me an unlimited canvas, I'm like, "I don't know what to do with this." And I think you unconsciously do something that's too safe because you weren't given guidelines that you know will really work. So it's just, the chances are if you give me infinite possibilities, the possibilities I choose, there's too much chance that they're not good possibilities.

KEY INSIGHT: Structure actually enhances creativity—working within proven templates gives you creative freedom by eliminating decision fatigue and focusing your energy on generating unique ideas.

MATT: Absolutely. Because you're simply going to go back to your original thinking pattern. And if your original thinking pattern is not, let's say, "the right one", or if you are just not kind of "a good creator", whatever this means to you, then chances are you're not going to come up with something interesting.

And if I tell "Rodney, write me a blog post." "Yeah, about what?", okay, if I give you an idea, okay, so now that I have the idea, but then what should I really write about? Okay, let's just come out with an outline. So we're just adding more and more boundaries so that you can then be creative within these boundaries. And yeah, that's really how creativity works, and I'm happy to you, you brought this up.

RODNEY: Yeah. Well, I think you brought it up actually, but yeah. And is that what you do in your courses? Are you giving people these templates that allow people to then produce results?

MATT: I do. I certainly do because it's just the fastest way to get good results. And one thing that I keep mentioning is AI obviously is getting better day after day, but the easiest way to write good content with AI is to simply give AI a template. So, "Hey, I'm writing about this, follow this template." Even if you did nothing else, then just giving it a template. And even if you didn't give it your writing style, whatever, then you might change the wording, etc.

But it would still come up with something that is readable and better than, "Hey, please write me an article about X, Y and Z." So that's really kind of the cheat code. And I really think that, or I don't think, I firmly believe that you just studying theory will not get you as fast as where you want to go than if you simply start it using templates and then just simply kind of iterating by examples and not just by theory.

RODNEY: Right? Right. Yeah, I think that's really important that the examples is really where you actually finally start learning. And I've seen people teach things where they just give a principle and I'm like, "What's the example? I need to see it in action." And then sometimes it's almost like if you just gave me the example with just a little bit of a breakdown, I would've been fine.

I wouldn't necessarily need the whole lesson where it just says, "Here's the hook.", or "Here's the headline part, and here's what we did here. And here's..." I watched the whole lesson. I've watched Frank Kern break down an email once years and years ago, and it was illuminated, it opened my eyes, just that one piece because I'm like, "Oh, I get what the psychology was now, having looked at an example and someone talking about the example was better than somebody just giving a lecture on it." So yeah.

MATT: You need to grab the reader's attention, and then you start transitioning to, and then you continue with three bullet points. Okay, give me an example that I can mimic, right, where I can just change a few words and I just have something that more or less works, I'm just going to repeat it for the next 30 days. After 30 days, I will be able to write this even without having to think about the theory. Right?

RODNEY: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. So now let's say people want to find out more about you and maybe check out some of your courses and check out some of the things that you're doing. How would they do that?

MATT: So the best way would be not to buy anything, is just simply head over to my website. Opt in. I have a free email course and I have free emails that I send out every day where you can learn more about my philosophy, how I think about things, and then later down the road if you want to purchase something you see that something resonated with you, that would be the best place to start.

RODNEY: Now you're in a few places, so what's the URL that we should go to?

MATT: My website? So it's my name, so I think it's going to be a written format, so yeah, dot com. That's it.

RODNEY: Yeah. So mattgiaro.com. Awesome.

MATT: Exactly.

RODNEY: Very good. So awesome. Well, it was great talking to you, and if there was one thing you had to say as a parting thought, what might you give to people?

MATT: Build a business that you enjoy, that you would do, even though you wouldn't make any money out of it.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM MATT GIARO

On finding your flow format: Experiment to discover which content formats you truly enjoy—it might be short-form writing, long-form articles, emails, or something else entirely. When you find what clicks, you'll work without watching the clock.

On learning from masters: Study people who excel at what you want to do, deconstruct their work, and develop pattern recognition that helps you understand why something works. This practical application teaches you more than theory alone ever could.

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Tom Kueglar - Using AI to improve your writing: The Notesmith advantage

Reading time: 6 minutes

RODNEY: So Tom Kueglar is a writer and digital storyteller who has mastered the art of building engaged online communities. With over seven years of experience in blogging, content creation, and digital marketing, Tom has built a substantial following across multiple platforms, including Medium, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Substack.

At one time, he even had over half a million followers on Facebook. His journey from viral vlogger to Substack writer showcases his deep understanding of audience growth, storytelling, and the evolving creator economy.

Tom has helped thousands of aspiring writers turn their passion into a real career through his straightforward insights on personal branding and writing success. And here's a fun fact. His blog, [Finding Tom](#), is a playful nod to the animated film, Finding Nemo, reflecting his adventurous spirit and love for storytelling. All right, thanks for being here, Tom.

TOM: Yeah, thanks, Rodney. Finding Nemo, my favorite Pixar movie. Actually, it was my favorite Pixar movie for a while, and then Up took its place, but that's a whole other story for a whole other day. So thank you for that great introduction. Appreciate it.

RODNEY: Yeah, thank you. And Up is a great movie too.

TOM: Yeah. You can't beat the love story. It's still a better love story than any love story ever in film history, just in 10 minutes. So pretty incredible stuff. But anyway.

RODNEY: Yeah, that first 10 minutes was like a tearjerker already, and I'm like, "Wow, the movie's barely started."

TOM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's fantastic. It's amazing. I'm still waiting for Up 2, but I don't know if they could. We'll see if that happens.

RODNEY: They're going to make an Up 2?

TOM: I don't know. But you never know with Pixar, we have the eighth Toy Story coming out and we still...

RODNEY: After the third one, I thought they were done and then another one came out.

TOM: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah. All right.

RODNEY: All right. So here's my question. The question I'm asking everyone is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

TOM: Okay. So Rodney, I was really excited to talk to you about this because for me, I just started to get into AI. I started to get into AI about six months ago or seven months ago. I started asking it just basic questions and was just floored by the responses that I was getting.

And I started to start to use it and implement it in my business a little bit more, just asking it business strategy questions, talking about what other people are doing, and how I could strategically counter that or maybe opportunities for me and whatever.

And I had a friend, Michael Simmons, who runs Blockbuster Blueprint on Substack. He told me, he was like, "Tom, I think you're a really good writing coach. I think you have really good advice for people in terms of short form writing, especially on notes on LinkedIn."

KEY INSIGHT: AI tools like Claude can be trained to replicate your specific feedback style, allowing you to scale your expertise and help more people without sacrificing quality.

And he said, "It'd be really cool if you could make a bot that replicates your feedback, that could just give people the feedback that you would've given them if they send in their note to you." So I was like, "Huh, that's a pretty cool idea." And then I did nothing about it for months. So in January, I was like, "Okay, this might be a good time to try this out." And I spent about 50 hours or so trying to figure out how logistically to make this work.

I tried to use a custom GPT and fed it my notes feedback. I copy pasted all the notes feedback I ever gave to somebody text-wise, put it into a ChatGPT, try to

make a custom GPT that would replicate my feedback and rewrite their note in the way that I would rewrite it. And it just didn't work that well because I found that ChatGPT, it wasn't a good writer, it wasn't a good enough writer, it didn't really have that same punch. And so I tried Claude and I found it was just way better. And so I was like, "Okay, I'm going to build this tool with Claude."

And I found this solution called [Pickaxe](#). So I think it's called Pickaxe Project. If you type it into Google, I think it's [pickaxe.co](#) is the actual URL. And what it allows you to do is it allows you to build a bot and you can import your prompt into it and teach it how to respond. And you can import your prompt into it. You can create your own bot, and you can train it on some of the things that maybe you're an expert in.

Some of your basic tenets in your business or some of the beliefs that you have, or your opinions or your workflow or your strategy. If you work with it enough and tweak it enough, it will replicate that and you can give that to your audience for them to work with you, but not really work with you.

And so it's been insane because my biggest problem has actually been not really that the tool doesn't work, because it works very well. My biggest problem has been to convince people to try it because it's that good for me. I think it's that good and a lot of people have gone viral with it, writing, getting feedback on their notes with it.

And so that's actually been my biggest problem. It's such a new concept, or it's such, I think also the writing niche, writers, they typically don't want AI anywhere near their process. And so convincing them in that way has been difficult.

But I've looked at the Pickaxe. Pickaxe has a community forum and I've seen what other people are making, and some people are making like therapists are making a bot that people can talk to that gives them advice or helps maybe run these digital therapy sessions. It's just insane what people are able to use AI with a very detailed prompt to do for their business. And so I look at this as using AI to scale yourself as a educator, as a teacher, as a coach, to help your audience solve a particular problem. So that's basically my answer, Rodney.

RODNEY: Awesome. That's amazing. I think I might've heard about Pickaxe but that's really cool. Because I've been building custom GPTs is what I've been doing. And I was wondering, I was going to actually ask you at some point when I'm ready to try to turn it into a custom chatbot, oh, what did you use? How'd you do it? And so you answered that question.

TOM: Yeah, well, custom GPTs are cool too. I think in terms of writing, it just wasn't quite at the level that I wanted, but that was two months ago. And ChatGPT think has come out with another model since then. So maybe it's a little bit different now. But I do love ChatGPT. I pay for the pro plan. I think it's more than worth its weight in gold. So yeah, custom GPTs can be fantastic too, for sure.

RODNEY: And I was using them for things other than just writing too. So for certain types of analysis and brainstorming, it can be really useful. But yeah, I use Claude for my actual writing when I use it to help with writing because it is better.

Its word choice is just better, it's phrasing. ChatGPT had more cheesier things that it would do, and I would have to try to tell it to not do that like, don't do emojis, or don't do this or don't do that. And then it would stop doing those things, but it was still something, and Claude was just on point. So yeah.

TOM: Well, Claude just came out with a Sonnet 3.7, and my friend told me, he was like, "Tom, I used 3.7 the other day to basically just write up a blog post for me based on a prompt that I already had." I think he fed something into it already, and he was like, "I have never in my life used AI." And just basically just prompted it once and it wrote up something that I was like, "Okay, I would actually consider publishing this." It's to that point now. And so it's just really cool to see how these tools are going.

KEY INSIGHT: Claude outperforms other AI models for writing tasks—it produces more natural, less formulaic text without the need for extensive prompt engineering to remove unwanted elements.

And another thing I was talking to Michael Simmons about was, so for my tool, it's trained on Claude or Sonnet 3.5. So when a new model comes out, it's almost like a free upgrade to your tool because it can think better or it can write better, or you know what I mean? So it'll give better answers.

RODNEY: Mm-hmm.

TOM: So that's another really cool thing about these AI tools is that when a new model comes out, all you have to do is just on Pickaxe, there's a dropdown menu, and you could just choose which model that your bot is trained on, and you could

just pick the new model. So it's like a free upgrade, and that's amazing. It's just a brave new world that we're living in with this AI stuff.

RODNEY: Yeah, it is. And it's remarkable because the thing that you're doing with it by having it learn how to give feedback is basically how AI was trained because AI is trained on all these examples, and it's machine learning, and it's like, "What can you learn from it and what can you generalize from it?" And that's basically what you had to do. You said, "Here's a note, here's the feedback I gave. Here's the improved one." And then it learned, "Okay, this is how Tom thinks." And then eventually you got it to the point where it could replicate a lot of what you could do.

TOM: Yeah. And one final thing too, Rodney, about this that I want people to understand is I worked many hours importing a note, seeing what feedback it gave, and then being like, "Okay, I think this is good, but I don't like this part. I would say this here, or I would've added this." And then just again, with the machine learning, it just kept learning how I gave feedback. And so I spent a lot of time just trial and error, updating the prompt, putting things in, taking things out, that sort of thing.

Getting the prompt right is like gold basically for me. So I just wanted people to know that before they start to create their own tools. You got to really work on the prompt. You could probably do whatever you want to do with a great prompt, and if the outputs aren't what you want them to be, just keep working on the prompt. You'll get it there.

RODNEY: And that's something that's a key element is that whole idea of the back and forth because you are training the system. And another element that it's really good that you brought up is you do need to have expertise. If you're going to train in AI, you need to be able to give it feedback. So if you don't actually know what good looks like, if you don't have taste developed in that domain, then you won't be able to do it. But you need to do it in things that you actually know how to do.

TOM: Yeah. And that's the coolest part about this, because I feel like for people that are experts or teachers or coaches that have a lot of expertise, they're going to hit home runs with AI, I think. I don't want to promise the world here, but I do want to say, I do think for most people that have actual great insights and expertise, they're going to hit a home run with AI.

And for the people that don't really know much or don't really have the experience, let's say, they're not going to be able to use these tools that well to create something, anything worth of value, anything that's really valuable. So it's just going to scale. It's just going to maybe amplify your expertise.

So if you have a little, it's not going to be a lot, but if you do have a lot, it's going to be amplified. And there's not a lot of people that I think really work with AI too, too much, especially in my niche. I just don't see people working with AI too much to create tools like this. So if you're doing that and you're the first to do that, it's a huge opportunity. People are going to love it. The feedback I've gotten on this, Rodney, it's better than anything that I've gotten on any other program I've ever made. People are just wowed by it. They're like, "How did you do this?" They don't know how I did it. It's like, "Well, just use AI. Write a prompt. You could do it." So it's not magic. You could do these things.

KEY INSIGHT: AI tools aren't magic—they work best for people with genuine expertise that can be systematized, as AI amplifies what you already know rather than creating expertise from nothing.

RODNEY: Well, when you say the word magic, I literally have an article that I wrote that I haven't published yet, which is basically how it's like a magic trick. That's how it feels when you can submit a piece of writing and then the AI can instantly tell you, here's the way to improve it. Then you make those improvements and everyone else loves it. That's like a magic trick. The fact that you boom, get that.

Even if I hired you to give me feedback on writing, after I sent it, I might have to wait a couple hours or something to get feedback, but to get instant really good feedback or to improve the writing, oh, push the button and now it's going to tell me how to improve it. And then it says, you want me to make the improvements? Okay. It's literally like a magic trick.

TOM: Yeah. And even if you approximate what you would've said by maybe like 70%, maybe it's like, "Okay, I would've said 70% of these things," or it's just missing maybe 30% of probably what I would've said. That's still hugely valuable. I think even 50%. Even 50%, that's still hugely valuable.

And I tried to work with my prompt until nine out of the 10 things that's suggested, yes, that is a hell yes for me. That's what I would've said. And so, yeah, even if

you don't even have to really get it to change the world or be 100% correct all the time, just get it to say most of the things that you would've said, and you're good. People are going to love it.

RODNEY: Right. That's awesome. That's awesome. So if people want to find out how they can get into your world and also try this tool, where should they go?

TOM: Yeah, just go to the Writing Long Game Substack. The URL is, I think, I'm pretty sure it's thewritinglonggame.substack.com. And yeah, you'll see my navigation bar up top. You'll see a tab that says Grow On Notes in my navigation bar. And you could see the Notesmith there. You could try out the tool. And I talk a little bit about AI there. I have started a new publication called [Scale Yourself With AI](#). I'm going to start writing there soon, but I haven't had the time yet. I will though, I will after I launch this thing in April, and so you can maybe see how I'm using AI via that publication.

RODNEY: Awesome.

TOM: You can follow me there too.

RODNEY: Well, I'll definitely. I've already subscribed to the Writing Long Game, but I'll definitely subscribe to the other one too, because I'm definitely very curious to see how you're doing it, because I think it's definitely the future. It's not slowing down, we got to get on the AI bandwagon.

TOM: Yeah. And it's not like the devil. I think a lot of people think, especially writers, I think they're just really apprehensive to it. But you could use it ethically. You could use it in a way where you write something, get feedback on it, instead of just getting it to auto generate everything. You can work with it in a great way as an assistant.

RODNEY: Right.

TOM: Yeah,

RODNEY: As an assistant, but also as a coach in your way. It's a coach, it's a teacher.

TOM: True.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM TOM KUEGLAR

On prompt engineering: Getting the prompt right is crucial—Tom spent many hours refining his prompts through trial and error, testing outputs and continuously improving the AI's understanding of his feedback style.

On ethical AI use: AI doesn't have to be a replacement for writing—it can be used ethically as an assistant, coach, or feedback tool that helps writers improve rather than generating all content from scratch.

Want to experience AI-powered writing feedback?

Visit thewritinglonggame.substack.com and check out the Notesmith tool in the navigation bar to see how Tom has trained AI to provide his specific style of writing critique and suggestions.

MONETIZE MORE EFFECTIVELY

*Here's where you learn how to turn
content into reliable income*

Chris Stanley - Mini books: The authority shortcut that sells courses

Reading time: 6 minutes

RODNEY: Chris Stanley is an innovative writer and entrepreneur who has mastered the art of mini books to build a thriving business. Eight years ago, he was unknown in his industry, but through his dedication to mini books, he became an eighteen-time Amazon number one best-selling author and built a \$750,000 internet-based business.

Now he teaches others how to do the same in their niche. Fun fact, Chris lives full-time on a sailboat with his wife and three children seamlessly blending work and adventure while proving success isn't tied to a desk.

CHRIS: Oh, man. Thanks for having me, Rodney.

RODNEY: Yeah, yeah. So the question I'm asking everyone is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

CHRIS: Well, you said it in the bio, so it feels a little redundant, but for me, what kickstarted everything eight years ago was writing a book. And at the time I didn't know to call it a mini book, but basically I created a course. Me and you both are fans of courses, and created a course, put it out on the internet. No one else had a course. It was really, to anyone on the outside, a really boring course, how to look at a damaged vehicle, basically was the course, as an insurance adjuster. And nobody bought.

I was on LinkedIn, I had some traction. I even had a podcast, but not a single buy in the first five-ish months of that course's existence. And so eventually what I did was I wrote a mini book and I published it on Amazon, and through that process, suddenly, I was a respected name, I was trusted, and people started buying my course.

And so after that my course started to sell and then the business started to take off. And so I kept leaning into this concept of write something that someone needs help with in a really small package so they get it solved and then go, "What else can you help me with?"

KEY INSIGHT: A mini book establishes your authority faster than a course – it creates trust that leads people to purchase your higher-priced offerings.

RODNEY: Wow, that's fantastic. So you had created the course but weren't able to sell it, and then you create the book and the book ended up making you an authority so that people would then buy the course. That's fantastic.

CHRIS: Well, it's like who are you on the internet other than what people can find out about you? And if there's not much about you, one of the best places people can confirm authority is Amazon, books. I mean, traditionally speaking, I mean for how many thousands of years there's a book about Jesus Christ. So we have a lot of information we wouldn't have ever had, and he's an authority. He's still an impact on our life today. Same with all the other great people in history. If there was no written record, no one really gives a darn.

So that's kind of how I look at it, is it has a type of authority building that sure, social media, YouTube sometimes seems to circumvent or maybe speed up the process, but it still comes back to, what can I find in print about you? And if you've got a book and you can explain a topic like no one else can, and I understand it, "Man, I want to learn more from you, Rodney. I want to learn more from you, Chris. How do I go and now execute further on this same problem?"

RODNEY: And I love that you harken it back to texts that are thousands of years old because this is actually true. I mean, this is literally how Machiavelli got a job. He wrote a book. You write a book, and everyone goes, "Wow, you must really be an authority if you wrote a whole book on the topic." Especially in your field where probably there weren't as many books, maybe I'm assuming.

CHRIS: Almost none. There was one author who had written any books that I know of, and it wasn't still for my niche. When you go to write, traditionally I call them a legacy non-fiction book. Let's say a 30,000, 50,000 word book. You think of Atomic Habits or whatever. That thing's going to stand the test of time. It's huge, it's massive. It's legacy, but it's really long, right?

Well, if you're going to write for independent auto insurance adjusters like I was, you're not going to spend two years on a market you're going to sell 2,000 books on. It just doesn't make sense logically, financially, and it doesn't have the same scrutiny as something like Atomic Habits.

And so when you write a mini book, it's really laser focused on a niche, laser focused on a problem within that niche, and you write it typically pretty fast and it's only 5,000 to 15,000 words. That's kind of my range is what I call mini books is it over 5, is it under 15?

And that's kind of the sweet spot of I got something of substance as a reader, but most non-fiction books we put down after we get through a quarter anyways. Well, let's just cutting out that other two-thirds to three-quarters of the book and saying, "Just give me the meat and potatoes. Forget everything else."

KEY INSIGHT: Mini books (5,000-15,000 words) solve specific problems for niche audiences – they're faster to create and more focused than traditional non-fiction books.

RODNEY: Right, right. Yeah, just get all rid of all the fluff. Just get straight to the point. I love that. Okay, so you can solve a problem for me then here that I've had. I've seen your mini book stuff and I've been intrigued by it, and my only thought was, and since you created the course first, then you created the mini book and then people bought the course. Well, I have a course and I'd like to sell more of them too. So how do you select what goes into the mini book so it's not like the same stuff as in the course?

CHRIS: Well, interesting. I just wrote a chapter, and I think you probably read it on courses just this last week. But what I have found and what I've heard, Russell Brunson great marketing person, really smart, Alex Formosi, he gives you courses on the books he writes, right? These greats do the same thing.

You think of your book as the same as the course, but it's not.

If I write you out instructions, Rodney, "Here's how to get to Walmart." That's one way you can get to Walmart. I remember doing that as an insurance gesture. It was hell using MapQuest, printing it out or getting the instructions from the guy on the phone, "Pass the tractor, take a left." Right? He gave me how to get there.

But then a course is like, "Hey, here's a video of you driving. Go all the way to the stop sign. When you get there, stop. I have a packet for you." Open it up and it tells you, "Now, take a right-hand turn and make sure you stop and get donuts right here because the best in the state."

And so you're guiding them along that same journey you told them about, but now there's a visual aid with it and other resources along the way that make the journey more interesting, more likely to succeed, more engaging. And then you can take it a step further if you went to coaching or a cohort. Now what are you doing? You're in the car with them. So the book is still giving the same instructions, but people are like, "Okay, just show me. Come with me. In fact, I'll hire you to take this journey with me."

And then services, if you sell services or software product that helps people do it, you're now saying, "Let me drive you there. You can take a nap in the backseat and I'll drive you there." It's the same in destination, but it's a different level of assistance in that. So it's the same thing. So I've seen some of your courses and some of your materials.

The only thing I would tweak if I was say, Rodney wants advice, is I would say I would do visual aids, whether they're video or not, resources, templates, things like that that go beyond what you give as a lead magnet in the book. The book is the text version almost of your course. I've used it almost as my script for the video course, but it's totally different. It's a totally different experience telling you about an insurance adjuster résumé in a book versus showing me, changing your insurance adjuster résumé screen recording in Microsoft Word. Totally different experience.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. I love that. And I love the analogies of driving and stuff. "Here's the directions, I'm going to give you these printed instructions." And then, "Okay, maybe here's turn by turn like the GPS." Right? And then, "Hey, I'll take it to the next level. Hey, I'll drive you." So that's really great. I love that. I think that makes a lot of sense to break it down that way.

Oh, there was another question I was going to ask you, and I can't even think of it now, but this is really cool. This is really cool. And I know because I've read through one of your books and you actually talked about there's different styles of mini book. I can't remember the three different outlines. Was it three different outlines?

CHRIS: Yeah, there's three different outlines I tend to stick to. And now what I say is not gospel, other than I just picked some things that I thought worked really good with a short 5,000 to 15,000 word book that I had done.

One was the W's model.

It's what I wrote the first mini book in the series with, it's called Mini Book Model and it was basically the what, why, the where, the who, the when, and then the how of your topic. So in your case, Atomic Courses, right? What is an Atomic Course? That's a chapter title. When is Atomic Course completed? How do you know when to stop creating? How is it too long? Or when is the right time to do an Atomic Course versus a full length course? So you're just filling in the gaps with those W's and the H.

Then the other one is sequential.

So that's more like a roadmap. That's like the turn by turn, right? So like step one, you need to pick your niche. Step two, you're now going to decide on the title of your book. Step three, the subtitle of your book. I'm taking you on a sequential step-by-step roadmap journey.

And then the third one is the 10 Problems and solutions. So in Atomic Courses, in your example of what's the 10 things people complain about? No one buys my course. I don't know what to create a course about. I don't know what to put in the course. I don't know what not to put in the course, whatever. What are those 10 problems slash, you could think of 10 solutions? It's like, here's 10 ways to record your course if you're doing a mini book on how to create a course in a weekend.

KEY INSIGHT: Use proven outlines to streamline your mini book creation – the W's model, sequential roadmap, or the 10 problems/solutions approach.

That's your mini book. Let's say you come up with 10 ways to do that, or 10 steps if you wanted to do the sequential model or the W's, how you can do it and when and where and who to do it for, all that kind of stuff. So you could write the same book and the same thing from your point of view in a few different ways.

And it really changes the flair of the book, depending on which one you pick. But then the whole point is just to force you into a box where it's just fill in the blank. So you're not thinking, because we overthink this like, Rodney needs help writing a book. He doesn't need me to ramble on like I am forever. He needs to know what do I do next? Pick a title. Well, what should my title be? It should be something to do with the problem you're solving.

Well, I talk about small courses. I call them Atomic Courses. Probably the title of your book, man. That was hard but that's the Atomic Courses. Well, subtitle is the explanation, right? You need to be told what to do next so you're not mentally bogged down as a reader or as a course taker, rather than hear the backstory of why Rodney started doing Courses because of what happened when he was 16 for four pages. They don't need that. They need to go, "Hey, Courses changed my life. This is what happened. Now let me show you how to do the same for you." And that's the difference between a mini book versus a legacy non-fiction book.

RODNEY: Right, right. I love that. And I love that you have these three methods because these methods seem like they would streamline it and avoid bloat. So you don't even, the worst thing is writing so much stuff and then having to cut it that you waste all that time writing it.

CHRIS: Not only wasting the time. A lot of times you mentally connect things to each other subconsciously that when you take a chapter out or you take a section out, you suddenly have left the reader feeling disconnected because you didn't even realize you disconnected something.

So I actually go so far in one of my books, the Mini Book Straight Jacket is what it used to be called. Now it's called Mini Book Writing. But mini book writing takes you through the process of, here's actually how you do the outline, how you go through it step by step with three points, three sub points to each point and then here's the writing cadence for each one.

I literally will sit down and write a 1, 3, 1 writing cadence. Me and you both know Ship 30 for 30. I learned it from Nicholas Cole. It's no secret. But I saw that and I was like, this makes me write briefly and be really careful with my words in my mini book. And if you do that, 2, 1, 3, 1s, as I call it, for every sub point of every chapter up to 10 chapters, you have under 15,000 words. I end up at 13,000 words every time.

RODNEY: Got it.

CHRIS: And it just forces you. That's why I called it Straight Jacket, initially. It puts you on a straight jacket and it says, just tell us what's important.

RODNEY: Right. And for everybody, 1, 3, 1 is one sentence, then three sentences, then one sentence, like one sentence paragraph, three sentence paragraph, one sentence...

CHRIS: I call it a three course meal now is you have the appetizer, you have the meat and two sides, and then you have dessert. So it's a hook. It's something to keep you at the table. Now here's the weight of it, three sentences explaining what I just teased you with. And then the dessert is the nice calming bomb like, don't you feel better that you just learn this and save all this trouble, nice closer. And then you do that again, and you just do that for every sub point. And all of a sudden you're like, "I just freaking wrote a book on accident."

RODNEY: Right. It also keeps it from being just a wall of text that looks overwhelming because you're like, "Oh, I get a break every so often."

CHRIS: Well see, internet age, people are skimming and it's that slippery slope for copywriters. They're like, "You need a headline." Then they want to read the next thing, and then they want to read the next thing. And even if they don't like two sentences and they skip down, they're not met with, like you said, a wall of text.

RODNEY: Exactly. And I finally remembered the thing I wanted to say or ask you, your mini books are paid. People have to buy them, right? They're not free on Amazon, right?

CHRIS: Right, right. Now, I've had mini books sell for \$10 each, and then I've had mini books I gave away, and then I have some more traditionally that are like \$3 to \$4, but I use those as my client locators. It's my filter for my coaching on my main business and then same on the mini book side, is it is gathering people who are interested in this topic. If they get all the way through the end of the book, they're probably going to want more.

You're either going to find my premium newsletter, they're going to find out I have or whatever, and then they're going to come to me already filtered because they made it through the Amazon gauntlet. If I got them that far, that is really likely to convert and that's where most of my clients, you mentioned in the opener about business generating all this money. Well, it was only from people who were coming through buying a \$5,000 coaching product, but it started with mini books that they were reading that got them interested and then wanted to talk. And then, great. I'll tell you how I help you.

RODNEY: And I think potentially that a lead magnet people pay for is a better filter than a free one. And because I'll easily download something free and just forget about it. But if get paid, if I paid, I had to make a decision. I feel like I had to actually decide, "You know what? I actually, I'm going to go through this thing."

Especially if it's not a time limited paid offer. It's only a dollar today. I might buy it and just say, I'll eventually get to it.

But I'm probably going to use it today. I'm probably going to read it, especially if it's small. I mean the combination of I had to pay and I don't have to spend forever. When I got one of your books and I was like, "Oh, oh, I got it. Yay. I'm done. That's good. Oh, this is fantastic." I sat in one sitting and I finished it, and it's just like, yeah. If I had to do it for multiple days or weeks or something, there's a potential that I might not have gotten through it. There's somebody who gave me something to review and it's been weeks and I still haven't finished it.

CHRIS: No, I'm the same way.

RODNEY: And honestly, even when I send people stuff to review, if it's long, I always say, "Just this one chapter. Tell me what you think or tell me what you think about this part." Then they'll do it and sometimes they'll do more than what you asked, but at least it gets done. If I say, "Read a whole darn book, read 200 pages." I mean, there's a bunch of them who are going to say, "Dude, I totally forgot. I'm sorry. I didn't get to it. I started one day."

CHRIS: They'll say they read it and didn't really read it all the way.

RODNEY: Exactly, exactly.

CHRIS: Yeah.

RODNEY: Exactly. So it's a lot to ask of somebody, but if you just give them a chapter or a mini book, "A mini book? Yeah, I can go through that."

CHRIS: It's usually an hour, for those who are wondering. It takes about an hour to read through a mini book if you're about 10,000-ish words. It's an hour for a decent, steady reader who doesn't struggle to read.

But even if someone is a slower reader, they're going to get through it in two-ish hours. They can still do it in a setting, and each chapter is unlocking something. You're not withholding something to the very end. They're just taking that journey. They could stop, get out of the car, walk around and get back in the car and keep going in a little bit later.

RODNEY: And it's easier to go back to re-read because sometimes you do want to re-read something again, but if it's really long, it's like, "Am I really going to do that?" Whereas if it only took me an hour, when I read it the second time, I might

only skim through the parts, get to the parts that I was maybe iffy about or something. So that's fantastic. All right, so here's the thing. Chris, when people want to find out more about you, where should they go? What's the next step for them?

CHRIS: Head to minibook.news is the best place to go. That's where the newsletter is at. It has a lot of free stuff on there. Also has the premium stuff. I released a chapter of an upcoming book every week there. So if you're interested in this mini book concept, it goes through the gamut of creating your first book to publishing on Amazon, how to market it, et cetera. So you can find it all at minibook.news.

RODNEY: Awesome, awesome. Thank you. And if there was anything you wanted to say at the end, the last thing that they need to hear from you, what might it be?

CHRIS: If you plan on selling anything on the internet, you should write a book. And I don't think you should write a 30,000 word book unless you just want to. I've done that too. It's hard. But sit down, write out an outline, and then trick yourself into writing that book. Because my guess is once you write the outline, you're going to be shocked at how quick it could happen and then just sit down and start writing it because it's going to help you, it's going to help your followers, your readers, your customers, and it'll help you find more of them.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM CHRIS STANLEY

On writing format: I use a "three-course meal" writing pattern: one-sentence appetizer to hook them, three-sentence main course to deliver substance, and one-sentence dessert to close. This 1-3-1 pattern creates readable content for the skimming internet reader.

On value perception: When someone pays for your mini book rather than downloading a free lead magnet, they're more committed to actually reading it. The combination of "I paid for this" and "I can finish it in one sitting" dramatically increases completion rates.

Looking to turn your expertise into a mini book that sells? Visit minibook.news to learn Chris Stanley's complete system for creating, publishing, and marketing mini books that establish your authority and drive course sales.

Rodney Daut - Text-based courses: The writer's easiest path to profitable programs

Reading time: 7 minutes

In this special interview, my brother Austin, a personal trainer and author of the [Lift Anywhere](#) Substack publication which shows you how to make the world your gym, turns the tables and interviews me about my approach to course creation. As the interviewer instead of the interviewee, Austin brings a fresh perspective with thoughtful questions that helped me articulate some of my most effective strategies.

Why you'll find this interview valuable:

1. **Discover why text-based courses are a perfect fit for writers** - Learn how to leverage your existing writing skills to create valuable courses without the technical complexity of video production.
2. **Understand my proven framework for creating courses that get results** - I break down exactly how to focus on the minimum effective information that leads to transformative outcomes for your students.
3. **See how to reframe "resistance" as valuable feedback** - This mindset shift alone can transform your teaching effectiveness and dramatically improve your course completion rates.

This conversation provides a behind-the-scenes look at how I approach course creation and some of the real-world success stories from my clients. Enjoy!

AUSTIN: What's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

RODNEY: The thing that's working really well, because I'm talking with people who are already writers, is to make text-based courses. Most people, when they say, "Oh, I'm going to make an online course," they say, "Oh, I got to put it on video because that's what everyone's doing." But if you're already a writer or whether you are a writer professionally or whether you're a writer, you already do write content, write a newsletter, write social media content, if you're already doing writing, why not use the writing skills to actually produce the product?

That's the thing that works really well because it's leveraging your existing skills. You don't have to now learn a whole 'nother skillset before you can create your program. You can actually just use the skills you've already got.

KEY INSIGHT: Leverage your existing skills as a writer to create text-based courses instead of feeling pressured to create video content—this allows you to produce valuable products faster without learning entirely new skills.

AUSTIN: Excellent, excellent. Okay. When you come up with your courses, what is the framework that you use to develop it? What are you basing the information on? Are you trying to solve a problem?

RODNEY: Yeah, it's a good question. The mistake that a lot of people make is to say, "Oh, I'm going to teach this topic." They say, "Oh, I'm going to teach a copywriting course," or, "I'm going to teach a headline course." And it's not the worst place to begin, but it's not the best place to begin. The best place to begin is, who am I talking to? Who am I trying to help? And what's their goal? And then what's in the way of it?

So who am I talking to, what is their goal and what's getting in the way of them achieving that goal? You need to answer those three questions first as your foundation before you begin any course, whether it's a text-based course, video case course, cohort course. No matter what type of course it is, you need to know the answers to the questions.

Then once you have that, then you say, "Okay, now what's the promise I'm going to make in this course?" Because whatever their problem is, there's some subset that you're going to be able to handle if you're creating a course. If they say, "My problem is fear of public speaking," are you promising it's going to completely go away, or are you promising it's going to be reduced, or you promising to solve one of the issues?

Like one of the issues I worked with people with fear of public speaking is I'm going to forget what I have to say. Well, you might have a solution just to that one concern, but whatever it is, you want to be able to say, "That's the outcome that we're going to achieve in this course." And then you figure out what's the minimum information to help them achieve that outcome.

So you don't say, "Oh, what are 10,000 things we're going to do?" No. Which a lot of people do, they say, "Oh, I should throw in this, I should throw in that, I should throw in this." And that creates the kitchen sink disease where it's like, let's throw in everything including the kitchen sink. That's overwhelming to the students.

But what you want to do as an expert... And some people say, "But I just want to give them every possible strategy."

And I say, "No. As the expert, as a teacher, your job is to help them to screen all that out for them, and give them only what they need."

It's just like the horse with blinders on. In order to make that horse effective at horse racing, they do they need to see everything? No, they just need to see a narrow field in front of them, and that's what you ought to do... give them that narrow field that will allow them to be successful. And if they want more or need more information later, yeah, they could get that. But most of the time that's not the problem. The problem is they're confused with so many options, so our goal is to narrow it down to the minimum required information.

KEY INSIGHT: Focus on the minimum required information—your job as an expert is to filter out the noise and provide only what students need to achieve their specific outcome, not overwhelm them with every possible strategy.

And then we start building the course. When you say, "Well, I don't have that much information." Guess what? They don't care. All they care about is does it solve the problem? And once you solve the problem, you're going to get fantastic testimonials from people who say, "I solved it."

I also talk about testimonials, two types of testimonials. "I love it" testimonials, and "I changed" testimonials. I love it. It's, "I love your course. It was so entertaining. It was so good." Oh, that's fine, but I lived it. I want it so they lived it. "Oh my God. I got to the end and I did this thing that I couldn't do before." "Oh, I took a course on cartooning and it showed me three different ways to make characters. And man, sure enough, I made them and my kids were impressed and my colleagues were impressed."

That's I lived it, I got the outcome. That's what you want. "I loved it, it was so fun to go through your course," that's cool. That is good to know because people do

want to know that they're not going to be bored and that it's going to be a nice experience. But what they really want is to get that badass experience at the end where they go, "Dude, I'm awesome now. Thank you." That's what we want to deliver.

AUSTIN: Very good. Yeah, I like how you're talking about focusing on the big, important things like the big rocks, and you're trying to smash a bunch where you don't want to focus on little ones. Focus on the big, important things first before you move on to anything else. Yeah, that's really important to have the goal in mind.

You've talked about how you came up with courses, figuring out a why, solving the problem. Making sure that they get the outcomes that they're looking for. What are the main issues that you usually have? One that a lot of people tend to have, that they come to you for help with?

RODNEY: People ask for my help because they want to grow their business and they need something to sell, to grow their business. That's one of the things. The other thing is, or they're teaching and the teaching isn't working. One of my clients, he's a physical therapist. His name is Skulpan Asavasapon, and he was teaching at Loma Linda University, and he was working with all these residents who were in physical therapy, and he had a very specific process.

He works with them, they're called Pain Fellows. They're teaching them how to help patients that have chronic pain. The big thing about chronic pain patients, there's two big things. One is they don't like to do their exercises because they hurt. And the other thing is, is a lot of times they don't believe that that's what they should do to solve it. They think that maybe there's another idea that would work better, but they're still with a physical therapist who's supposed to help give them exercises because that's what works over 90% of the time.

So he came up with a way to persuade them to desire to do exercises, to believe that it's the right thing to do, and to connect with what's really meaningful to them in their life about why they would do these exercises even though they hurt. Then he was getting all these patients following through and getting better, and other people are like, "What's going on?" Well, when he tried to teach this to his Pain Fellows, he thought that they understood. They were like, "Oh, this makes so much sense." And he'd watched them practice and they weren't doing it, and they weren't getting the same results. They were getting patients coming back saying,

"Oh, well, I don't know. I gave up on the exercises," or, "They hurt too much." But in his practice, the patients were following through.

Anyhow, he worked with me and we created a course, an eight-week course that we had his students go through.

And at the end of the course, they said they loved it and they said it was great, and they finally got it. But the main thing was the improvement in their practice. They were getting better results with their patients. Then he piloted that with Kaiser Permanente and Kaiser Permanente, they're a large health maintenance organization, so they're measuring the outcome.

And I didn't realize this at first was going to happen, but I guess they're constantly measuring, so it doesn't matter whether they're running a pilot or not. And they get these scores called MAP scores, and the MAP scores came out and they said this is the first time they've seen anything that improved the MAP scores.

AUSTIN: Oh, wow.

RODNEY: Yeah, the patient outcomes were actually improving, compared to physical therapists that didn't go through the program. I was like, "Wow, now we're really cooking." And so that's the other thing. If your program isn't delivering the results you want, I help people improve that. Or they just don't have a program, they need to build a program from scratch so they can make the extra income while making a big contribution to people that they serve.

AUSTIN: Oh, very nice. Yeah, it's a really hard thing when you're supposed to be coaching somebody and they're having a hard time being coachable. So being able to teach coachability is a very difficult task, whether you're doing physical therapy, general personal training, working with kids in sports and stuff, having someone coachable really makes a difference. And being able to make sure that they know the importance of that and that it helps them, that's a really, really powerful thing. That's really good that he's able to do that.

RODNEY: Yeah. Well, and the thing is, is he's making them coachable, which is really cool, by making his patients coachable and then teaching that skill. Because the actual skill of coaching, a lot of people think, "oh, you're giving people advice." And it's not that. It's how you ask questions and how you listen, but you also have a framework that's guiding the person from point A to point B. And the person doesn't realize there's a framework there, but there needs to be.

If you just say, "My goal is to convince someone to do something," that doesn't work. You really need a process by which you help the person make these different realizations that would help them make a decision at the end and say, "You know what? I'm going to experiment..." His patients actually would ask him for exercises by the end that he's talking to them. They would say like, "Oh, so what exercises should I do?" Because the process he took them through made them realize that if they changed how they move, they could strengthen these different muscles. They could stop exacerbating the problem. And then they're naturally like, "Well, how do I get better at that?" And he's like, "Oh, well, I can show you."

And remember, he's a physical therapist. They don't have hours to talk to these people. They have a certain set of session times, so being able to do that in a short period of time and be persuasive, but without being pushy or anything, that people are actually asking you for the help that you're providing.

Instead of, the most common thing that they would talk about is people resisting. And of course, in my mind people aren't resisting anyway. People are doing what makes sense to them. And so if you're offering something that doesn't make sense to them, that might look like resistance, but really what it is, is someone saying, "This does not make sense to me, what you're offering."

KEY INSIGHT: Reframe student "resistance" as feedback—when students appear resistant, they're actually giving you valuable information about what's not making sense to them or what beliefs need to be addressed before they can progress.

This is the same thing with students. When you're building a course, you're creating a course. To me, all the students' reactions is feedback. None of it is resistance. It's all feedback. That tells me something about what I presented or what exercises I created, something's not clear. Something doesn't take into account the mindset they already started with. And if you take that point of view as a teacher, you'll never have resistant students. They're not resisting, they're giving you feedback. They're letting you know.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Gotcha.

RODNEY: Because remember, these people paid to be there, so they want to get something, right? But if it looks like resistance, it's most likely they just don't

understand something or they have a different belief, and you need to then address that belief in a respectful way so that they go, "Oh, I get it now." And sometimes you help them decide to at least experiment with something different. It doesn't mean that they're a hundred percent doing something. But they might say, "You know what? I'm going to at least try this way." And hopefully your marketing will have brought them to that point too. But that's a whole 'nother discussion.

AUSTIN: Very good. Very good. Yeah, it's again, that coachability thing. And I haven't really thought about it from that perspective before, that even a negative reaction is really just feedback for like, okay, maybe I can go about this a little bit differently. I can demonstrate this in a different way. Maybe the way I'm demonstrating isn't presenting my expertise in this subject, maybe I need to rework how I would describe this. Very good. Very good. Okay. So if people want to find out more about what you do, where should they go?

RODNEY: The best place to go is you can go to my Substack. You can go to coursebuilderscorner.com and you'll see a landing page there. But if you don't want to subscribe right away, of course, hopefully you do, there's a link that'll say, "Hey, you want to read the other articles?" You can just go read them. Or it's rodneydaut.substack.com, and you'll just be able to read everything that I publish there. And if you like what you see, go ahead and subscribe.

And then I have a course called The Atomic Course Blueprint, which you'll also find on that site as well, and other programs. And I publish a newsletter every single week, so if you do subscribe, you'll get a newsletter every week from me. I've been told really good things about it, but you don't have to take my word for it, just look at the hearts that people, when they click like...

One of the things I love about Substack is people can click like if they want to, and so you can see what my most popular articles are just by looking at all the likes. And there's even a little section that says Top Articles and you can see it's all organized by how popular those articles were, and you can see the best ones. I've been happy to see that my last four have been the ones with the most likes. So come see what everyone else is all excited about there.

AUSTIN: All right, sounds good. It was great talking with you.

RODNEY: Yeah, thank you. Thanks Austin.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM RODNEY DAUT

On effective testimonials: There are two types of testimonials—"I love it" testimonials that focus on the experience and "I changed" testimonials that focus on the outcome. While both have value, the most powerful testimonials demonstrate how students applied what they learned and achieved real results.

On course frameworks: The best approach doesn't start with a topic but with three key questions: who am I talking to, what is their goal, and what's getting in the way? This foundation ensures your course solves a specific problem rather than just covering a subject.

Looking to create profitable text-based courses that leverage your writing skills? Visit coursebuilderscorner.com or rodneydaut.substack.com to learn how I help writers turn their expertise into outcomes-focused programs that your clients love.

Jari Roomer - Mini courses: The focused solution that sells faster

Reading time: 5 minutes

RODNEY: Today we have Jari Roomer, a productivity expert who transformed from a chronic procrastinator to an Iron Man finisher. With over seven years of experience in online writing, Jari has authored more than 300 articles, attracting millions of views and tens of thousands of followers." Welcome, Jari.

JARI: Thank you for that introduction.

RODNEY: Glad to do it. All right, the question I'm asking everyone is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

JARI: For me, it's always been mini courses. That's how I built my entire productivity business. I used writing as a way to build my audience, writing as a way to attract an audience, get them in my ecosystem. But really, when it comes to monetizing, I've always been a big fan of digital products in the first place because I want to create something once that can then generate income for months or years into the future without my active involvement.

And in the beginning, I actually built this ultimate productivity course. It was a 10-hour course. And I thought, this is going to be amazing. My audience is going to love this. Let's price it at \$300. And put a lot of time and effort into it. And then when I launched it, it didn't do as well as I expected. It still generated good revenue, but I was like, "Hey, this is not the game changer I thought it was going to be."

Instead what I did, I looked at all the individual modules of that ultimate course, and I broke that down and turned it into its own mini course. For example, the module on procrastination became a mini course, the module on focus and the flow state became a mini course, the module on building habits, that became its own mini course.

KEY INSIGHT: Mini courses targeting specific problems sell better than comprehensive courses because people want fast solutions to their most pressing challenges.

And all of a sudden, those mini courses were really selling very easily. And that's when I discovered, hey, people are no longer interested in those ultimate courses of 10, 20 hours; they want to solve a very specific problem that they are facing. Solve that in one or two hours of video lessons, get results from it, and then buy the next mini course or upgrade to your coaching.

And I was like, "Hey, this really transforms my business." Instead of doing these big flagship courses, I decided, hey, let's only go for mini courses. And that's how I generated multiple six figures in the productivity space. And now I'm actually helping other online writers specifically build their own mini course.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. That's incredible. You had a big course, and it didn't do as well as you wanted. And instead of giving up on that, you broke it into smaller pieces and sold the pieces, and that did even better.

JARI: Exactly.

RODNEY: Yeah, that's fantastic. And for you, a mini course, what defines it? What makes it small enough to call it mini?

JARI: Yeah, that's a great question. I would say a mini course should tackle one clear problem. If we look at productivity, productivity is too broad of a category. Do I struggle with procrastination or with time management or with productivity apps? Pick one of those problems. In my case, for example, procrastination was actually the problem my audience was struggling with. They do make to-do lists, they set goals for themselves, they have big plans. That's not really the issue. The issue is they don't follow through with it; procrastination.

Picking one very clear problem that your audience experiences and it's really a painful, pressing problem to them, tackle that. And try to tackle that in one to three hours max of video lessons. A course that someone can buy today, follow it the same day and get results from it the same day, that's what I define as a mini course. Specifically, what's one problem I can help my audience solve?

RODNEY: Got it. In one day, they will be able to immediately start applying the information that you've taught them.

JARI: Exactly. Yes, yes.

RODNEY: I love that because people want quick results, and they don't want to have to spend a few weeks consuming the information before they can finally be ready to take action.

JARI: Yes. And what you'll find is that, especially as you're passionate yourself about a topic, you will want to teach everything you know. You're excited about it; let me teach everything. The main problem then is someone who's on the other side, the student, the customer is overwhelmed. It's information overload. Okay, this course will take me 10 hours to go through. I don't have that time right now. Let me not start at all. I'm too busy with other stuff.

But if it's like, okay, here's one problem. I can follow this course in two hours. I can do that in let's say one afternoon or maybe two or three days. And if you get quick wins from it, now it's like, hey, actually, this works. Let me try this out more. Let me buy more courses that you have because I'm getting quick wins rather than information overload. I found that it was a bit of a paradox because I always thought more is better, but it's not true. Actually, less is more, but make sure that it's effective, that someone's problems are being solved in your course.

KEY INSIGHT: Less is more in course creation—information overload paralyzes customers, while focused solutions create quick wins that build trust and lead to additional purchases.

RODNEY: Right, right. I love that because it's like a laser beam versus a flashlight.

JARI: Yes, exactly. Yeah, yeah.

RODNEY: And that laser beam, it really drills into the place that it's going, and the flashlight, it covers a lot of area, but it's not covered that brightly.

JARI: I like that. Yep.

RODNEY: I love that. Yeah. Fantastic. Yeah. And how did you discover the problem? Because that's the thing that I think is a big thing for everyone is how do I find the problem that people are really going to want to solve? How did you learn that?

JARI: Yeah, I would say it's a combination of two factors. One is I do like to look at my own life. What have I experienced as a painful problem or challenge myself? And how did I overcome it? I was a chronic procrastinator myself. I could really resonate with my audience. I had a lot of goals, dreams, but I wouldn't follow through with them. Through self-study, learning about neuroscience, psychology, I was able to overcome that problem myself already.

I think that scratching your own itch is a great starting point for a course idea, but then you still haven't validated it with your audience. Do other people experience the same problem or challenge? What I like to do is I like to, first of all, analyze my data. I was writing a lot on medium for years, and consistently my articles and procrastination would get more engagement. That's a first sign. That means people are more interested in learning about that topic.

Every time I would send an email to my email list about procrastination, I would get more questions from people. "Hey, how can I best tackle this? How can I best overcome procrastination?" That's another data point. And I would always send out a survey. In an automated email sequence, I would've a very simple survey. It wasn't even a survey, it was like an open-ended question. It was like, what is your number one goal with getting things done? And what is your number one struggle, your number one challenge with consistently getting things done?

And now my audience would, over the course of a few weeks, months, would just give me that data. They would say, "Okay, my goal is to write a book, but I'm never starting." Or, "My goal is to build a business, but I'm never following through." And basically, my audience really had a bunch of different goals, like I said, building a business, writing a book, anything like getting their PhD, but the issue, the challenge, the pain point was overwhelmingly procrastination. That's when I knew, hey, this is a great idea for a course.

RODNEY: Got it. I love that because people sometimes think, oh, the idea just comes out of nowhere just from their passion. And you're balancing the passion with a need, right?

JARI: Mm-hmm.

RODNEY: Because it's something you did. And of course you care about it because you solved your own problem. And when we solve our own problem, we love to have everyone else try the same thing that worked for us. But then you have all these other data points that are letting you know, no, this is real. This is really there.

JARI: Yeah. Yeah.

RODNEY: Awesome. Fantastic. I love that. I love the importance of validating. Okay, very cool. If people want to get into your world and find out more about what you do, where should they go? How should they get in touch with you?

JARI: I would say on Substack, the [Write, Build, Scale](#) Substack publication. I run that together with Sinem Günel and Philip Hofmacher. And there we have everything specifically for online writers who want to grow their audience, but also then really build a business, like a writing business; create digital products, create mini courses like I just talked about. Everything is there on our publication, so I would say the **Write, Build, Scale** publication on Substack, that's the place to look if you want to learn more.

RODNEY: Got it. And do you still run your community on productivity? Because I think people would be really interested in that too.

JARI: I still own that business. It's called [Peak Productivity](#). I have completely automated it. If someone joins the email list for the next three years, they'll get emails completely on autopilot, including sales emails. It's completely hands off, that business. Yes. It still exists, it's still there, it's just I'm no longer actively involved with it.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM JARI ROOMER

On validating course ideas: Find problems you've personally solved, then validate with audience data—look for articles that get more engagement, questions that keep coming up in emails, and survey responses that reveal consistent pain points.

On business automation: Even when you move on to new projects, you can fully automate successful businesses—Jari's productivity business runs on autopilot with three years of pre-written emails, including sales sequences that continue to generate revenue.

Want to create focused mini courses that sell? Check out the [Write, Build, Scale](#) publication on Substack, where Jari and his colleagues teach online writers how to turn their expertise into profitable digital products that solve specific problems.

Karen Cherry - High-quality, high-effort content: The subscription model that works

Reading time: 6 minutes

RODNEY: We have here Karen Cherry, who is a Substack expert who has transformed her passion for writing into a thriving newsletter business.

With over three years of experience on the platform, Karen has grown her publications from zero to tens of thousands of dollars in reliable recurring revenue.

She's the author of [*How to Make Money with Substack: Unlock the Power of Subscription Newsletters*](#), a guide that has empowered many creators to monetize their content effectively.

Beyond her digital endeavors, Karen enjoys relaxing near the beaches of Australia, savoring a cold drink with sand between her toes. Welcome, Karen.

KAREN: Hi, Rodney. Thank you for having me here.

RODNEY: Yeah, yeah, so glad to have you. So what is one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

KAREN: Look in the Substack space, a lot of people are doing pretty well with the Notes right now, and that's something that's really, really tough to do if you're a new person on Substack.

I want to talk less about what I'm doing as a Substack expert, because frankly, it's quite easy to build an audience and get followers and get revenue when you're talking about Substack on Substack.

I want to talk more about what I'm doing in my paid publication. So the reason that I'm a Substack expert is because I started a publication in food safety, which is my career professional expertise three and a half years ago, and it's now at a recurring annual revenue of just over, I think we've just cracked \$23,000 a year.

So I wanted to share what I was doing in that space and share the learnings that I was getting from a real expert who's not just writing about writing.

RODNEY: I love that. So that way it's not... Whenever you're on any platform-

KAREN: Yeah, because everyone's hearing all the hacks and the growth thing and whatever, and those of us who are Substack experts, it's easy to get growth that way because all of our readers are on the platform and are really interested and engaged in Substack.

So in my pay publication, it's for food professionals, and my crowd is not hanging out on Substack. They don't even know what Substack is. So I don't use Notes for that crowd. What is working well for me and has worked well for me for the past two and a half years since I've been monetized is... People are going to hate this... is sending out really high quality, high effort content every week.

KEY INSIGHT: High-quality, high-effort content consistently delivered to a professional audience builds reliable recurring revenue, even without platform-specific growth tactics.

When you ask people for a paid subscription, there are two ways that they're going to pay. There's a big chunk of people, at least 40%, who will just never pay for paid subscriptions. That's just their personal policy.

There's another chunk who are going to pay for something that they really want. So in an investment Substack, people will pay if they really want a report on a particular company so that they can invest in the stocks or on a gardening Substack they will really pay for a specific handbook of how to do a certain type of gardening. There're a portion of those people who will do that.

And then there's another portion of people who will recognize that the work that you're doing is a lot of effort and is very unique and they want to support you as a writer.

And what was a massive game changer for me was realizing that if I can appeal to both of those types of readers into strands, I can get my conversion rate way up.

So when I first went paid, I had a conversion rate of 2% and conversion rate, I mean, out of all of my subscribers, the percentage who would pay. And 2% is okay. I was part of a special Substack initiated thing called Grow Intensive where they actually took creators like me, and put us through this course together, which was really cool. That was two years ago. And 2%'s where I plateaued.

So I launched paid, my absolute super fans all went, yeah, yeah, we want to pay Karen because we can see that she's doing really hard work for us and we want to reward that.

They all paid, they got me to 2%, and then it just plateaued and I wasn't converting anyone else. When I realized that, especially in a work Substack that is for work, people want to be able to show their boss and the tax man the benefits, the actual physical benefits that they're getting from their subscription as well.

So now when I talk about upgrading to a paid subscription, some of the time I say, if you upgrade to paid, you get these special reports that no one else gets. And some of the time I say when you upgrade to paid, you recognize the huge amount of work that I put into this newsletter every week.

And the way that I make it look like a lot of work is I do have a lot of words with a lot of headings and subheadings, and I use a lot of charts and people associate the charts.

I mean, they're helpful as well, but people associate the charts with an extra value-added special something or other. So that's my strategy.

It's not a great hack by any means. It's really hard work, but I've now got this really, it's not a great hourly rate of money that I get from my Substack compared to the consulting work that I do, but it's very, very reliable. It's very repeatable.

I've got a 92% retention rate on my paid subscribers, and so every single week I know I'm going to get a certain amount of money, and all I've got to do is just sit down and write some articles. And learn with my audience, share a bit of my personality and a lot of my expertise, and it's working great, and it's growing about \$1,000 a month. It's growing, which is awesome.

RODNEY: Wow. Wow. That's awesome. All right, so here's the question I have then is what constitutes a high-effort article? And you mentioned headings and you mentioned charts, but what else is there?

KAREN: Look, it's going to be different for everyone. So it's possible to have a really short post or a format with really short posts that people still think it's really valuable.

I'm hesitant to say that what I do is what everyone should do because I don't think that it is. But I know my audience quite well. I've been working with that type

of person for 10 years, and they recognize if something is very well researched, they recognize that I am very focused in the way that I talk to things, which you've probably seen when I write as Karen Cherry in PubStack Success.

I get straight to the point. I don't do any fluffing and waffling. They like that. And I do a lot of research and I use a lot of sources. And because it's a food-science audience, they really appreciate that.

KEY INSIGHT: Visible effort signals value to readers—headings, subheadings, charts, and well-researched content demonstrate that you've put substantial work into creating something worth paying for.

And there's a lot of things for people to look at every week. And I use a lot of headings and subheadings so that people... I don't expect people to read the whole thing every week. What I want them to do is dip in and out of the articles in each post that are interesting to them.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. And that idea of the high-effort content reminds me of another Substacker who I interviewed Michael Simmons, and he talks about creating really great pieces of content that can stand the test of time, and his are long.

He used to put in 30 hours to produce a single article. I don't know if he still does that anymore, but it would be massive. And yeah, people pay for that because they know, obviously there's no way he can afford to do that if they don't pay. Wow. And that's amazing.

KAREN: Yeah, it's a really good strategy because people are so used to saying pretty crappy stuff on the internet that when they find something that looks really high effort and high value, they are willing to get their wallets out much more so than five years ago, which is great.

So Michael's obviously doing the same thing as me. I spend about 12 to 16 hours on each week's issue.

RODNEY: Wow. And do you let them know how many hours it takes?

KAREN: No, I do occasionally. These are professional readers, so I don't play the pity card too often. But I do occasionally say, "Look, if you appreciate the effort that I put in, you can sign up for a month's subscription to say thank you."

And very occasionally I'll say, "Look, my hourly return on this work is not as good as it could be," but rarely.

RODNEY: Got it. Well, the reason I say that is another person I spoke to, she works in buyer psychology and she talks about something called the labor illusion. And she says, if people know how much effort has been put into something, they value it more.

So then she will actually say how many hours something took so that people value it. And then if something only took five minutes, you don't want to tell them because they're going to think it's less valuable, even if it's really not less valuable. So very interesting.

KAREN: Yeah. One of my calls to action that I use is, I'll say something like, "I scan thousands of articles on the internet every week to find you the very best." So that's an implied hourly investment, and I actually use a virtual assistant who I pay to do some of the information that's coming into the inboxes to organize that.

But yeah, I don't say the hours, but yeah, I do often say, "I've looked at thousands and thousands of these articles and I found the very best ones for you," and people value that for sure.

RODNEY: Wow. And now that makes me add another point of value. You have a virtual assistant, that means you had to pay that person as well.

KAREN: Yes. So I'm very lucky in Australia that we're in a similar time zone to the Philippines. And within the Philippines there are a cohort of people who are well-educated and speak English very well, but who have a low cost of living. So I pay her about three times what she would earn in the Philippines, but for me, compared to my colleagues in Australia, she's quite cheap for me to use.

RODNEY: Right. Yeah, I do the same virtual assistance and paying them well, because then of course you get to keep them for a really long time because that's a really great income for them to have. So that's awesome. That's fantastic.

Oh, I loved hearing about that. So let me ask you this, because 12 to 16 hours, I've never spent that much time on an article. I don't even know how I would do it. Can you just run down a little bit of what your process is for selecting a topic and then how you figure out how to make that into an article?

KAREN: Yeah. Look, again, this is very specific to the food safety things that I do, so it's not going to be that helpful to everyone, but I have a set format where I have three articles within each weekly post.

Again, so people can dip in and out of their topics that are interesting to them because not everyone is interested in poultry if you're in the food industry. And sometimes I will write specifically about food safety hazards in poultry.

I, typically, I'll use... I subscribe to heaps and heaps and heaps of different other newsletters and industry magazines. And so I'll get my virtual assistant to collect all the incoming stuff to the inbox into a single report that I can read all in one go. And I'll look through and see what's interesting to me.

And I use LinkedIn as well to find things that are interesting to me that are happening in the industry.

And every now and then I'll just dip into my own expertise banks. In my PubStack Success publication, I've got 106 drafts on the go where if I get an idea for something, I'll just quickly make a draft post with maybe one sentence in it, just saying, this is what I want to talk about. Here's the draft headline. And then that idea is always just sitting there ready to go anytime I want to.

And sometimes I sit down on the day that I'm doing the newsletter and I have no idea what's going to come out.

KEY INSIGHT: Create a sustainable system for high-effort content—use virtual assistants, maintain an idea bank, and develop a consistent format that makes production manageable.

RODNEY: But I love that, having those partial drafts because then as you're collecting all this, all of that information has a place to go. It's a seed, it's part of what feeds that article into something. It's like the sunlight and the water that's going to grow it. I love that. Wow, and 100 though is a lot. I just got to eight in the queue for myself, and I thought I was pretty proud of that.

KAREN: Well, they are only one sentence each, but it means I'm never sitting down to a blank page. There's always something, some kernel of an idea that I can build on, something that my audience really loves.

And again, this is probably more of a food-industry specific thing, but if I am collecting ideas on one topic for a while, I might then see a new current issue that springs up that's on that topic, and then I can tie the whole story in and go, "Oh, and just this week, this thing happened in Canada." And then tie that back into the whole story. And that just works like a prompt for me to keep things fresh and current.

RODNEY: Awesome. I love that peek into your writing system because that makes a lot of sense. Now, it helped me understand a lot how you can be so productive with... I don't know if you know how much you know about Taylor Swift's writing process, but it's a little bit of what Taylor Swift does. She keeps all these ideas, she keeps it on notes apps on her phone, and she keeps collecting stuff and eventually has enough for a song.

And you're doing that for writing. You're going to have, if you have 100 different ideas, even if they're just one sentence, that's going to start the process of noticing when something fits that.

And it's like Richard Feynman as well, he did the same thing. He would have a list of questions and every time he learned something, he would bounce it off those questions. And then people would say, "How'd you come up with something so brilliant?"

And he says, "I already had that question written down and this happened, that happened, and I noticed it related." And so you're in good company creative-wise.

KAREN: Yeah, I guess with my PubStack Success audience as well, if I sit down to write about a topic, like recently I read about tags, I will just brainstorm what is every... And I'll go and look in other comments and chats and Google searches and things, and I'll just brainstorm what is every question that people would want the answer to. I do that with my other newsletter as well, and I make subheadings of them.

Sometimes I take the headings away, but I basically set out to answer every single question that I've come up with, and make sure that I've covered all the questions so that people can leave the article knowing everything. That sort of content is really, really good for SEO as well.

RODNEY: Oh. And so you end up getting visitors from Google then, which also then could end up becoming subscribers. Awesome.

KAREN: Yeah, so my free publication, my PubStack Success publication about Substack, that does really well with Google.

RODNEY: Awesome. That's fantastic. All right, so you shared a lot of great stuff here today, and if people want to find out more about you and what you do, you mentioned PubStack Success, is that the best place for them to go?

KAREN: Yeah, unless they happen to be a food safety manager, which they probably aren't. Yeah, come and find me a PubStack Success. I write under the name Karen Cherry, and you can send me a direct message request on there. And I do read all those requests.

And if you subscribe, you'll get a welcome email and I encourage you to answer that welcome email with your questions. I do one-to-one coaching as well, where I help new creators and intermediate creators get their strategies aligned with what they're trying to do.

RODNEY: Oh, and that's really good because one of the very best ways to learn is one-on-one from someone who's an expert or someone who's much further along than you are. So I definitely encourage people to do that because if you really want to succeed on Substack, succeed with someone who's already succeeded at multiple publications on Substack.

Awesome. Thank you so much. Is there anything you want to share before we go? One last thing, or anything?

KAREN: No, that's it. I think if you show up to try to make your audience lives better in some way, I think that's the key. PubStack Success, I'm trying to make people's Substack journey easier. In my food thing, I'm trying to save my readers time so they don't have to look at all the crap in their inboxes and stay on top of what's happening.

And I think if you sit down with that, keep that promise top of mind, so it helps you make all the different decisions. What will I write about? How will I write about it? What will I say? How will I push this out to LinkedIn? Just be there to help your readers, and you can't go wrong.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM KAREN CHERRY

On audience understanding: Know your audience deeply before deciding on your content approach. Professional readers appreciate focused, no-fluff writing that respects their time while delivering comprehensive information.

On solving reader problems: Make it your mission to answer every question your audience might have on a topic—this delivers immense value, improves SEO, and positions you as the definitive resource in your niche.

Want to create a profitable, sustainable newsletter business? Find Karen Cherry on [PubStack Success](#), where she shares strategies that have helped her build a \$23,000/year food safety publication with a 92% subscriber retention rate.

Landon Poburan - Building a 1-on-1 coaching business through minimal marketing

Reading time: 6 minutes

RODNEY: Today we have Landon Poburan, a marketing strategist and writer who helps coaches and creators grow through minimalist marketing. With over 18 years of experience in digital marketing, Landon has managed \$12 million in ad spend, built five online programs and helps scale multiple seven-figure businesses. Despite his disciplined routines, like sixty-minute daily workouts, he swears by his morning \$6 coffee and nightly Netflix wind down. Welcome, Landon.

LANDON: Oh, I'm so happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

RODNEY: Yeah, yeah. So the question I'm asking everybody is, what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

LANDON: Awesome. So love the question, and I love just being succinct. It's like, let's deliver the goods. So what I wanted to share was effectively my system, which I refer to as subliminal selling. I'm all about simplicity, minimalism, how can we effectively get the job done without complicating things? And I think this is especially great for people that are coming up in the space, looking to monetize their businesses, because there's so much information out there.

So subliminal selling is kind of something I embody when it comes to creating and selling digital courses, looking to get booked calls for high ticket coaching programs and planting the seeds to craft new offers. So effectively what I started to see was this question around people saying they want to monetize. They're looking to build an audience, they have an audience they want to monetize, but they just don't know what to sell.

And what I started to find is a lot of people, as they would get started, even if they didn't have anything and they started to get started, they would look at, "Okay, what can I sell?" And we need to flip that and look at, "What do people want." We need to flip it from us to them, and we need to start changing the language to, "What solutions can I provide to solve problems?"

And I like to think of this system as, and to summarize it in one sentence, it is, "Ask them what they want, create the solution and sell it to them." I don't think we need to over complicate this process, especially when we're looking to create a product and that's what this system does. So the very first thing that I like to do when I'm looking at this process is I will always want to validate things first.

KEY INSIGHT: Subliminal selling flips the usual approach—instead of deciding what to sell, find out what problems your audience wants solved, then create and sell those specific solutions.

I don't want to put effort in if I don't need to. I don't want to try and spend months creating some big fancy product to go and try and sell it and have it just kind of fall on deaf ears. So I'm always looking at effectively, qualitative and quantitative data. So we're coaches, we're creators, we're in this space, we're marketers.

So every like, comment, DM, repost, every single thing that we have is just planting the seeds to validate what our next product or offer could be. But what my favorite is, is things that happen through conversations, and what my mentor Travis Motley taught me was this invisible survey. So what I like to take is I use this invisible survey and I literally go out into my audience and I ask them the question, they tell me exactly what to create for my next product. And it is, that's why I kind of refer to it as subliminal selling.

People are just literally always giving me the information of what they want to pay for. So I can go to my audience, I survey them and not in the traditional like, "Hey, pick what product you want." It's always in this kind of value first mentality, which is just fueling the data that I'm getting.

And so I might go out and be like, "Hey, I've got my video editor flying in next week. We're going to be creating all of our content for May. I've got so much in my heart that I want to share. Please tell me which of these four topics you would most benefit from right now." And I would list out four topics, four or five topics allowed the people inside of my community to vote what they're looking for. Then I'm going to take that and that is literally the seed for the product that I'm going to create.

And I'm getting those topics from all of this quantitative and qualitative data that I'm being provided every single day through, if I see, all of a sudden the trends

on certain pieces of content are just hitting. And I go, "Okay, obviously the market is telling you that there's something here."

Whether it's a topic, whether it's a specific problem that they're trying to solve or the questions that are coming in through the comments, questions that are coming in through the DMs. And just getting curious. Curiosity is such a valuable trait when it comes to marketing. Just get curious, ask people questions. They're going to tell you what they want, they're going to tell you what problems they're trying to solve, and that fuels what we create inside of our business. So we can always have validated things that we're taking to market.

RODNEY: Awesome.

LANDON: So we take that. Do you want me just to keep rolling?

RODNEY: Yeah, yeah, keep rolling. Yeah, you're doing good.

LANDON: Sounds good. Sounds good. So effectively once we have that, we have the seed for what we're going to do. So this can literally be the simplest, minimal viable product that we're looking to kind of create for a course is, we could do a live and convert that into a product. Just like I find so many people were over complicating this process.

I can say, "Hey, I have this idea. I'm going to create this as a product." I could pre-sell it like I'm putting on this training and I'm going to do it live. Sometimes this force of, "I'm doing it live, I'm going to pre-sell it," it forces us to take quicker action, but we can string it out. We could go, "I'm going to go back to the Batcave and I'm going to create this product based on this feedback." But what I find works a lot and really well for people is doing it as a live training.

And then we can either take that live training and then turn it into a product, we can take that live training, make some tweaks and kind of like re-record it as a live training or we can use that training and the questions that kind came in, our feedback from how it went to what we might want to tweak and turn it into something that might be a little bit more in depth on the back end. And that simple process can become our first product.

KEY INSIGHT: Live trainings are powerful forcing functions for creation—announce a live session, pre-sell it, and the deadline forces you to deliver, while audience questions refine your product.

RODNEY: Awesome.

LANDON: And then from there, it's just a matter of distributing it out to the world. But this very simple product of like, validate the concept based on the feedback that we're getting. Ask people the questions, create the solution, and then now we have that solution to be able to go back and sell to them.

RODNEY: Got it. And I love when you said it forces us to take quicker action to do it this way, because that whole idea of a forcing function, because if you set a date and say, I'm going to deliver these live things, you're going to get yourself ready.

LANDON: Yep.

RODNEY: And make that happen.

LANDON: Exactly.

RODNEY: Whereas when you said, "Go into the bat cave and work privately," yeah, you might get disrupted by one thing or another, but I literally had an experience where I had a mentor who's like, "You really need to webinar with me," and months will go by and I didn't do it. And then I said, "You know what? Let's just pick this date." And sure enough, that week I regretted it at first, because I'm like, "Oh, there's all these things I have to do," but I already agreed. So I got it done and it was fantastic. We had a great time and the people loved it. And if I had waited till I was ready, I probably still wouldn't have done it.

LANDON: That's the way it goes. That's the way it goes.

RODNEY: But that week, if someone had said that week, "Can you do it?" I would've said, "No." But because I had said 30 days ago that, "I was going to do it," I felt like, no, I can't let people down. I can't not show up and not be ready. And then my mentors already told people. So I think that is a beautiful solution because just schedule those meetings for the course and now you have to do it and then it'll be done. So fantastic. I love that. All right, and so we've gone through ask, we've gone through create, and now what do you do for sell?

LANDON: So selling can be simple. It can be extravagant, it really can take any shape and form. And I don't like to put pressure on people. I believe everybody's at a different stage inside of their business. So this will vary between, let's say we have somebody whose brand new. They might be selling through one-on-one

conversations, because they've got no audience, to somebody that has a pre-existing audience.

This is likely going to be sold through probably emails. You could probably do a week, maybe four to seven emails where this is getting pitched to your list. It's kind of like a launch to present this to the world. But what I really like is, I'm not a big launch person because I think you can have a lot of hype and a lot of relying on this one event. And I come from the ad world.

So when clients are doing two launches a year for their big high ticket coaching program or membership, it doesn't give you a lot of room to test things and iterate because if it goes well, awesome, but if it doesn't, now you're waiting four months before you're going to do it again. So I like creating automated systems that effectively allow this to just work in the background on an ongoing basis. So for me personally, what I like to do is kind of use this process to create either a product or an offer and then it gets launched. So it'll go out to my existing audience through email and through social. So just distributing it through the existing channels.

Typically, what I'll do is I'll write emails that are going to present it as direct offers. There will be more insights and takeaways speaking to the pains and problems that they're experiencing, the symptoms, how that's showing up for them, and just presenting this as a solution. And that content will get repurposed as content on social media. And then I will bolt this into an automated system. So generally speaking, if we have one traffic source, one lead magnet and one product, we have everything we need to just continue to funnel new traffic in, create this little system so that we just consistently having people getting exposed to whatever we just created.

So I'll use Substack for an example. It's where I'm most active right now. Every new subscriber that comes to my Substack, they are now getting exposed to various lead magnets through my welcome email, once they get added to my Substack and then various, it's linked in my post, it's linked on my publication homepage. There's all of these avenues to take this new traffic and get them onto my Kit list. Everybody that gets onto my Kit list, goes through an automated sequence that is now selling them that product.

So you can kind of create this little ecosystem that after you create that one product, you now just have all kind of arrows directing to people just to make sure

everyone's getting exposed to that offer and then on an ongoing basis talking about it.

KEY INSIGHT: Create automated systems that continually sell your products rather than relying on big launches—every new subscriber should encounter your lead magnets and offers through a seamless ecosystem.

RODNEY: Got it.

LANDON: And you got to let people know what you got. So I've done lives where I'm talking about something I'm doing, people are purchasing the product because I mentioned it on a live, you got a piece of content and it's related, you make a reference to it, you link back to it, you send out more emails, you drop content. We don't just create things and forget about them. We want to make sure everything that we're doing is kind of driving towards the same purpose.

RODNEY: Got it. And I love how you talked about getting Kit in there because which it used to be called ConvertKit, which is an email sending service. So the people that are on your Substack are not automatically added to Kit, they have to join Kit by responding to something else. Is that correct?

LANDON: So this could be in an entire podcast in and amongst itself. So there is a lot of people that automatically pull their audience over, and I don't inherently have anything against that. I like to utilize a lead magnet to pull them over, I like this because of, it is implied consent. When I just automatically import them, they didn't necessarily join my Kit list. They subscribed on Substack.

And now when I utilize a lead magnet, it kind of almost acts as a double opt-in. I know a few more things about them. First off, they have taken an additional step, so I'm able to generate way more money, a very small, tight and very specific segmented list on Kit. So it doesn't cost me as much money. My open rates are higher and the revenue per subscriber is higher. I also know exactly what they're looking for because of what they opted in for, so I can segment them beautifully.

So it's also kind of one of those things, there's a few things with Substack that I'm kind of curious on how will shift in the future in terms of they don't like when people reply to an email, they will block it because they're trying to avoid people from using Substack as an email service. So there's a few things that I kind of like to kind of play around with, but I like to integrate Kit as that kind of secondary

process where I can pull people into all of my automations and segmentation and welcome sequences and things like that.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. And you said people, they don't like people to reply? I have on occasion had people reply to my Substack emails and I get the reply, but then I had one or two where somebody emailed me personally and said, "I'm not sure if you got my reply." And I'm like, "I didn't." So Substack's doing that on purpose, that wasn't just a glitch.

LANDON: Yeah, I've had people reach out to me in the DMs with my welcome email for a while. I had hit reply, if you want to get access to this. And they're like, Substack replied to them, the email address is for me, it's like Landon@substack.com or something like that is where the emails come from. So the reply when they replied, Substack sent them a message and said, "Please reach out to that person on Substack." So I was like, "Oh, okay." So now I've shifted that strategy to, there's a button that goes directly to your DM's that Substack gives you. So I've shifted that to when people to get access, I'll drive them into my Substack DM's.

RODNEY: I really love that. I have not heard that strategy. And that is so brilliant, because I started DMing people. I DMed 50 people a few days ago, and most of the people don't reply. But when I put a chat, many more people comment and I'm like, "Oh, this is really cool. So fun."

LANDON: 100%.

RODNEY: So people want to get into your world. What's the best starting point for them?

LANDON: Yeah, the only thing I'm unsure of is if you set up a custom domain, I'm not sure if that changes the sending address. So that's something I haven't tested. So I'm just on the default, myname.substack.com for my publication. So there's a few things that I haven't exhausted all of the options. At the end of the day, I can simplify the process and I don't need to hyper-focus and fixate on some of these things.

RODNEY: Exactly.

LANDON: But my life is just a learning experience. I just test things, experiment, and then I just try and share the knowledge. That's pretty much what I do every day.

RODNEY: Right. But I still, I think DMs are even better than emails though too, because emails is cluttered, but DMs is just, it feels more intimate. So if someone's really responding to me in DMs, I feel like I am... And I actually take screenshots of their comments so that I can remember who said it to me. So that way I'm going to get, because what I'm going to do is I'm going to shout out, "Hey, I got the idea for this article from this person."

LANDON: And people love that, right?

RODNEY: Yeah.

LANDON: You're letting people feel seen and heard with what they're doing, and it shows to your audience that you are engaging back with them and listening. It's just like those little inefficiencies that people want to skip over because they want to get there quicker, but it's like those things make all the difference in getting to where we're trying to go.

RODNEY: I have a teacher named Kevon who he's got a thriving business online, and he says, "he likes to sometimes do things that don't scale." And this is one of those things that don't scale, but they're more intimate because they can't scale, then they know. I mean, I guess somebody could hire a VA to respond, but I wouldn't do that. But I can imagine if you had millions of followers or something. But it's just really cool to be able to just respond to people and get a response back. Awesome.

LANDON: 100%.

RODNEY: So when people want to get into your world. What's the best starting point for them?

LANDON: So best starting point is probably going to be checking me out, excuse me on Substack, just my name LandonPoburan.Substack.com. Try and keep it nice and simple. My publication is, "Landon's Letters." Nothing too clever there. So I'm fairly easy to find on Substack or you can check out my website, LandonP.com. Links up to everywhere that I'm active, but primarily I'm posting multiple times a day on Substack and all of my content is free and un-gated there. I try and give back as much as I can.

RODNEY: Awesome. Fantastic. And before we go, if there's one thing you wanted to share, people to take away, what would you say or what would you add?

LANDON: I believe that pretty much everything we do that is going to drive success is rooted in consistency. So the biggest thing I think people can do is just get started and then not stop. The longer we stay in the game, the higher we increase our chance of success. The only thing we know for sure is that if we stop, we're not going to be able to make it. We can't predict much else. The one thing we can control is, just to keep going.

RODNEY: I love that. And I was just seeing someone talk about how consistency is a signal. It makes people think that what you're doing must be important, the fact that you keep doing it for so long.

LANDON: Mm-hmm. 100%.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LANDON POBURAN

On audience segmentation: Using a lead magnet to get Substack subscribers onto another email list creates a better quality list. People who take that extra step are more engaged, leading to higher open rates and revenue per subscriber.

On personal connection: Taking time for things that don't scale, like individual DM responses, makes a significant difference in building trust. When you acknowledge people individually, they feel seen and heard, which builds stronger relationships.

Want to implement minimalist marketing techniques that actually work? Visit LandonPoburan.Substack.com where Landon shares daily content on subliminal selling, audience building, and creating products people actually want to buy.

Leo Quinn - Be Unignorable: Capturing VIP Attention with Lumpy Mail Strategies

Reading time: 10 minutes

RODNEY: Leo Quinn is a lifelong entrepreneur who has helped thousands of people improve their finances through local workshops and online programs. He likes experimenting in life, health and business, which led him to a rejection challenge that helped grow his business. Laugh at his jokes and say, "That's a great idea." Once in a while and you'll get along fine, all right. So welcome Leo. Thanks for being here.

LEO: Thanks, Rodney.

RODNEY: Yeah. So I'm here to ask you a question for this e-book which is, what's your favorite business building strategy that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

LEO: It's five words, put stuff in the mail.

RODNEY: Oh, all right. Yeah.

LEO: And that's not something you typically will hear from an internet marketer, but it gets people's attention. And we're just inundated today with email and even text messaging because it's easy to do and it's cheap to do. But when you take the time to put a letter in the mail or put something weird in the mail like I like to do, it gets people's attention. It proves to them that you've got some credibility because you're willing to put your money where your mouth is.

KEY INSIGHT: Physical mail stands out in our digital world—when everyone else is sending emails and texts, sending something tangible shows both commitment and credibility that digital communication lacks.

RODNEY: Okay.

LEO: And you just, I think get a better response, particularly if you follow up. As they say, the fortune is in the follow up, and if you have something good to follow up on, it's much better than having to say, "Hey, did you get my email?" "Oh,

sorry. I didn't." It's so easy to say you didn't get something even if you did. But if you send somebody an easy button, it's easy to follow up and say, "Hey, did you get the easy button?" And even if the person you're talking to on the phone, isn't the person you sent the easy button to. They probably heard about it.

RODNEY: Okay. All right. That was kind of leading my next question, which is what kinds of things are you sending people?

LEO: I've been doing this for years and I've sent baby bottles. We talked about Russell Brunson here at the beginning, I sent him a baby bottle years ago when he had a baby to get his attention. I've sent live working cell phones to people. I've sent easy buttons to people. I've sent letters in pizza boxes. I had... Was wanting to talk to a pizza shop owner and we had talked and he ghosted me as the kids like to say. So I sent him a follow up letter in a pizza box, he called me as soon as it got there. So a little creativity. My goal in life, as you could tell by my introduction, is to make people laugh and to make people say, "Hey, that's a great idea." Every once in a while. So if I can do both by sending something crazy in the mail, I'll do it.

RODNEY: Wow. It's so funny when you said send them in the mail, my first thought was, "Oh, okay. Send them a letter or a handwritten note even." Because I've interviewed... There's someone I want to interview who does that, and that's even more creative. Sending someone, a pizza box is quite something. So yeah, I could see why that would get the calls back. That's awesome.

LEO: I've seen some people who will want to... If they want to reach an office environment, they will send an actual pizza, not just a letter in the pizza box, and they'll put a letter on the pizza. They'll go to the shop and say, "Hey, could you deliver this? Just want to take this message on the box." So they're getting the letter delivered with a pizza.

RODNEY: Wow. Well, that's something.

LEO: Yeah.

RODNEY: How about that? So that's quite amazing. I mean, this is a small detail, but the letter is... The letter have letterhead or anything? Or it doesn't even matter at that point because they're still blown away?

LEO: Yeah. It doesn't matter. And there are people who will actually send handwritten letters. I mean, eight and a half by 11 pages, just handwritten

because nobody's ever gotten one of those, particularly not the younger generation. So the idea is to stand out.

You have to do things in this world to stand out and sending a letter... I like to send my letters in thank you note size envelopes, in a card. So I'll get the thank you note size envelope, I'll put the letter inside the card, so they're looking at it. It's handwritten, it's got a real stamp on it. It's got a handwritten return address. And that's what I sent. That's goes to the top of the mail pile, because it looks like grandma sent it to you. And grandma was always sending you money so there might be money inside. So that's another reason why they do that.

RODNEY: Well yeah. And I could see how that would work because it creates such a positive anticipation to see, oh, a human being sent this, they took the time to send something to you. And if it's handwritten, I know it's not part of some mail scheme, where they are just sending thousands of letters out and personalizing it by saying, "Hi, Mr. So and so." At the top and you've actually taken the time. Wow.

LEO: And the key is, you don't want the oh crap effect, meaning they've got that curiosity that you talk about, but then they open it up and it's just a sales pitch. Oh crap. So you want to have something inside that provides value. "Hey, I saw your ad in the paper and I think you should do this, that... You might want to try this, that or the other thing." So have something in there that provides value, gives them some information they might not have.

KEY INSIGHT: Avoid the "oh crap" effect—once you've captured attention with creative direct mail, deliver actual value instead of just a sales pitch to maintain the positive impression you've created.

RODNEY: Wow. Okay. Awesome. That's quite amazing. That's very cool. So how did you come up with that idea of sending people, something so unique?

LEO: Dan Kennedy conference. We talked about Dan Kennedy here before the start.

RODNEY: Mm-hmm.

LEO: In 2004, I went to his conference and I can't remember where it was, but I got two great ideas. One of them was, have a testimonial contest. So have a contest with your audience asking for testimonials, and it was done by a

company. I'm not sure who it was, but the idea was you would have a cash prize for the people who give you a testimonial.

You would give them X number of entries for just the testimonial. More entries, if they allowed you to use their full name. More entries, if they allowed you to use their full name and city and state and even more entries, if you allowed them to use a picture of yourself. So putting a picture with a testimonial, all great credibility builders. So I thought, "Wow, I could do that."

At that point in 2004, I'd been teaching my personal finance workshop for about seven years, so I had a lot of people I could get in touch with for testimonials, so I did that. The other idea I got was from a company called Shed Shop, I think, or something like that. Again at the Dan Kennedy conference, they talked about it. Their marketing piece was just a booklet of testimonials from customers.

So they would solicit testimonials and they would just put into this booklet and that's what they mailed, and that was their primary marketing piece. I thought, "Well, I have a lot..." At this point I had a few affiliates that were selling my product every once in a while and I thought, well, you know what? I'm going to put all the testimonials I get from my contest, put them in a booklet and then send that off to potential affiliates.

So that was really the first lumpy mail I ever did. It was just this booklet of testimonials, both from customers and other affiliates and my copy of my product on a disc. And I mailed that to 49 people that I'd seen online that I thought might have an interest in offering my product to their list. I mailed that on December 24th, 2004, the day before Christmas because I knew it would arrive the day after Christmas, which is probably a slower time.

And I maybe only got... I got less than 10 responses to that, but those less than 10 responses increased my income sixfold the next year. So that sort of proved to me, "Hey, this direct mail stuff can work. I should probably do more of it." And as I sit here talking to you, I should still be doing more of it, but it's something that stands out. Most people, they want affiliates, aren't going to spend 10 or 20 bucks to mail it to you, mail that letter to you. So again, you stand out, you have credibility by getting into the mail.

RODNEY: Right. Well actually your response rate, I would say is really good.

LEO: Well, I-

RODNEY: Out of 50 to get 10.

LEO: Yeah. And I should have followed up and it was 50, but one of them bounced back, so only 49 actually got through.

RODNEY: Got it.

LEO: Funny, I can remember from 15 years ago, 16 years ago.

RODNEY: Right? Right. But a one out of five response is much, much better than what you get with emailing, if you emailed just those people, most likely. So I mean that's... Yeah.

LEO: And it would've been better if I had followed up, I didn't follow up... Maybe I'd sent an email, but I didn't follow up again. I should have mailed them something again. I should have done all that stuff, but part of that was the fear of rejection and not wanting to be rejected so...

RODNEY: Right.

LEO: This was again, 2004.

RODNEY: Got it. Well, and that brings us up to the next idea, right?

LEO: Yeah.

RODNEY: Because you've come up with a pretty powerful way to overcome a fear of rejection.

LEO: Not really. It wasn't anything... So I've never had a great idea on my own in my life. I'm just a sponge for ideas. I'm always reading. I'm always looking for that little nugget of thing that I can use in my marketing. And we're talking about the book *Go for No!* It's a book, *Yes is the Destination, No is How You Get There*.

And it's a book I bought shortly after it came out, I think in 2008 or 2009, and I love the idea. It's going out in... Putting a different spin on rejection. Don't have yes goals, you can't control those yes goals. Have no goals, have rejection goals, because it's much easier to control that. And I'd given that advice. I'd talked about that book for years and years, some of the local talks I've given.

I'd never actually done a rejection project of my own. And if you Google Rejection Project... Rejection Challenge, there's a young gentleman, Gi Yang, I think is his name. He probably put this on the map as a thing.

He would go and ask people strange things.

He'd go into Duncan Donuts during the Olympics and he'd ask to have five donuts made in the shape of Olympic rings, and they actually said yes to him. So he got somebody who was game for that. He'd knock on doors and say, "Hey, can I play soccer in your backyard?" And I think they let him do that too. So he would do all these strange things to get rejected.

I didn't want to do that, I wanted to improve my business so I thought... I think it was May of 2009, I'm walking around doing my daily walk and I thought, "Well, I need to do a project for the summer. What's my project going to be?" And then the *Go for No Challenge* idea came up and I thought, "Well, how many should I get for my summer challenge?" And I thought, "Well, a hundred's too easy. One a day is too easy." So then the number 1000 came up and that made me nervous, and I knew that that was good, that was making me nervous.

KEY INSIGHT: Rejection goals are more controllable than success goals—turn rejection into a measurable objective by targeting a specific number of "no" responses (like 1000) rather than focusing on getting "yes" answers.

So I decided then that I was going to have my summer of a thousand nos. And I was going to solicit rejection, mostly on the phone, looking for clients for one of my businesses, but every once in a while I would do something offline.

One of my favorites is, we have a toll road system here in New York, and at that point they still had toll takers. And so I would... For a couple times, a couple of my nos were going up to the toll booth and them saying 20 cents or whatever the toll was. And I would hold up a lottery ticket, a dollar lottery ticket and say, "Would you take this instead?" And they would laugh and say, "No, sorry. I can't." So I paid my toll and gave them the ticket as a bonus for playing along.

So I would do some fun things like that, but most of the time it was calling up people on the phone and getting a lot of rejection that way. But it wasn't nearly as scary as I thought it would be. The thought of getting... I had to get 20 or 30 nos a day, which I could probably do in an hour or less once I got going. So once I got going, it was fine, but it was a little challenging to get the courage to do it.

RODNEY: Wow. That's awesome. And you... From what I remember from you doing that, because that was in 2000, right?

LEO: Right.

RODNEY: You had mentioned that there was actually business results that you got from doing this.

LEO: Yes, exactly. I don't remember the exact numbers, but I got some business out of it. I got some business... It's funny, I got more business talking about it offline than I did actually doing the thing. Because we talked to people all the time, "Hey, what's new? What's new?" I always like to have something really interesting when people ask me that question and saying, you're getting a thousand nos over the summer is something interesting. Most people aren't doing it. It's funny I have... You can't see it very well here, but it's a little chalkboard name tag so you can write. So what I would do, if I would go to networking events, I would write the number of nos I currently had.

RODNEY: Oh.

LEO: And I would wear that on my chest, and people would say, "Hey, what's that?" And I would say my IQ or whatever, then I would explain what it was. And again, just something to stand out. We all walk around these networking events, everybody's got their name tags on, it's all the same thing, and somebody sees a chalkboard on your chest they're going to ask about it.

RODNEY: Right.

LEO: But yes, it was a fun time. Some of the nos I actually got were, I was writing to podcasters asking if they'd like to talk to someone doing a Go for No challenge. And what I did was, I just found out where Andrea Waltz, one of the coauthors of Go for No had been interviewed and I sent them a request. "Hey, I noticed you interviewed Andrea Waltz. I'm actually doing an actual Go for No challenge. If you'd like to talk to somebody actually doing it, get in touch with me. If you don't want to talk to me, that's great, just write back and tell me no, I'll count that toward my 1000 nos." And several of the podcasters had me on because of that line.

RODNEY: Right.

LEO: Because they started laughing when I was trying to get a rejection out of them. So that was a fun aspect of it too.

RODNEY: Wow. Well, that's so wonderful because I mean your whole theme here is standing out right?

LEO: Yeah.

RODNEY: Having a 1000 nos was a great strategy to overcome rejection, but it's also a great strategy for standing out. And then it's another way to get publicity because, oh hardly anybody's doing that, that's a really gutsy thing to do.

And it makes people laugh the way you approach them about it. I'm sure all those business meetings, those people probably remember you. That was that guy with the chalkboard and he had a 500 or 600 or 700 number on there. And they're like, "Yeah, I remember that guy, he's the Go for No guy. He's the guy that..."

LEO: Right. Exactly. Well, that's important if we're talking to people who want to do networking. I did no networking in my life until 2016 because in 2016 I decided I was going to do something different every month.

So January 2016, I learned a new Polish word every day because my sister-in-law was Polish and March of 2016 was attend 30 networking events in 31 days. So that's where I started my networking thing. And at that point, I'm a marketing guy so I said, "Well, there's going to be a zillion marketing people at these things. Everybody's going to say, they're a marketer. I'm going to say, ever heard of Dan Kennedy or J Abraham? They're going to say no. And I'm going to say, well, you're not really a marketer if you never heard of them."

But anyway, I have a website, 518 Birthday Club where I list birthday clubs in my... Birthday deals from area restaurants in my area, so I went in as the birthday guy. So if you met me in 2016, you don't know me as a marketer, you know me as the birthday guy. And that's really what my goal is. I want to have some firm grip in your brain as something, rather than just the marketing guy because marketing people are a dime a dozen.

RODNEY: Right. And the thing I like about your approach, see a lot of people, when they want to stand out, they say, "Let me wordsmith something. Let me just figure out how I'm going to talk about myself." And I've heard people say, I'm going to 10X you this and I'm going to this." But what you do is you actually come up with an interesting concept.

LEO: Yeah.

RODNEY: That stands in your mind better. I mean, it's hard to wordsmith, people wordsmith for a hundred years.

LEO: Oh yeah.

RODNEY: But having a unique concept is really interesting because people are going to remember that. Yeah.

LEO: And my goal for any in person networking I do, is just giving them ideas. When I was a senior in college in 1990, I paid Jay Abraham \$2,000 for 20 pounds worth of his marketing stuff. So I've been reading marketing stuff for 30 years. And so I just... Whenever I meet somebody and I find out they're in business, well I immediately give them 10 ideas of things they can do.

And it's funny, I have a lot of pet peeves about networking events. I love when people say, "I just want to help people." And I say, "Well, you probably should do that then." That's why, if you meet me at a networking event, you're going to leave with 10 or 15 ideas on how to do better in your business because that's what makes me feel good.

Laugh at my jokes and say, "Hey, that's a great idea." And I'm astounded when I ask people, have you ever gone to the library? Have you ever Googled?

If I'm talking to somebody who does dog grooming, I'll say, "Have you ever Googled how to get more dog grooming customers?" And they'll say, "No." I say, "What? Come on, you got a huge resource out there." I'm amazed at the lack of curiosity of people to do things to improve their business. So I take it upon myself to give them the 10 or 15 ideas to go off and use.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. Well, that's pretty amazing. And I've gotten quite a few great ideas from you, which I'm actually going to use. I'm going to definitely send some people some really interesting mail because I've got some people who are difficult to reach for various reasons, but that may be the way that I'd finally get into some of them. Thank you for that.

LEO: I'll give you a book recommendation. *How To Get A Meeting With Anyone* by Stu Heinecke.

RODNEY: Okay.

LEO: How to get a meeting with anyone, and then his follow up book is, *Get The Meeting*. And he is a Wall Street Journal cartoonist, he's a cartoonist. He's not a New Yorker cartoonist, I don't think yet. But what he does is he sends cartoons.

RODNEY: Oh.

LEO: Sometimes in nice picture frames, sometimes in emails, but that's how he does it. And his book *Get The Meeting* was about strange things that people have done to get people's attention and get the meeting so...

RODNEY: Ooh, well thank you very much. I will definitely order that book as soon as we're done talking here. Now-

LEO: He's actually got a new book coming out, so he'd probably be willing to participate in this, if you wanted to talk to him about that.

RODNEY: Actually yes, you read in my mind. Yeah, I will want to talk to him. So thank you so much for that. And so people who are either reading this or listening to this, they're going to want to find out more information from you and get more great ideas from you, so where would they go to do that?

LEO: That is a good question. LinkedIn, just find me on LinkedIn.

RODNEY: Okay.

LEO: At this point, my picture has the word rejected across it. **[Note:** His current photo doesn't have that word on his picture.]

RODNEY: Okay.

LEO: On [LinkedIn](#). And why do I do that? Because nobody else has the word rejected across their face on LinkedIn. And that was a funny part of the rejection project too. I don't know if I counted it or not. I probably didn't because I sent a LinkedIn request to about 15 other Leo Quinns, people with my same name. And I explained, "Hey, I thought it would be funny to have a bunch of Leo Quinn as my connection requests."

I did that in like July or August of 2019. And I got my first yes in September. So two or three months before, one person accepted my friend request in 2019. I did it again this summer, same thing, 12 or 13 Leo Quinns. One accepted my friend request. So apparently other Leo Quinn are humorless boobs, but it was a fun thing to try. But yeah, look me up on LinkedIn, Leo Quinn and I got the rejected across my face, easy to spot.

RODNEY: All right. And there was one other thing. There was the website you have adventuresinrejection.com. Should people go there too?

LEO: Yes.

RODNEY: Okay.

LEO: Yeah, sure. Absolutely, yeah. Yeah. It's where I listed links to all the podcasts I did and... I have a Facebook group, I really have I've neglected it. I haven't done much in it. You certainly don't need a Facebook group to do that. Andrea Waltz, the co-author of Go for No! Has a nice community, if you're looking forward to increase your no quotient. She had lot of... November just went by, when a lot of people did no challenges, but you can certainly do them any time of year and it's something I definitely recommend doing.

RODNEY: Well. Thank you. Thank you for all the ideas. Thank for being here today. And I do think a lot of people are going to benefit a lot from getting to know you on LinkedIn, as well as going to your site adventuresinrejection.com. All right.

LEO: Thank you very much, Rodney. I appreciate it.

RODNEY: Thank you.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LEO QUINN

On standing out at networking events: Instead of wordsmithing your elevator pitch, create a memorable identity—Leo positioned himself as "the birthday guy" rather than just another marketer, giving people a specific reason to remember and talk about him.

On generosity with ideas: When meeting business owners, immediately offer 10-15 actionable ideas for their specific situation. This approach both demonstrates your expertise and provides genuine value that makes a lasting impression.

Want to learn how to stand out in a crowded market with creative direct mail and rejection challenges?

Connect with [Leo on LinkedIn](#) (his photo no longer has "rejected" across his photo), or go to LeoQuinn.com or visit adventuresinrejection.com to discover how embracing rejection can transform your business and personal life.

Russell Nohelty - Kickstarter: The platform creators overlook for book funding

Reading time: 6 minutes

RODNEY: **Meet Russell Nohelty**, a USA Today bestselling author and mentor who helps writers build sustainable, profitable careers. He's written dozens of novels and graphic novels—including *The Godsverse Chronicles* and *Ichabod Jones: Monster Hunter*—and reaches over 68,000 subscribers through his Substack, *The Author Stack*, where he shares brutally honest advice on writing, world-building, and marketing. He's also the editor of *Cthulhu is Hard to Spell*, co-founder of Writer MBA, and publisher at Wannabe Press—"a small press that creates weird books for weird people."

RUSSELL: Oh, man. Thanks for having me, Rodney.

RODNEY: Yeah, yeah. So the question I'm asking everyone is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

RUSSELL: I mean, it's one that's been working for a while, but I have been using Kickstarter, I've done almost 50 campaigns, and I have raised over \$500,000 for my projects and millions for other creators. I've been part of over \$1 million in Kickstarter, and that's just in the publishing category. I mean, I think that people still undervalue Kickstarter as a way to make money, but I run somewhere between four and 10 campaigns a year. Last year, we did \$125,000 for my campaigns on Kickstarter, so it is one that I always fall back on and I know that I can fall back on it as often as I need.

KEY INSIGHT: Kickstarter remains an underutilized platform for writers—with the right approach, you can run multiple campaigns per year generating significant revenue.

RODNEY: Wow. What is it that makes Kickstarter work so well for you?

RUSSELL: Well, I think I've been using Kickstarter for over 10 years now, so part of it is familiarity, but part of it is it's a really great way to do two things, one of which is run a time-bound campaign. We're always trying to facilitate scarcity or talk about scarcity or artificially make scarcity a part of our daily entrepreneurial

journey, and Kickstarter is a way that you can actually legitimately do that, so I love that about it.

Then it's also just a great way to test messaging and test products and test the ideas before you bring them to the open market. I think between those things and just my audience has now seen Kickstarter, they know what they want from me and I know what I want from them, and so it just becomes this really beautiful marriage. I mean, for years, I didn't even have a store, my books weren't on retailers. It was all convention sales and Kickstarter.

RODNEY: Got it. I love that, here's the funny thing, I hadn't thought about Kickstarter in years. I remember when it was new and it was like this big thing, and I mean, sounds like it still is a big thing, because it's still going on, but I hadn't thought about it for so long.

I remember somebody who... I think he was creating an ebook on how to make money with Kickstarter and he was doing research and everything, and he created a Kickstarter. He'd already done a couple of Kickstarters on other projects. He created a Kickstarter for that ebook, and I thought that was really interesting, so he got paid to write the ebook before he actually had the ebook ready.

RUSSELL: Yeah. All of my projects... Well, almost all of my... No, all of my projects have been in some form of the publishing category, which has really grown in leaps and bounds over the past few years, but yeah, I mean, it's a great way to reward your best buyers to... Because you can test out 10, 20 rewards at the same time to basically split test rewards against each other, see what upsell products will work, what downsell products will work, get a sense of which covers more is better for your retail release.

There's all sorts of really just like... Between the testing and the time-boundedness, there's really nothing but upside, and because Kickstarter handles all of the uptime stuff, because it's their platform, you really do, you don't have to worry about, "Well, is this plugin working better? Is my load time too fast?" It takes a lot of that technology away and makes you focus specifically on the messaging and the rewards and the copy itself, and any imagery or video that you have.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. That's so interesting, that's so interesting to be able to do that. It's amazing that that ever fell off my radar, now that I think about it. Just like you said, the scarcity aspect of it, the ability to test. I didn't know that there was

the ability to test these different rewards, upsells and downsells, at the same time. That's completely new, and that means those things don't even have to exist yet. You've created the messaging for those things and then you only have to create it after the time period is up, right?

RUSSELL: Yeah, I mean, it's always a good idea to have stuff at least prototyped out before you put it out there, but yeah, because you can do rewards from a dollar to \$10,000, you can have a reward at \$1, at \$10 at \$20, three awards at \$40, a reward at \$80, reward at \$200, and it really tells you which ones are the most popular.

We have now, because we've done so many campaigns, really have it dialed in to what people want from us on a nonfiction campaign, which is ebook, audiobook, and then paperback book, and then some class/workbook thing also. After seeing the same general rewards be our most popular reward for years, it just becomes a lot. I'm a lot more confident when we offer it other places.

KEY INSIGHT: Kickstarter provides built-in reward testing—offering multiple price points and packages shows you exactly what your audience values most.

RODNEY: Got it. Your campaigns, are they all for fiction projects or any of them nonfiction too?

RUSSELL: I have a company, Writer MBA, and all of those are nonfiction, but then I have fiction, too. With fiction, the stack's different. Nonfiction, it's a lot easier to make a lot more money with a lot fewer people than with fiction, because fiction really doesn't have that many upsells. I mean, they have special edition boxes and book boxes and such, but for someone that doesn't want to create a bunch of filigree, it's a lot easier to make more money with nonfiction.

RODNEY: Got it, got it. I'm blown away by this, because I've never considered that. Do you actually teach people how to use Kickstarter in your work as well?

RUSSELL: Yeah, so I have a book I co-wrote called "Get Your Book Selling on Kickstarter." I have two courses available in The Author Stack. One is for founding members, called the Kickstarter Accelerator, and then one is for paid members, called Crush It on Kickstarter. Most people want to hear about Kickstarter when they come into our orbit. Either Kickstarter or Substack, one of those two things.

RODNEY: Got it. That was the question I was going to ask you. If somebody was just starting out, how would they get traction on Kickstarter for their project?

RUSSELL: Well, just like any sales page or anything that you do, entrepreneurship, you're going to have to drive traffic to it, whether that's... Preferably not by ads or more likely through some organic/email list. There's not a huge algorithm going behind Kickstarter, but you do get... I like to say, if you can bring 25 people, they'll bring 25 people, so you'll get some ability to grow through their own ecosystem.

I mean, I'm not going to lie and say you don't need an audience. You need an audience. Everyone's always talking about how they want this magic world in which just people find your work without you having to do anything, and it's just not a world that exists. I mean, if you write in a specific genre, you can write a book that you can game the algorithm through search and then ads, but in almost no way when you start out can you just make money from nothing.

It's one of the biggest, worst fallacies that people believe. You need to grow an audience, nurture the audience, and then monetize that audience.

Can you grow and monetize at the same time? Sometimes, usually not, which is why you should always over-index towards a growth at the beginning, and growth takes investment. Then once you have an audience, they'll tell you what they want and then you can make that thing.

RODNEY: Got it. I think you're right about the, "It's hard to grow and monetize at the same time, so maybe start with growth. Focus on growth in the beginning and then get to monetizing," and then that would apply to Kickstarter. I think some people had the impression, in the early days of Kickstarter, "If I just put something really amazing on there, then it'll just collect all these people who are randomly browsing Kickstarter."

RUSSELL: Yeah. I mean, I think that's been proven not to be the case, but it's not the case on Amazon either. The people that are winning on Amazon are making a book that people want and then running ads for that book. Very rarely, do you find somebody who's really killing it on Amazon just from search alone, and those people are almost always in very underutilized niches that most people don't want to write in.

Most people don't want to write how to hoe a garden on \$3 a week. Those are the kinds of things that win without ads. Yes, there's value in that. I'm not saying

that there's no value in that. What I am saying is that most people don't want to write that book, they want to write some big flashy book about losing weight or a history of Ethiopia, whatever the thing is.

KEY INSIGHT: Kickstarter isn't a magic audience generator—you still need to bring your initial supporters, but they can help attract others through the platform's ecosystem.

They want to write books that are interesting to them, not just like what is hot on Amazon. And if that is the case, you got to have an audience and then you got to make stuff for them. It's a very simple formula. Entrepreneurship, you have to have a product and to market and fit them together. All you need are those two things.

If you have people to buy a thing and a thing to sell that people want, then you have a business. Kickstarter is a great way to be like, "Hey, I'm testing out this new product line. Look, I am making soaps. Would you want to buy these soaps?" Then if people buy it, you're like, "Cool, I'm going to make a lot more soap," and if no one wants to buy it, you didn't have to create a website for it, you don't have to spend a lot of time for it, you didn't have to do a lot of testing for it.

You can do all of this stuff very simply and easily, and then you can do the thing. Kickstarter allows you to do the thing that you normally can't get on a website or any other platform, which is, "How does my copy convert? How do the actual products that I'm making convert? Which converts better? Which converts worse? Which one should I never do again? Which should I do every campaign?"

All of those things, you can lay out, and yes, you end up... A lot of people, they test their ads and their products through advertising, and my process is I'd rather get paid to test it on Kickstarter, make the money that I'm going to make, and then once I know the copy is humming and the emails convert, then I can go and I can bring it to the wider market. Once I do that, I already know that I have a product that is already profitable.

RODNEY: Got it. I love that, because that's the holy grail, how do we test effectively and how do we test with the minimum investment possible? That's pretty much one of the things Kickstarter gives you by having the infrastructure already there that you can leverage. That way, you don't have to build any of that stuff yourself and it's already there. Yeah, fantastic.

RUSSELL: Yeah, absolutely. There is some organic reach that you will find there too. It's not perfect, because things that are popular on Kickstarter aren't always popular in the market, and vice versa, but in general, you'll at least be able to end the campaign knowing what converts the best for your audience.

RODNEY: Got it. Awesome, fantastic. Well, thank you for that. That makes a lot of sense. Let's say people want to take the next step with you. They've read the transcript, they've listened to the audio, and they've said, "You know what? I want to get more from Russell." What would be the next step they should take?

RUSSELL: I think you should go to theauthorstack.com, it has over 1,000 posts between paid, free, and our founding tier. If not that, then go and read [Get Your Book Selling On Kickstarter](#) (affiliate link). I mean, it's on all retailers, it will give you a good sense of who I am and what stuff you can do on the platform. I usually say go to [The Author Stack](#), because every week, I put out a very extensive article on how to grow as an author.

RODNEY: Awesome, fantastic. That's what everyone wants, is they really want their books to sell. Withdraw all that hard work you put into it. That's lovely, that's fantastic. If there was one thing you wanted to leave people with a parting thought, what would that be?

RUSSELL: Making money has nothing to do with you, selling books has nothing to do with you. It's 100% about the transformation someone is going on, and whether you are the right conduit for their transformation. I know that we want to make it all about us, but really, it's not about us at all, which means that the bad stuff, when they reject your book, when they say "Not for me" when they unsubscribe, is also not about you.

The good stuff can't be about you and the bad stuff can't be about you at the same... You can't have it both ways. The good news is that a person that says no to you is almost always 100% of the time saying, "I do not think you are the right person to lead me to the transformation I want to take right now. In the future, maybe. Maybe in the past, maybe, but right now, this is not the transformative journey I want to go on."

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM RUSSELL NOHELT

On nonfiction vs. fiction campaigns: Nonfiction Kickstarter campaigns typically generate more money with fewer backers because they naturally lend themselves to valuable upsells like courses, workbooks, and coaching packages.

On campaign frequency: With experience, you can run 4-10 Kickstarter campaigns annually—Russell's campaigns generated \$125,000 in a single year, showing the platform's potential for consistent revenue.

Want to fund your next book through Kickstarter?

Visit theauthorstack.com or read "[Get Your Book Selling on Kickstarter](#)" to learn Russell's proven system for running successful publishing campaigns that test your ideas while generating revenue.

Sinem Günel - High-ticket coaching: The one-on-one monetization approach

Reading time: 4 minutes

RODNEY: Today, I'm thrilled to introduce Sinem Günel — a leading voice in the world of online writing and digital entrepreneurship. Starting her journey as a business student, Sinem quickly realized her true passion was helping others grow their ideas into powerful, profitable writing careers.

She built a loyal audience of thousands on Medium, became a Substack Bestseller in under 60 days, and went on to create Write • Build • Scale and Substack System, teaching writers how to turn their words into sustainable businesses. Her work has empowered countless creators to find their voice, build their platforms, and scale their impact.

Please join me in welcoming Sinem Günel.

SINEM: Thank you so much for having me, Rodney. I'm excited to be here and share what I've learned on my journey.

RODNEY: It's great to have you with us today, Sinem. Your work helping writers transform their passion into sustainable businesses has inspired so many people. So here's my question: what's one strategy, technique, or philosophy that's been working really well for you or your clients?

SINEM: I hope Jari hasn't brought this one up. You have to tell me if he did, but one thing that's working really well for us right now is working one-on-one with clients on the higher ticket end. And it's also working well for our clients who offer coaching services in particular. And I think there are various reasons for that. But most importantly, people are really looking for support that is tangible and that gets them from A to B.

And you can communicate that very well when you are actually working with someone in a one-on-one setting.

KEY INSIGHT: High-ticket one-on-one coaching is particularly effective now because people want tangible support that produces clear results, not just information.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. And how do you set that up? The one on one work with somebody?

SINEM: We usually sell it through a Notion doc. Very simple. The payment and the booking system happens via [Teachable](#) with us.

RODNEY: Okay.

SINEM: And then in most of our packages, we have Zoom calls. We have a WhatsApp or email support that they can use between the calls. And depending on what exactly the client needs, there is there might be some other communication, but that's basically the tool stack.

RODNEY: Got it. So, the payment booking is through Teachable, and you have Zoom calls, and then they have WhatsApp and email support in between. Awesome. And what does the offer look like for the one-on-one coaching?

SINEM: The most common offer we use right now is a package of eight calls. That's forty-five minutes of calls where we help our clients make very specific progress. So with some of them, we work on their Substack publication. With some of them, we help them, set up their paid offers, launch their offers, sell their offers. And that's that's the core idea of all packages.

We have various different docs and depending on what we think they need, they get the doc that most speaks to them. But sometimes it ends up being a combination of those different problems that we help them solve.

RODNEY: I got it. So in your coaching, there sounds like there's a specific objective for each package. And then there's the time with you, but then there's also some supporting materials in those docs that helps them as well.

SINEM: No. Actually, there's no supporting materials in the coaching per se. Right. This might be a bit complicating or confusing, but many of our one on one clients are also in courses with us or in our memberships. Therefore, they do have access to resources.

So when it makes sense, we refer them to them, but those resources are never part of the coaching offer.

RODNEY: Ah, okay. Got it. Got it. So since they've already purchased some courses, they already have access to them, and then you're pointing out to them.

SINEM: That's yeah. That's what you should like, I would say about half of our VIP clients right now are first clients in our courses, and then they basically purchase the upsell, which is the one on one.

KEY INSIGHT: One-on-one coaching works best as an upsell from courses—clients who've already purchased your materials are primed to invest in personalized support.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. Okay. So it's an upsell in the course. That makes a lot of sense because some people need that extra support.

And if you don't provide it, then they've got information, but they may not implement it. And then there's some people who are ready to implement it, and so they don't necessarily need that support. That's awesome. That's fantastic. Yeah.

Very cool. Very cool. And what how do you figure out, like, the pricing for your coaching offers?

SINEM: There I know there is a lot of different answers to that question. Honestly, what we have done is we are going up with the price every X purchases. So we have gone by every five pack every five sales in the beginning, and we are basically assessing the situation based on demand and how many how many clients we can handle, and we up the price based on that. So it's it's very strategic in that sense and more of a okay. We can afford to go up now because we don't want to sell our time for a lower amount.

So let's just increase the price. Then we usually have, like, a period of seven to ten days where the people who have received the offer before they still get it for the initial price, and then we change the price on all the pages.

And honestly, for our clients, what also what we recommend them to do is starting with a price that feels comfortable so that selling is easy because right now, we have a bunch of clients who want to sell through discovery calls. They feel like

when they have someone on a call, it's very easy for them to sell their offer, but they really struggle to sell through a sales page, sales emails, a big launch, etcetera. That's particularly people who are, like, in the in the spiritual self improvement sort of niches.

So for them also, it's very important to kind of be confident when they articulate their price. And that's fine as long as you are not feeling like you are completely undercharging. We recommend them to just start with the base price that feels good and then go up every five clients, add X percent to the price.

RODNEY: I love that because that's I mean, it's behavioral psychology. Right? Start where you're comfortable and then keep stepping it up over time where there's some people, like, go big or go home, and it's, like, that's really pushy and really hard to get through. But if you just whatever price you think, I think that's a good method, you know, just to start where you feel comfortable and then grow from there. Yeah.

That's awesome. Very cool. Very cool. And are they all selling through discovery calls, or are you also instructing them on using actual pages and things to sell it?

SINEM: They also have pages, but right now, our clients who do have one on one offers, they lean towards the discovery calls and the yeah. Some call them discovery calls, some call them clarity calls, whatever it is. And one thing that there's actually two people in particular who are like, it works really well for one and the other is basically, modeling what has worked for for the first one. They do master classes, live sessions. And in those events, they invite people to book a call.

And then with the people who book a call, those are the ones who then receive the one-on-one pitches.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it.

KEY INSIGHT: Start with comfortable pricing and gradually increase—every five clients, raise your prices, giving existing prospects a 7-10 day window to purchase at the original rate.

SINEM: And those are people with very, very tiny audiences actually. So they don't talk to hundreds of people. But if they can get 10 people to watch their class and one signs up and they do that every week and convert a handful of one on

one clients a month, that's already leading to, like, 5k months. That's a great success for them.

RODNEY: Right. I love that. I love that there's different pathways. Like, oh, you know, go straight to discovery call or a clarity call or or do a master mind session or master class first and then invite them, or or the way that you guys do it with this through, you know, a sales page or an offer page. And that way, there's multiple routes to success in this.

That's really cool.

SINEM: Yep. Yeah. I think that's also what makes one-on-one offers so interesting in the first place, given that you have the confidence and the skill set that you can actually help someone when you get to work with them for forty-five, fifty minutes, whatever it is. Right? But that's what most of our audience members and students do.

They're really good at what they write about and what they teach, so they can help you when they have time with you. That's the baseline. If you can do that, then you can very easily figure out what the offer should look like. And that's also how I started, to be fair. Like, my first online clients were not people who bought a course.

They were one-on-one clients, and they helped me understand my audience or my my ideal customer.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. Fantastic. I love that. And that I think what you shared is really great, and it's just so good for people to understand that there's a process by which people get to where they are.

Like, they look at where you are, and they go, oh, I don't know how I could ever get there. Well, you didn't start where you are. You started, you know, a few steps back, and that's what everyone has to do. Awesome. Fantastic.

Alright. So, Sinem, if people wanna get into your world and take a next step in learning about more about what you do and how you do it, where should they go?

SINEM: [The Write Build Scale](#) Substack publication is the best place to go so you can access a lot of our content for free there, and you can check out what we're doing and see if that's the kind of stuff that's useful for you right now.

RODNEY: Got it. So Write Build Scale is the best place to go. Fantastic. And before we go, is there anything else you'd wanna say that you think everyone else should know?

SINEM: Maybe just emphasize what what you just said. Everyone that you are seeing online right now has started at a completely different place. Like, no matter how many followers they have right now, they started with zero. And if they started fifteen years ago, their journey looked significantly different than what your journey will look like if you're starting today or if you started last year. Just keep that in mind.

It doesn't mean that you cannot grow your audience and your business starting right now. It just means the journey will look different and it can sometimes be frustrating if you compare it to those people who have been doing this for a decade. But that's true for anything. Right? If you start with a new kind of sports, if you get into playing chess, whatever it is, you don't compete with the people who have been doing this for years or or decades.

You play with the people who are at your stage, and I think that's kind of a healthy reminder in the online world as well.

RODNEY: Awesome. I think that's a great reminder. Yeah. Because there's so much comparison thinking that goes on, and it's like, are we making the right comparison? We have to compare to apples to apples, not apples to oranges.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM SINEM GÜNEL

On discovery calls vs. sales pages: Different personality types excel with different sales approaches. Some people sell effectively through discovery calls but struggle with sales pages—starting with what feels natural builds confidence and conversion skills.

On audience size: You don't need a huge audience to succeed with one-on-one coaching. Even creators with tiny audiences can generate \$5,000 monthly by converting just a handful of clients from small masterclasses or live sessions.

Want to turn your writing into a sustainable business? Visit the [WriteBuildScale](#) Substack publication to learn how Sinem helps writers develop high-ticket coaching programs that transform content into consistent income.

BUILD TRUST & DEEPEN RELATIONSHIPS

*Discover how to achieve genuine
connection with your words*

Ana Calin - Building thriving communities: Not just collecting followers

Reading time: 7 minutes

RODNEY: I have here Ana Calin, a community builder who empowers creators to transform readers into devoted fans and paying subscribers. With a background as a high-level executive, Ana has rapidly built a thriving Substack community of over 48,000 subscribers. After experiencing corporate burnout, she embarked on a journey to help others achieve creative autonomy and sustainable growth.

ANA: Thank you for that introduction!

RODNEY: I'm so glad to have you here. So the question I've been asking everyone is what is that number one, that most effective strategy that's working really well for you and your clients right now?

ANA: I think what I said, building a community first and having that in mind, having their needs in mind. Because no matter what your topic is, and I have people in my community who are talking about growth like I do right now or branding like I did in the past, but they're also talking about parenting, or plants growing, or dogs, or any other topic. So, it really doesn't matter the topic as long as you build it for someone who needs it.

So don't talk only about you, talk about your experiences, of course, and make it personal but rather build it around their needs, their questions. Ask them frequently what they need, what they like, what they don't like, what are their problems. I think that's pretty much my biggest strategy and secret. So, I'm always trying to give people what they need in the moment.

KEY INSIGHT: Focus on solving community needs rather than talking about yourself – ask questions and deliver what people actually want.

RODNEY: You mentioned some of the things you do, which is find out what their needs are, and then you're delivering on that. How do you find that out because that's the thing I think a lot of people have is they're like, "Oh, I want to build

something. I want to make something," and they're not close enough to the customer? So how do you get close to the people?

ANA: Because they really expect people to just knock at the door and say, "Hey, my needs are this, and my problems are this. Can you solve them?" It doesn't work like that. You have to do a bit of work there first, but that's the best work. It's very easy. You have to just look in your comments, in your messages. The way I do it is besides looking at the comment, you can say, "Okay, fine. I don't have messages. People don't reply to my posts yet." Look at the people who are doing the same thing that you do in your business.

In Substack, it's very easy because we have that leaderboard with categories that we can look into. So you can look at their posts, and their notes, and see what people comment, and see what people ask for. What are their struggles, what are their needs? You just have to do that consistently and you will start to see patterns. That's one way to do it.

Secondly, is you can Google it. If you Google anything online, if you Google, for example, Substack growth, then you will get multiple suggestions from Google saying, "Okay, people also asked about this, or they asked about this, or they asked about this." Look at that. Look at other platforms. Look on social media, again on your topic and see what people talk about and what they ask about. It's very easy.

One very straightforward way I do it is that I ask people directly. In my chats on Substack, I frequently ask them. For example, when I launched my mastermind last month and the same for the bootcamp for this month, I literally ask them, "Hey guys, I'm putting together a mastermind of three days live. I would love you to join if you find this helpful for you. I'm thinking about these three topics. One is monetization. One is branding." One is I don't know what was the third one. Okay?

I literally asked them, "Which one would you prefer me to run this month with you?" They told me. So they said, "Okay, one, or two, or three, or none, or something else." I go with what they want. You can put polls in your posts or ask questions in your notes at the end. So it's so easy, but you have to do it.

RODNEY: Got it. I love that. A lot of people, they spin their wheels where they think, "Oh, should I offer this? Should I offer that? Should I offer this?" Instead of thinking of that inside your own head, you just go to the community and ask them, "Hey, which one of the—"

ANA: You have to give me just one second.

RODNEY: No problem. So I was saying is, instead of just trying to figure that out inside your own head, you just go directly to the community and ask them which of those options they would find most useful or they most want to do?

ANA: Yeah. It's the best way to do it because people tell you honestly what they want, and especially what they don't want and what they don't like. Then, you just deliver on that. People overcomplicate it. They try to figure out what people want, what problems to solve before they even write their own posts. Just go ahead and do it, and ask the questions, and post the questions, and you'll be amazed at the response.

RODNEY: Got it. That's fantastic. I love that. What do you think made it so that the community grew so quickly that you were building?

ANA: So, I think that this was one of them probably. I honestly asked myself this one. I told you, honestly, I'm blown away by the speed that things happened. I've been lucky as well. I've been blessed with a very nice community, to be honest. I feel blessed and grateful every day for it. I think I've been on chat from day one. I started to build that community from day one. In the first week, I got one reply. In the second week, I got three replies. Then, it grew from there.

KEY INSIGHT: Start building community from day one, even when engagement is minimal – consistency gives people time to decide if they connect with you.

I try to really be present because when people see you, when people read about you pretty much every day, they have to make a decision about you. They like you or they don't like you. So, I try to be present as much I could. I didn't post just one note, for example, every other day. I posted 10 notes every day without counting them as much as I could.

I also shared a lot of my own story because I felt really encouraged and free to do that without the selfies that you put on other social media platforms or pictures. I literally shared my story along with my perspective and insights, and people responded to that, and they related to that. They felt like I'm a human being who is like them, and who wants to share and help them as much as I can.

So I believe this helped, and people at least tell me that that's something they like. I really stay in touch with my community very much via chat or via DMs. I encourage them to ask me questions. I try to go live quite a lot, not this couple of weeks that I had some personal things to do, but I went live with Q&As and a lot of content like that. I didn't paywall my content as well. I just gave special access to my paid members to very specific bonuses like workshops, or masterminds, or offers. Otherwise, all my content is almost free when you are just reading the new posts. So it's little things like that, I guess that make it really happen.

Just like we buy from people we trust, we follow and subscribe to people we trust as well. It's really all about that. It's building that trust. That's what I'm working on.

KEY INSIGHT: Build trust through consistency, authenticity, and vulnerability – people connect with genuine human stories, not perfect images.

RODNEY: Wow, that's fantastic. I love how much you shared. I love also that when you said you were on chat from the beginning, and you first posted there and maybe you got one reply. I think that's what keeps a lot of people from continuing on to do these things is, they're hoping for instant success where it's just so disappointing to get crickets when you post, but then you have to keep doing it. Posting 10 notes a day, you're going to eventually hit something that attracts attention.

So, I love that because I think it's good to reset the expectations. If you're just starting out, you want to get here (puts hand up high), but you got to put your expectations way down here (hand down low) at first, and then build over time. Fantastic.

ANA: I'm still telling people that I still have notes within a day. Some get thousands of engagements within the same day, and some others get two, or three, or 10. So, within the same day.

RODNEY: Wow.

ANA: It's usually fine because you should not expect it to, I don't know, just go viral. You should expect it to be meaningful and tell a story when people read through your feed to tell a story. Many of my subscribers come to me and say, "Hey, I'm following you right now for a few weeks or months, and I relate very

much to your content. That's why I subscribe to your bootcamp, for example, of this month.

So, your feed needs to tell a story. It doesn't have to have thousands of likes. It's fine if a note or a post plops for now, make another one, make it better next time, you know?

RODNEY: Right.

ANA: So, as long as you are real.

RODNEY: Got it. I love that because on LinkedIn, which I post a lot, you post more than once. Every post gets less and less views that same day. It sounds like Substack doesn't care how many times you posted.

ANA: No.

RODNEY: It doesn't hurt you.

ANA: No, it really doesn't matter. It doesn't hurt you, honestly. Do what feels right for you. Substack is definitely not as tied to the algorithm as LinkedIn has become.

RODNEY: Exactly. It's become an interesting place over there, a different kind of place. Awesome.

ANA: I know.

RODNEY: So Ana, if people want to find out more about you and in your world, what's the best way for them to reach you?

ANA: I think we have Substack or via LinkedIn if they prefer it as well. So these are my only two channels that I use. I have written quite extensively also in my about section, a little more about me. I have been writing as well for Forbes for a while, so you can find me there too. Easiest way is to reach out via Substack right now where I'm most active. They can write to me personally with a DM very easily, find out about me, about my newsletter, see if they like it. If they like it, maybe they stay.

RODNEY: Right.

ANA: I love to chat with anyone.

RODNEY: I'll make sure to have a link to the Substack because that's probably where most of the people are going to want to go, especially since you're accessible there and they can really see your community, and all the comments, and join in the conversation.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM ANA CALIN

On consistency: Don't expect instant success. I started with just one chat reply in my first week, three in my second week. Keep showing up, making your content meaningful, and telling a story through your feed.

On building trust: Being authentically present every day forces people to make a decision about you. Just like we buy from people we trust, we follow and subscribe to people we trust as well. That's what I'm working on.

Want to learn more about building a thriving community? [Visit Ana on Substack](#), where she's most active and accessible through direct messages. Her approach to community building has helped her grow to 48,000 subscribers in less than seven months.

Kevon Cheung - Building in public: Validating ideas through open testing

Reading time: 4 minutes

RODNEY: Today I have here Kevon Cheung, a founder who turned radical transparency into a movement. Through "Building in Public", he helps creators stop hiding and start sharing, one authentic story at a time. He's built a loyal following by showing the messy middle, not just the glossy wins. But Kevon's real audience? Two tiny humans who call him Dad. Whether it's weekend adventures or bedtime reflections, he sees his children as his most important audience.

So glad to have you here, Kevon.

KEVON: So glad to be here.

RODNEY: So what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

KEVON: Mm. So I was thinking, as a writer, it's actually insanely hard to just make a living based off your writing. So if you want to be more profitable, you actually need to offer something else, maybe a service or a consultation, or maybe even some kind of products. So yeah, not many people can monetize based on your writing, like a newsletter or publication.

So I think one technique that works really well for me so far is building in public, as you said, you want to focus on this part. So I thought about it a little bit, and I think it comes down to essentially teasing ideas. Of course this is given if you have a bit of a small audience around you, but I think a lot of people, they want to do something, like, oh, I want to build this new thing, and they don't validate it enough, and then they go build it and realize, oh, it's crap.

I think we all made that mistakes. For example, my rebrand to Small School, that was just me thinking that I should do it, but did I really ask people around enough? Mm-mmm, Probably not. So I think a lot of people would think, "Oh, validating ideas, building in public. Okay, sure. Let me just put a question out like, 'Hey guys, I'm going to build this thing. Are you going to buy it?'" That's, of course, the easiest way to validate, but I think people are more sophisticated than that. So

you need to be a bit more creative. And that reminds me of, I'm actually watching this Netflix show with my wife is called The Residence.

KEY INSIGHT: Building in public isn't just announcing what you're building—it's creatively observing reactions to gauge genuine interest rather than directly asking if people will buy.

I don't know if you have heard of it. It's kind of like a detective show around the White House. So I think it was last night, the episode talks about how this Detective Cupp, C-U-P-P, the main character, she's investigating the crime scene, right? And she would not ask people, "What'd you see? What happened?" And all that direct questions, but basically she asked people to, "Hey, walk me through what you were doing that night and how your usual routine is like."

And then she would point out things from their behavior, from their reaction. For example, someone was a little hesitant when they switch on the light and then she could guess that, oh, it's because the light was usually off, but then the switch was on the other side, so that's why they were hesitant. So she got a bit of clues from that.

So from that, I get the relationship with testing ideas and building in public is that, yeah, you don't ask directly what people want or whether they would buy, but you think about different creative ways to gauge their reactions, and then you form a conclusion whether this thing that you want to build has potential or not. So I think this detective story explains it quite, pretty well. Yeah. Let me just pause there.

RODNEY: And are you looking for problems that they have or are you just looking for what ideas excite them?

KEVON: Because I read the book, The Mom Test, so I always care more about their existing behavior, and the problems that agitate them, and the complaints that they have. This will tell you more about your solution than you just share an idea and see how excited they are. Excited is an illusion in a way. It doesn't mean they are really feeling it, it's just maybe they're nice or they find it interesting, but that's not enough of a motive to become a user or even buyer.

RODNEY: Got it, and what is enough of a motive for them to become a user or a buyer?

KEVON: Complaints, people who really love complaining, right? If something hurts so much, they would come out and say, "Oh, I'm so frustrated about this, and I think you have a good point here. If someone would fix this, this would change my life." If they share sentiments like that, you know you're at least on the right track. Some strong reactions and emotions.

RODNEY: Got it. That's, I think, really important, that there's strong emotions there, not just a passing interest. There's a lot of people who say, "Oh, that would be fun to do, or interesting to do," but then as soon as money gets involved, it all evaporates. But if it's a big complaint though, and that's hurting them every day, then they're going to spend the money.

KEVON: Exactly. Exactly, and how it relates back to building in public is, well, you can do this privately, but the benefit of doing it publicly is that, well, I have tested it over and over that people are not going to see the whole journey of how you validate this idea, but then they would pay attention to pieces here and there.

And to be honest, that's enough to have the trust to say, "Oh, this is ready, and I'm willing to commit now." Because it's like, oh, Rodney has spent two months just figuring this out, and I just know it will be something worth the money. That's all it takes to get someone to buy. So that's the benefit of doing this in public instead of in private conversations.

KEY INSIGHT: Strong emotions and complaints signal genuine need—people expressing frustration rather than mere interest are far more likely to become paying customers.

RODNEY: Right. Right, and one of the things I noticed from people building in public is they end up, it's almost like they've made up their mind to buy before you put it on sale.

KEVON: Pretty much, yeah. Yeah. I did that earlier this year. I paid \$400 for AI, for an AI course. I didn't even need to read the three paragraph sales page because I trust that guy. Yeah.

RODNEY: Was that Nat Eliason's course or... Yeah.

KEVON: Yeah. I don't usually buy courses, but I think that one was a... To be honest, I was talking to people and if you look deeply into the curriculum, right, it's not life-changing. You can get that elsewhere. But I purely purchased it

because I trust this guy. I trust that he can deliver, and the promises is more on how I can use AI, not how I can learn from Nat. So in terms of validating ideas, actually pulling this all together, he did actually validate this in public and the reaction was so strong. That's why he went on to build it.

RODNEY: Right.

KEVON: And I'm the example of when you validate it, emotions are strong, people like me will just jump in because of the right timing of a right promise.

RODNEY: Right, exactly. Exactly. Yeah, it's quite amazing how it works because build in public lets you validate and it lets you market the product itself, as long as the people who you're validating with are the right customers.

KEVON: Exactly. That's important.

RODNEY: Yeah. Very cool, and what would you see as maybe a key mistake people make in building in public, or an obstacle?

KEVON: I would say the rookie mistake is you make it one way. I think too many people focus on, I'm here to show you what I've done. So that public profile is really just an update board where I post it there every day, and you get to walk by and you see it. No, I think the right way should be just be open and transparent about what you're adding to the product, because the truth is, you don't know everything. No one does. Yeah.

So if you don't listen to the people's feedback in building your product, yes, you might have validated the idea, but it might not be what they actually want. So I would say keep it two-way, don't make it one way, keep it two-way. And since you have validate the idea, now you're building, then just share parts and get feedback, and then use those to build the second part. And yeah, eventually you have a really nice, let's say, car because people share their feedback all the time.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it, and one of the things I really liked about your approach is how you would loop people in as you're doing something. So you were talking about people saying it, they just post, "What did I do?" But you would do more than that. You would do a couple different types of posts.

One of them was getting feedback on different things. That was one type, and then another is what lessons you learned as you were doing something, because one thing to just share, "Oh, I did this today," but that's not really... That's okay, sometimes it's

really cool, but a lot of times it's just like, that's nice. But then you would also say, "Okay, here's the lesson I learned," or, "Here's the mistake that I made. Here's how I would do it better next time." And I thought that was really cool to see that, because then we're learning something along the way.

KEVON: Yeah, and I think this is especially important in the AI's age. AI's so good at so many things, but being reflective and being self-aware to figure out the next step for that human being, this is not something AI can help you with. And I think when we are bombarded with all kinds of content, this type of content will still stand out because people are always interested in seeing how something evolves, and a human being evolving, that's the most fascinating thing of that storyline. So, yeah.

RODNEY: Yeah, I agree. I agree, and it's something that you can't duplicate with a machine. Maybe a machine can make fictional stories one day, but nobody wants to hear a fictional story of how you built your product. They want to hear the real story.

KEVON:

Yeah.

KEY INSIGHT: Make building in public a two-way conversation—don't just share what you've done, actively listen to feedback and incorporate it into your product development.

RODNEY: Got it, Kevon. All right, so when people want to get into your world. What's the best starting point for them?

KEVON: Things are changing, interests are changing, focus are changing. So kevoncheung.com would actually be the best place to start because that's my home base. It is what I would put up there that is truest to my heart at the moment. So that would be a nice place to start, my personal website.

RODNEY: Got it, so go kevoncheung.com. All right, very good. Thank you so much, Kevon.

KEVON: You're welcome, Rodney.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM KEVON CHEUNG

On validation vs. excitement: Excitement doesn't equate to purchase intent. Look for emotional complaints and strong reactions—these signal genuine needs that people will pay to solve.

On public trust building: When people see your journey of developing a product over time, they build trust in your process. By the time you launch, they've already decided to buy before seeing the sales page.

Want to validate your ideas more effectively? Visit kevoncheung.com to learn how Kevon approaches building in public to test concepts and create products people actually want to buy.

Philip Hofmacher - Digital communities: The future of online education

Reading time: 6 minutes

RODNEY: So here we have today Philip Hofmacher, a digital entrepreneur and community builder who empowers online writers to monetize their expertise. With over ten years in digital business, Philip co-founded multiple six-figure ventures, including the Write Build Scale Mastermind. He asserts, "I strongly believe the future of education is community."

Fun fact, while in Skiathos, Greece, Philip and his fiancée rented a private boat embracing their adventurous spirit by playfully considering themselves pirates for the day. All right, welcome, Philip.

PHILIP: Thank you so much. Yeah, that's awesome.

RODNEY: All right. So here's the question I've been asking everyone. It's what's one strategy, or technique, or philosophy that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

PHILIP: Thank you, Rodney, for asking an amazing question. One thing that's working really well for us, and one thing that I strongly believe is the future of digital business is building digital communities. Let me quickly explain where this is coming from. I started my digital career about 10 years ago, and back then, everyone started creating video courses.

Honestly speaking, I love the idea of video courses. We all strongly believe in wanting to build a business that provides us with freedom. So basically, a video course can provide you with exactly that because you create something once and then you can sell it over and over again without additional costs. That's amazing.

KEY INSIGHT: Digital communities represent the evolution of online education—combining knowledge, accountability, and environment in ways that courses and coaching alone cannot provide.

But honestly speaking, the internet, and also the digital community field, and yeah, the way how we digital entrepreneurs run our businesses has changed a lot over time. So in the beginning, it was enough to give someone access to a course. They would take a look at it and then try to implement it themselves.

But nowadays, that's no longer enough. If you really want to make change with someone or you really want to help someone get to the next level, you need to provide them with three different things. They need to have the **knowledge**. They need to have the **accountability**, and they need to be in the right **environment**. That's why everything moved away from courses and even coaching towards digital communities.

Here's the thing, courses can only provide you with knowledge, but honestly speaking, in 2025 and beyond, knowledge is almost worthless because you can go to ChatGPT, and you can get the knowledge on everything that you need. You can go to YouTube, you find all the information that you need. So just providing people with knowledge no longer works.

Then if you take a look at the second level, that's coaching. Coaching basically also provides you with knowledge, but it also provides you with accountability. So that's already much better than courses. But here's the thing, if you really want to make an impact on someone, you also need to put them in the right environment.

We are, as humans, we always adapt to the people that we spend the most time with. Even if you have an amazing coach, but you spend the majority of your time with people who are not on your level, you will not reach the next level. But here's the thing, now, if you imagine a digital community, you have the best of all worlds. You get the knowledge, not only from one person, but from 15, 20 or even 100 other people.

You have multiple people that keep you accountable, and you spend the time in a community and in a place where a lot of people are already at the place where you are or where you want to go, and therefore, yeah, you're just soaking up the knowledge from other people.

RODNEY: Wow. All right. I love that, and I love how you put it into levels because the first level is just knowledge, which you can give with a video course. Then the next is, okay, if you get coaching, then you get knowledge from the coach, but then you get the accountability, and then the third is the environment, and you're talking about not just like a physical environment, but a social environment-

PHILIP: Yeah.

RODNEY: ...that raises you to the next level, and we are social creatures.

PHILIP: Yeah.

RODNEY: We're not meant to slave away alone.

PHILIP: Exactly.

RODNEY: What you said reminded me of the Renaissance. In the Renaissance, there's so many great artists, and they think about these artists like Leonardo, and Michelangelo, and Raphael, and all these people, and they think, "Oh, they're so great."

But where did the greatness come from? In workshops where they were trained with hundreds of other people, and they wouldn't have existed, they wouldn't have got there, without the support, without the teacher, but then the community also, that they were in, that rose them up.

So that's exactly what you're talking about. You're creating that environment so that greatness can rise to the top.

PHILIP: Yeah. Also, the cool thing about the digital community is that we are finally stepping away from this "Just one expert that knows it all." Let me give you an example. Let's say I've built an Instagram account to 100,000 followers, and then I can teach someone else how I made it to 100,000 followers on Instagram. But here's the problem. Let's say I did that 2018 in the personal growth field, then I can teach you things that have worked in the personal growth field in the year 2018.

If you, now, in 2025, want to build an Instagram account in the, let's say, online business field, it's completely different. There's five years apart. There's different niches. Back then, probably, we all did a lot of follow-for-follow, let's say. Now, you need to do reel, whatsoever. So if one person teaches you, they can all only show you what worked for them at one point in time, at one specific niche.

KEY INSIGHT: One person's expertise is limited to their specific time, niche, and circumstances—communities provide diverse, current knowledge from multiple perspectives.

If you join a community, you have, in the best case, tons of people who can show you what's working right now. You're always getting day-to-day experience from different fields. I always love to explain a community like a little bit like a mountain.

So we launched Mastermind Community for Substack creators, and I always call it a mountain. So let's imagine that's the mountain, and it's called Mount Substack. Everyone wants to have fun on this mountain. Everyone wants to climb this mountain. Some people want to climb it as fast as possible. Other people might bike on it. Other people might want to enjoy the journey, take pictures of the animals that see on the way. Others just go there for the nature. Others want to sleep in one cabin, move to the next cabin, and so on.

So everyone has a little bit of different goals, just like creators on Substack. Some want to get as many followers, someone to get as many paid followers, someone to monetize for digital product. But the mountain is unique to everyone. So the cool thing here is there are multiple people on different journeys, and it's totally fine. You don't need to be the one climbing it as fast as possible because you can always learn from other hikers, and that's the cool thing about the community.

Let's be honest, if you want to climb a mountain, isn't it better if you meet people on the way who can give you tips, who can give you insights rather than trying to figure out everything by yourself?

RODNEY: Exactly, and I love that. I love that. What would you say are some of the key things that you have to do to build a community to make something like that work?

PHILIP: Yeah, awesome question. First of all, you need to know exactly what's the thing that unites everyone inside the community. It can be, for example, that we're all interested in Substack, or it can be that everyone of us wants to run their first marathon, or it can be that we all want to lose 10 pounds in the next year. There needs to be some kind of shared vision and shared goal. It doesn't need to be exactly the same, but there needs to be a reason why you want to be inside that community.

Second of all, we all know it's important to decide who you want to have in the community. But I think it's even more important to decide on who you don't want to have in the community. Because if you have nine members, and you add one member that takes up a lot of time in the coaching calls or in the mastermind sessions, and that ruins the experience for everyone.

You might get one new client by letting that person in, but you might dissatisfy five other people and lose them in the long run. So I think it's much more important than deciding who you don't want to have in it rather than just getting as much people as possible inside the community.

Another thing is you need to make sure that you have certain criteria that those people follow. So for example, how... I mean there are two levels. First, you always look at the level of expertise related to your topic, and the second thing that's even more important with community building is you want to have people with the right mindset.

So if I build a community, I want to have people in it that are action takers, that are coachable, that love to get feedback because there are two kind of people, the one that get feedback, and the one that hear feedback and try to defend themselves.

The most important thing, you want to have people that are willing to share. You cannot build a mastermind group or a community where someone comes in, tries to get all the knowledge from everyone else, but doesn't share their own experiences.

KEY INSIGHT: Carefully select community members based on both expertise and mindset—one wrong person can ruin the experience for everyone else.

RODNEY: Got it. I love that. I love that. That's fantastic. I really love the fact of who you want, who you don't want, knowing that, and then having people with the right mindset who want to take in feedback and use it and not defensive, because yeah, that totally gets in the way if you have somebody. Even one person like that can... Like, in the US, we say one rotten apple can ruin the bunch.

PHILIP: Yeah. Absolutely.

RODNEY: Yeah. Awesome.

PHILIP: Absolutely.

RODNEY: Fantastic. So if people want to find out more about your work and get into your world, where should they go? How should they find you?

PHILIP: I think the best place is to just subscribe to our Substack. It's writebuildscale.substack.com. Yeah, you can also go to writebuildscale.com, but honestly speaking, on Substack, you learn everything that we do. Whenever we have a launch, we announce it there. From there, you can also join our email lists, and I think that's the best place to be in touch with us.

If you want to reach out to me, you can message me, Philip Hofmacher, at Substack. I am, honestly speaking, trying to respond to every single DM that I get, unless you're just sharing me a link and say, "Subscribe to my Substack." But if you have an interested question, I'm always happy to help.

RODNEY: Exactly. Yeah. It's good for people to submit questions instead of always like, "Help me do this," or, "Join my newsletter."

PHILIP: Right.

RODNEY: "Subscribe." Yeah, please ask questions and join our communities instead.

PHILIP: Yeah, exactly.

RODNEY: Awesome. Fantastic. It was great talking to you, Philip. You shared some fantastic information. Even though it's recorded, I have taken notes on the things you said, so it's very useful. Thank you so much.

PHILIP: Thank you so much, Rodney. Thanks for having me.

RODNEY: Thank you.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM PHILIP HOFMACHER

On shared vision: Every successful community needs something that unites its members—whether it's a platform they use, a goal they share, or a transformation they seek. This common ground creates the foundation for connection.

On member selection: Focus more on who NOT to include rather than just getting as many people as possible. The wrong person can damage the experience for everyone, costing you multiple members in the long run.

Ready to build or join a digital community? Visit writebuildscale.substack.com to learn how Philip and his team help online writers monetize their expertise through communities that provide knowledge, accountability, and the right environment for growth.

Ian Botes - Identity alignment: The writing strategy that sells your worldview

Reading time: 4 minutes

RODNEY: Meet Ian Pierre Botes, a brand strategist and digital educator who helps creators simplify their path to profit. With over 950 clients served and multiple five-figure launches under his belt, Ian turned his knack for clarity into The Holistic Entrepreneur—a Substack newsletter where he distills personal development and business growth into practical steps. A self-declared anti-hustler, Ian's mission is to help others build meaningful businesses without burning out.

IAN: Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

RODNEY: I'm so glad you could be here. Let's begin. What's one writing strategy that's working well for you?

IAN: Most writing online focuses on quick solutions — bullet points and how-to lists. I take a different approach. My writing is designed to **shift readers' perspectives** and **build identity alignment**.

If you want people to buy your ideas, products, or services, it's not enough to list benefits. People need to **see themselves** in what you're offering. I craft narratives that change their awareness and get them to identify with my philosophy.

KEY INSIGHT: Instead of focusing on quick solutions, craft writing that helps readers see themselves in your philosophy—true persuasion comes from identity alignment, not just bullet points.

For example, I choose mentors I feel aligned with, even if they aren't the biggest names. It's not about who's the biggest authority — it's about who resonates with you. That same principle guides how I write.

My articles are long — sometimes 2,000 to 6,000 words — because I'm not just giving answers. I educate readers deeply and structure the narrative so that even skeptics can eventually see my perspective and feel connected to it.

This method could be called "indoctrination," though I don't use it maliciously. It's about helping people adopt a worldview that improves their lives. For instance, I helped a client in India triple his income by teaching him a different way to see his career options.

RODNEY: It sounds like you're not just teaching how-to tactics — you're also teaching a bigger perspective about how people can build a business and change their situation. Is that right?

IAN: Exactly. I want people to realize they have more options than just following traditional career paths. Through my writing, I'm guiding them to adopt a new way of thinking about building a business and creating opportunities online.

RODNEY: So you focus not just on features and benefits, but also on perspective — both yours and the reader's?

IAN: Right. When I write for clients, I interview them to deeply understand their story and philosophy, and then write in a way that connects readers to that identity. When I write for myself, I embed persuasive techniques that gradually bring readers into alignment with my own worldview.

RODNEY: How do you persuade in your writing?

IAN: I start by highlighting a real problem the reader is likely facing. I show why typical advice doesn't solve it, then frame my perspective as the solution. I use comparisons to real life, open loops to keep them curious, and progressively deepen the identification.

KEY INSIGHT: Effective persuasive writing follows a pattern—identify a real problem, show why conventional wisdom fails, then frame your perspective as the solution that transforms their situation.

By the time readers reach an offer, it feels natural because the worldview they now share points to that solution.

RODNEY: I love that approach. It's a much deeper way of thinking about writing and marketing — really focusing on changing how people see themselves, not just selling a product. So if people want to learn more from you, where should they go?

IAN: They can subscribe to my main newsletter, The Holistic Entrepreneur, or my short-form newsletter, Digital Philosophy, which focuses on client acquisition, sales, and marketing psychology.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM IAN BOTES

On reader transformation: My longer articles (2,000-6,000 words) aren't just information dumps—they're carefully structured narratives that take skeptics on a journey toward adopting a new perspective that solves their problems.

On natural selling: When you've successfully aligned readers with your worldview, your offers feel like the obvious next step rather than a hard sell—they've already adopted the philosophy that points to your solution.

Looking to shift from tactical marketing to transformational writing? Subscribe to Ian's newsletter "[The Holistic Entrepreneur](#)" to learn how to craft narratives that change perspectives and naturally lead to sales.

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Claudia Faith - Trust the process: Finding your rhythm in online writing

Reading time: 5 minutes

RODNEY: Today we have Claudia Faith, a writer and creative entrepreneur who went from writing updates for startups to Substack Bestseller in just six months—without a social media following or email list. With a background in the startup world, Claudia discovered her love for writing while crafting investor updates and turned it into a thriving business.

Welcome, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: I'm glad to be here.

RODNEY: So I'm asking everyone the same question, which is, what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now? And as someone who has grown fairly quickly and built a business already here, I'm sure you have probably loads of strategies, but what's one that's really working really well for you?

CLAUDIA: Yeah, it's also what I write and teach a lot about. It's this one mindset of trusting the process because there's so much power in this tiny little phrase. Really, it's all about giving it time, trying things out, finding your own rhythm, finding your audience, your tribe, realizing what works and also what doesn't work. And it's all in this trusting the process. So come online, be yourself, and trust it.

KEY INSIGHT: Success online comes from trusting the process—giving yourself time to find your rhythm and audience through trial and error rather than expecting immediate results.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. Okay. And what are some of the things that you found as a result of trusting the process for yourself?

CLAUDIA: It's really about being brave to let yourself be out there. I think that's one part of it. And I get a lot of writers asking me like, "Hey, what does it mean that I need to niche down?" I think that's part of it as well. So people, they come

online and they have so many thoughts and ideas, but they don't really know where to start. And my advice to them is, it always depends what your goal is. If you just write for yourself, then that doesn't really matter. If you want to make a business out of it, it matters a bit more. But my advice is to trust the process and give it a trial and error.

Start with writing things you're passionate about, that you like. See what resonates with people. If you feel like, okay, there's something that you like to write about, but nobody else wants to read it yet because maybe they don't know you yet and they can't really get the grasp of it, then maybe you need to reiterate and then try a next topic that you like to write about or share your journey and share your ups and your downs. And for me, it's really a process of finding things out that you like to write about.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. And I like how you mentioned you're finding things you like to write about, but also seeing what resonates with other people as well. Because if you just write about what you're eating for breakfast every morning, that may not do it. Unless you're a gourmet chef, then maybe somebody says, "Oh my God. I'd love to make that too. Teach me how." Awesome. Fantastic.

Well, how did you decide that you wanted to do this on Substack? Because you started out, you were in the startup world, and then you discovered that you liked writing in the startup world. So what made you say, "Oh, I'm going to start putting some things on Substack"?

CLAUDIA: Yeah, basically, it's funny because the one thing that brought me to writing online was I was writing late night investor email updates. And somehow in those investor email updates, I was able to show more of my creative side, because investors get 1,000 emails every day, and wanted to make it sound fun and creative and entertaining.

And so that's how I started being like, okay, this is the most fun part of my job, and that's the one that I actually enjoy. And I've always wanted to write online so then I started saying, "Hey, I like being an entrepreneur. I like being in this, having my company, my startup, but I also really want to do something that is just on my own, really just a solopreneur, an online solopreneur, just me and my words." That's how I started.

And I actually discovered Substack through Medium because I knew Medium from years ago. I've never really been a writer, only an observer. And then I started writing on Medium. I hated it. And I found the people that said like, "Hey,

if I had to start right now again from zero, I would do it on Substack." And I said, "Okay, amazing." I come over on Substack, and I came and never left. And I think it's awesome.

KEY INSIGHT: Start with what naturally energizes you—even small things like creative investor updates can reveal your passion for writing and lead to something bigger.

RODNEY: Yeah, it has been awesome for you too. And I really want to ask you about the late night investor email updates and that you showed your creative side there. How did they respond to that creative way of doing those updates?

CLAUDIA: I think they liked it. It's all about standing out a bit more and just making it awesome. The end investors are also just humans, and if you can make it a bit more fun for them, then they're happy and thankful as well. Of course, if your startup's not doing well and you're going bankrupt, then don't write it in a fun way. Don't do that. But if it's something you want to act like some good news or some shifts or experience that you've made, then there's no harm in just making this more fun and creative as well.

RODNEY: Right. I love that because I could just imagine that investor updates are probably pretty dry. And if they're investing in multiple startups, I could just imagine, "Oh, hey, there's one from Claudia. Maybe I'll read hers first because it'll be more fun than the others."

CLAUDIA: Yeah, that was my hope. And also it was just honestly more fun for me to do it that way, and not saying, "Okay, this is our Q1 results. Have fun with those financials." But no, just making it a bit more entertaining for everybody.

RODNEY: Right. I love that. And that's what you do with your writing too. Your personality comes through in your writing, which people really enjoy.

CLAUDIA: Thanks.

RODNEY: Yeah. And I think that's one of the keys to success, is people have to let themselves be themselves, which there's always a fear because, what if people don't like it?

CLAUDIA: Yeah.

RODNEY: But at the same time, if you do something that's less than your full self, people may not like that either. So either way.

CLAUDIA: Yeah. Yeah, 100%. And I think at the end of the day, there will always be people who don't like you and there will always be people who like you. And I think just be yourself, show that you're human, let yourself be seen. And I know it's difficult for a lot of people. I don't have any active social media role. I've never had that. I've always been more of the quiet observer on Instagram, on TikTok, on Facebook, or whatever.

And Substack is the first time really as an online platform for me where I show up and I dare to just be myself. And it's so nice. People are so supportive and friendly, and I think if you are brave, you inspire others to be brave as well, and just go out there and be seen. I love that process and I love that journey.

KEY INSIGHT: Being authentic and showing your humanity online isn't just good for you—it inspires others to be brave and builds a supportive community around your work.

RODNEY: And it's really working well for you. And if you had to break down three things that you feel like you did that made your publication successful on Substack, what would you say three of those things would be?

CLAUDIA: The first one is, start writing. Don't make a plan for a year. Really, I see so many people who plan their first article for three or five months, and it's like, just do it. Nobody is going to read your first post anyway. It's harsh, unless you have 1,000 followers already. But if you're just starting from zero, then the way to go is to just start writing. So that's my first recommendation. Go out there and write.

The second is trial and error. Really, go out, write, but then also analyze what works and what doesn't work. If, again, you want to do this as a business, if not, and you want to share your thoughts, then it doesn't matter.

And the third one would be really try to connect with people. Read those notes of other people, leave a comment, read those articles. Connect. Use the chat function in Substack. I think that's one thing I started somewhat too late. I think you could do this earlier. And I think that's just such a great way to connect, again, more with people on a one-on-one level and make it really about being a human.

RODNEY: Got it. And just right before you said about being human, the chat function, I only recently started that, because as I've been talking to different people and they're using it, and I saw you use it. I think you posted one either today or yesterday, and I was like, "Oh, it's such a good idea." And I start doing it and I'm like, "Oh, people actually are responding." I write newsletters and maybe one or two comments, but when I put a chat, many more people comment and I'm like, "Oh, this is really cool. So fun."

CLAUDIA: Yeah, it's fun. And it's also you can do one-on-one chats. That's already great. And then you can also do those publication chats where you bring your community and people together. And now I think in my community, really, I have people there who are so supporting each other and are cheering on for each other, and I'm trying to make this really a positive and a kind space where it's all about helping each other out. I love it. Really, it's just such a fun journey.

RODNEY: It is. And I love that Substack added these things because it allows you to build a community. When you have a newsletter, even if you have hundreds or thousands or however many people, those people are usually separate from each other and don't get to interact at all. And maybe if there's comments, there's a little bit there. But when you have these other features, it's so good to take advantage of them because it really allows you to build community. So fantastic.

CLAUDIA: Yeah.

RODNEY: Now, if people want to find you, what are some of the best places for them to find you, the best ways for them to get started learning more about you?

CLAUDIA: So go to Substack, Claudia Faith, and my publication is called [Wander Wealth](#). There I help people starting on Substack, starting writing, monetize their writing. I have another publication that's called [The Successful Online Entrepreneur](#), where then it's more about really how do you create an entire business around your newsletter with digital products and sponsoring, branding, coaching, and all of these things. But I think the easiest way is if you go to Substack and you look for [Claudia Faith](#), that's where you'll find me.

RODNEY: Awesome. And being able to manage two publications is even more impressive, which is awesome.

CLAUDIA: Thanks.

RODNEY: All right. Yeah, so before we go, is there any last thought you have that you'd want to share to make sure people remember?

CLAUDIA: Yeah, there's never too late. You're not too late for anything. Life is not a race, writing is not a race. And setting up your online business, it's not a race. It's just about doing this first step of getting started, and I recommend you to just go ahead, start doing it, and trust the process.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM CLAUDIA FAITH

On finding your audience: Start with writing about things you're passionate about and see what resonates with people. If something doesn't connect, try a different topic you enjoy or share your journey with its ups and downs.

On community building: Connect with people by reading their notes, leaving comments, and using Substack's chat function. Building a supportive space where people cheer each other on creates a positive environment that people want to be part of.

Ready to trust your own writing process? Find [Claudia Faith](#) on Substack at [Wander Wealth](#), where she helps writers start, grow and monetize their work. Her supportive approach has helped countless creators find their voice and build sustainable online businesses.

Josh Spector - Getting more out of what you create: The content asset strategy

Reading time: 7 minutes

RODNEY: Josh Spector helps creative entrepreneurs and businesses get more clients through smart content strategies. He's the creator of the [Clients From Content](#) newsletter, a resource packed with actionable insights on growing your audience and business that's attracted over 35,000 subscribers. Josh also hosts the **Clients From Content** podcast where he shares practical advice to make audience and business growth less overwhelming. Through his [Clients From Content program](#), he offers skill sessions and coaching designed to help people turn their content into customer getting machines.

I'm really excited to chat with Josh today and discover insights that can help us all create content that actually connects and converts. So glad to be speaking with you, Josh.

JOSH: Yeah, thanks for having me.

RODNEY: So the question I'm asking everyone is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

JOSH: Cool. So I'm going to give you one strategy that has two components to it, and I think they're both relatively obvious, but most people don't do them. And most people that do do them just do little bits and pieces of them, they don't really do them.

So the two pieces are this. So one is I view everything as content, and I also consider every piece of content an asset that can be, should be and needs to be used over and over and over again. And so let me explain both sides of this equation.

So when I say everything is content, I mean everything. So every email that I write to people is potentially content because most likely a lot of those emails are me answering their questions or sharing advice to them, or some sort of communication that can be turned into content of all forms, social posts, blog posts, podcasts, videos, all different things.

KEY INSIGHT: Everything you do can be content—emails answering questions, conversations with clients, books you read, and podcasts you listen to are all valuable content sources hiding in plain sight.

Every question I answer from people, clients, newsletter readers, social followers, people are asking questions or commenting on things all the time. Every one of those answers that I give them could very easily be repurposed as content.

Every book I read can become content. Either it can inspire me to talk about an idea or something I learned, or it could be as simple as sharing an excerpt from the book that stood out to me. When I read books, which I'm always reading two books at a time, I'm starring things as I go. And I'm not just starring them because like, oh, I want to remember them. I'm starring them because anytime I want content, I can open a book and go to anything that was starred and be like, ah, there's content.

Every podcast I listen to can become content. Again, the same way. I'm listening to a podcast, oh, that was an interesting thing. I can share that, talk about that, that kind of thing.

This everything is content is a mindset that is really powerful. Every conversation you have, once you start to realize, oh, every single thing I'm spending any time on that I don't think of as content time is actually content time if I have awareness of that. So, that's the first piece.

The second piece, when I say that every piece of content that I do publish or produce I consider an asset to be used over and over again, what I mean by that is I think most people don't get nearly the value they could out of the content they create.

So what most people do is they create a piece of content as small as an individual tweet, as big as a book, as big as a hour-long podcast episode, YouTube video, whatever it is, long blog post, whatever they create, typically what happens is they spend some time creating it, whether it's two minutes or whether it's two weeks. They put it out in the world, they share it once or maybe twice. They post it on their social channels, they email it in their newsletter, and that's it.

By only doing that one time or that one or two times, they are shrinking the potential value of that post, which is such a waste because they've already put

all the time into creating it. If they reuse it, if they reshare it, if they repurpose it into other platforms, into other venues, into other... all they're doing is increasing the return on investment from the initial time they invested in creating the content.

So for me, I view every piece of content as an asset, and I am looking for all the different ways that I can share it, reuse it, repurpose it over and over and over and over again. There are a million examples of how I do this, and literally everything that I spend any time on creating winds up getting used multiple times and for years.

Also, most of what I create is evergreen and timeless, which enables me to do that. You're not going to see me talking about some new feature that LinkedIn introduced today or that's going away, or that's news, because ultimately that's not going to have value six months from now. So that's another piece of it too.

But here are just a few examples of how I do this. So I use LinkedIn and Twitter. Every social post I publish gets reposted on multiple platforms. So if it originally goes on LinkedIn, eventually it's going to probably go on Twitter. It also gets reposted. The ones that work and perform well get reposted again a few months later and a few months after that and a few months after that.

So when I'm creating content, I'm, what I consider, building a content library of hits. So new posts are experiments to see if it works. If it works, it's now a part of my "library", and it's going to be used over and over and over and over again.

I might publish something on LinkedIn that was originally published 10 years ago and has been published 10 times, or who knows, and I know it's going to work because it always works. So as a result, the pressure to constantly create new content goes away down. I could never create another piece of content and continue to grow my audience just by sharing stuff that I've created in the past that I know works. So social posts is one example.

KEY INSIGHT: View your content as valuable assets that can be used repeatedly—sharing something once wastes the time you invested when it could continue to generate value for years.

Another example is I have my newsletter. I publish a one-paragraph daily weekday edition and then a longer Sunday edition. Everything, or almost everything I share in my newsletter gets reposted in a future newsletter issue oftentimes years later. So my weekly edition, my Sunday edition, I think I just

published the 454th issue. Each one has probably five to 15 links over the years, so I can reuse stuff all the time. I have hundreds of blog posts I published over the years. I've been doing this a long time.

Again, in the beginning you have to build up your archive of content, but I know just this week I shared a link to a blog post that I had written I think eight years ago. I'm still getting value out of a blog post eight years ago, and it's functioning as something the equivalent of creating content for my newsletter this week. Most people aren't doing that. Again, they're creating it, they share it a couple times and then they forget about it. It disappears.

Another example is the format of my podcast is, for the most part, people asking me questions. I craft those answers in ways that are easily clippable and also can easily be converted into social posts. When we're recording the podcast, even though it's a free-flowing conversation, I know in advance, okay, this is probably going to be one of the clips, and when I give that part of the answer I will set it up as if I was setting up a YouTube video.

So I will actually say in the context of the conversation, I'll go, "All right, well, we're talking about how to grow your newsletter. Here are six great ways to grow your newsletter," just like you would as if it were a standalone YouTube video. It's not, it's a podcast, but I know that it's going to be. So I'm always thinking with everything that I do about ways it can be used in multiple different platforms.

And then on top of that, so every question I answer in my podcast gets turned into a social post, get turns into a YouTube video, and then all of that gets shared in my newsletter. So, it's all working together.

The flip side is also true. Someone might ask me a question on my podcast and I'll be like, "You know what? I've already talked about this in a LinkedIn post." So I'm going to answer to them, and I'm not going to necessarily just say, "Hey, here's the LinkedIn post." I might, but I've already done that. I don't need to reinvent the wheel. I'm going to look at the LinkedIn post and I'm going to tell them my answer.

Even with my paid stuff, when people join my clients from content program, which they can check out at joshspecter.com/program, they get access to about 20 skill sessions, which are one-hour video presentations where I teach you how to do something specific, how to grow your newsletter, how to get clients, how to write a one-paragraph newsletter, how to improve your writing, that kind of thing.

So a lot of the stuff in those are new, but a lot of that stuff is also proven strategies that I have shared in other platforms now brought into this paid product. So I'm repurposing, "Hey, I shared a tip about how to grow your newsletter on LinkedIn. I know people loved it. I know they found it helpful. It's going to be featured in the skill session."

I also do monthly office hour calls as part of that program so people can come ask me questions. Well, guess what? My podcast is people asking me questions. So once every two months, an episode of my podcast is clips from the private office hours of me answering people's questions. So literally, I am always trying to have every minute and every second I spend creating content, be designed in a way that can be repurposed, reused, and so that I'm maximizing the value that I get out of it.

And this, to get very meta, our conversation right here is a perfect example of it because you told me what the question was going to be, and this morning I was like, all right, well, what's my answer going to be for Rodney? And I was like, all right, I think it's going to be talking about content as an asset and talking about everything as content.

And this morning on LinkedIn, I wrote essentially what my answer was going to be to you, published it on LinkedIn, so it's already a social post. Now, it's going to be in your ebook. That social post will get linked from my newsletter, will get reused. These two ideas of everything as content and content is an asset will get repurposed, and I'll probably mention them to clients. I'll talk about them as answers to podcast questions, and this cycle goes.

This is, again, it's very meta, but this is a perfect example of what I'm talking about. Most people, I would assume, you would approach them, "Hey, can I ask you a question? Can I interview for this thing?" "Sure, you can." They'd spend a little time thinking about their answer, they'll give you their answer, it'll go in your ebook. People will be like, "Oh, that's great," and that's it. For me, yeah, I'll answer your question, but in my own mind, I'm like, that time is also going to give me social posts and content and newsletter stuff and all these things, which will then, assuming people respond to it well, be reused over and over and over and over again.

That I think is the missing piece. Number one, it's a cure for content creation overwhelm that people feel. I think most people think they struggle to create consistent content because of the creating part. I think what they don't realize is

the problem is they don't get enough out of the content that they actually create. And that's, I guess, the core of my answer to you.

RODNEY: That answer is perfect. It answered everything, why is it important and how do you do it? I mean, I love that because you're maximizing the value of each thing that happens. People create something, oh, I created a tweet. Oh, people loved it. Okay, what do I do now? Well, turn it into the next thing and turn it into the next thing and the next thing, and so now you have so much more. It's like you're dropping seeds and which ones sprout? And then you're saying, "Oh, let's, now that those plants have sprouted, let's take the seeds of those plants, plant them again, and then let's keep sprouting them." Instead of just let's always be making something new. Let's always be planning something new. So I love that you're getting so much more out of the content. Very cool. Wow.

JOSH: It's funny that you said that seed analogy because it reminds me of, again, this is... And by the way, this is the other thing. People will hear me on podcasts being interviewed, and they'll go like, "How do you come up with this stuff on the fly?" And I'm like, "It's not on the fly." What I'm about to tell you, you said the word seeds and it triggered like, oh yeah, here's the thing that I've talked about and shared a bunch of times. And what I was going to say is I use this analogy of with your content that you want to be both farming and fishing. And what I mean by that is there's content that's created to attract and convert immediately the fish. You put your line in the thing and you catch it.

And then there's content that's planted farming, which is planting seeds. Knowing that I have blog posts that I published eight years ago that maybe some people liked, whatever, but when I share it now, it gets me a client. Those were seeds, and they were seeds that attract the people and they pay off over a long period of time.

And I think a lot of times people, besides not maximizing the value they get out of their content, they're too quick to judge. They think of it just as fishing. I put this social post out, it didn't get me a client. It failed. Did it? Maybe it would get you a client if you posted it again six months from now. Maybe the person that was going to resonate with it the most didn't see it because the algorithm didn't show it to them. Maybe they'd see it if you put it in your newsletter.

I think people are very quick to be, this didn't work. Whereas again, I think of it as assets in real estate. And every time I post a single thing out there, I... I'll give you another analogy. If you think about it like the stock market, every piece of

content that you publish is essentially a stock or an asset that you now have ownership of, and all it costs you is the time it took you to create it.

So if someone said to you, "Hey, you can have shares of a stock and all it costs you is an hour to do it, and you now own it for life and can get dividends and can get whatever, and you don't really know, just like the stock market, you might buy some things that stay flat and don't go up in value. You might buy some things that tank and you never get any, but some of them are going to go up, and your investment in it is only what you paid upfront to create it."

And so when you start to think about it like that, you're taking shots and you're acquiring, again, stocks or real estate. That's another thing and that's another way that I think about it. The more content I put out there, the more real estate I have, the more chance that some of those properties, some of that land, is going to go up in value.

RODNEY: I love that, actually. That's a really great analogy because all it took was the time to create it. It's basically you're thinking of it as an investment, and so you're going to then try to maximize the value of the investment. It's just like if you bought land, what's the next step? It's, well, build something on it. Okay, now what can we get out of the thing we built? Oh, we can build a restaurant here, or it can be a home. You can make rent. So that's really cool. I like that.

JOSH: To take the analogy even a step further, this is, again, if you think about the way most people treat their content, if you use this, it's like a piece of land. If their goal was to invest in property and then flip it or make money off of it, you bought a piece of land, you went out one time and said, "Hey, does anybody want to buy this? Does anybody want to rent this? Does anybody want to give me money for this?," and no one said yes, and then you never asked again. Because if you don't ever share it again, if you don't repurpose it, if you don't do anything with it, you took one shot, assumed it didn't work, maybe put it on one platform and that was it.

And it doesn't mean that it's necessarily always going to work, but again, I'm amazed. I will take content that is literally, I have basically cut and paste from an email that I sent to somebody. I already made it. Instead of just showing the one person in my inbox whose question I... This, again, an example, why would I take the time to think about and sit with you and answer your... Not why would I do it.

But if I'm going to take the time to sit and think about and answer your question, why would I not want to take that, what hopefully is value that I'm providing to

you, and provide it to as many people as I can by putting it elsewhere over and over again? That's why I said in the beginning, it's obvious, but people don't do it.

RODNEY: Yes, it is obvious. And I also think people didn't have as many varied perspectives on how to do it as you've shared today. One of the things I talk about in my programs is how important examples are to help people think about something. And so you've given all these examples, and so then it's like my mind is coming alive and I'm thinking, oh, I thought I understood Josh's idea, now I understand it way better because of all the examples you gave.

JOSH: I'm glad you said that, and I think that's the other thing to point out. Because, look, I'm not the only one that says repurpose your content. And lots of people do. And I think to your point, I think lots of people think they're doing it, and they're doing it a little bit, but I don't think they realize how broad the scope is of what they could doing with it.

And again, for me as well, and I'm not saying everyone needs to do it the way I do, but when I'm creating things and coming up with formats, this is in my mind. There is a reason that my podcast is the format it is because I know that I can reuse all of that, and it aligns with ultimately what I want, which is it's a showcase for my...

The reason why my podcast is mostly people asking me questions and not me interviewing them is because I want it to be a showcase for my expertise, because that's the point of the podcast is ultimately to get people to want more of my expertise and hire me and join my program and that kind of thing.

I'm amazed how many people start podcasts, they do the "obvious" thing, which is interview other people and then wonder why the podcast isn't getting them any clients. Unless someone wants to hire you as an interviewer, no one wants to hire you as a copywriter when your podcast is you interviewing other copywriters about how great they are.

RODNEY: Yeah, it makes a lot of sense. It's just like a journalist that interviews a lot of doctors, I don't want to hire them as a doctor, or they interview a lot of lawyers, I'm not going to hire them as a lawyer, I just think, wow, that person's a great interviewer, but that's it.

JOSH: I call myself a content strategist. It's really what I help people with. Really what I'm talking about here is being more strategic in what you create and how

you use it. And I think a lot of people are a little strategic. They think they're being strategic, but they're missing the opportunities.

Whenever I tell people about your inbox is an amazing source of content, it never occurred to them. But as soon as they hear it, they go look at their emails. I've had people do this exercise. I'm like, go look at every email you sent this week, and I guarantee you there are things that you could easily adapt to social posts. It's obvious once you know it, it's just not obvious until someone says, "Hey, go look at your inbox."

RODNEY: Exactly. Exactly. It's easy to miss. And that's why those examples are so powerful because they make you start thinking about it, and then you start thinking, well, what other opportunities have I missed that I might try to do something with? That's awesome. So thank you for that. Yeah, I mean, I thought I understood the idea too, and now I understand it better. So on a scale of zero to 10, I've probably been a two or a three on repurposing, and I'm hoping to bump that up to five to seven after this call and maybe get to 10 at some point.

JOSH: And by the way, I do all this and I feel like I'm missing tons of stuff. I'm trying to think, there was something the other day. Well, I'll give you an example. I was talking about in the podcast how I know where the highlights are going to be, and I said, I introduced them within the podcast almost like I know, oh, this is going to be a video clip, so let me do a setup here.

I don't know, I was 65 episodes in before I realized, hey dummy, you know what the clips are going to be, why don't you just have a one-line intro in the thing instead of for your YouTube clips having to have it awkwardly start in the middle? You're going to list five things, why don't you say, "Hey, I'm going to give you five things to do X, Y, and Z"? Again, I think I probably did 60 or 65 episodes before I had that, what is now obvious, realization. You always learn as you go.

RODNEY: Right. That's exactly right. Well, you learn as you go as long as you question things and think about them, because sometimes people just keep doing the same thing over and over. But if you question-

JOSH: And you have that as a goal, and I think that's the big thing. I always have a goal of how can I get more out of the stuff that I'm spending time creating? And I think just going into it with that mindset and just asking yourself that question will help you surface those things, even if it takes you 65 episodes to realize it.

RODNEY: Right. Well, and now we don't have to take 65 episodes because anybody who's reading the transcript will know now, oh, hey, that's what I should be doing, and so they'll get there a lot quicker. Awesome. So Josh, if somebody wants to get into your world, what's the best entry point for them?

JOSH: So JoshSpector.com is my website. To sign up for my newsletter, you can get it linked from there, but also you can go to fortheinterested.com/subscribe. That's always the place to start.

I am on LinkedIn, I'm on Twitter, [@JSpector](https://twitter.com/JSpector).

And my Clients From Content program, JoshSpector.com/program, like I said, you get access to all these skill sessions. If you've found the things that I've been talking about helpful and useful, you will love that stuff. And both the skill sessions, which you can get on their own, you can just get the skill sessions, you get access to all of them for \$99 a year, which is, not to toot my own horn, but an amazing deal. Or for \$299 a year, you can get all of them and access to my monthly office hours calls.

And on those, what's cool is you can come on each month, or email in your questions if you can't join live, and I'll give you one-on-one help with your specific stuff. So it's easy to hear me go like, "Oh, here's that strategy," but I have people come on those calls and they're like, "Can you take a look at my sales page? What am I missing? Here's my email that I'm going to send. What do you think the subject line should be?" It's like that sort of hands-on tactical stuff.

And again, just hopefully people could see from our conversation here, a lot of times it's just a little idea, a little shift, a little whatever, that makes things so much more effective for people.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM JOSH SPECTOR

On fishing vs. farming content: Some content is meant to catch immediate results (fishing), while other content plants seeds that may attract people and pay off over a long period. Don't judge content too quickly as failures—the person who will resonate with it most might see it six months from now.

On strategic format choices: Design your content formats with reuse in mind. Josh's podcast features people asking him questions rather than him interviewing others specifically because

it showcases his expertise and creates easily repurposable content that drives clients to his business.

Ready to maximize the value of every piece of content you create? Visit JoshSpector.com or subscribe to his newsletter at fortheinterested.com/subscribe to learn how to turn your content into a client-getting machine that works for you over and over again.

Kristina God - The content flywheel: Amplifying your message across platforms

Reading time: 7 minutes

RODNEY: Today we have Kristina God, a bestselling Substack writer and award-winning marketing expert who empowers writers to grow and monetize their work part-time.

With over 15 years of experience in journalism and marketing, Kristina has built a thriving online presence, earning hundreds of paid subscribers and amassing over 134,000 monthly views on Substack.

Her insights have reached millions on Medium, with features on platforms like AOL and Bored Panda. She believes writing should be joyful and soulful.

And here's a fun twist—Kristina once worked with actress Cynthia Nixon, renowned for her role as Miranda Hobbes in *Sex and the City*!

Welcome, Kristina.

KRISTINA: So glad to be here, Rodney.

RODNEY: So the question I'm asking everyone is what's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients?

KRISTINA: Yeah, the flywheel that you can build this content flywheel, something like this.

RODNEY: Ooh, that would be good. Yeah, that'd be a great one.

KRISTINA: The most important thing maybe could be this flywheel, which you can build with whatever platform you would want, but I think Medium and Substack is a great example. So as you might know, I started writing on Medium in December 2020, and then in fall 2022, I decided to not put all eggs in one basket. I also wanted to start my Substack newsletter. And it wasn't just the Substack newsletter, it was also YouTube, because my husband said, "You have to go beyond words because you want to become a better speaker."

So I not only went with the email list, I also went with YouTube. So you could say, I built this Medium-YouTube-Substack flywheel because this was my

triangle, my content triangle, where I really didn't do more, I just took parts of it. And these platforms that would otherwise work in silos, I put them together and link them together. And this really helped me grow.

KEY INSIGHT: Building a content flywheel across multiple platforms multiplies your reach without creating more content—you simply repurpose pieces across platforms to build a self-reinforcing system.

Apparently my unfair advantage is that I am a marketing and brand manager. I have a journalism degree, I have a marketing MBA degree. But back then I didn't realize this. And during writing, I started with parenting family topics. Then I realized, apparently I love to write on a meta level, meaning from a marketing background, I love to share news about platforms. It started with Medium, and then I expanded this to Substack where I also started sharing things about Substack.

What I did was I took the best performing stuff from Medium that got hundreds of views or reads on Medium and publications like Better Marketing. I took this content and then I put it on YouTube that I used it as a script, and then I was just changing some parts of it to make it more casual or more natural flow. And then I would record these videos. And then these videos, of course, I would promote via my newsletter. And then I would write a short form post on Medium. This was like this triangle. So that really every channel helped each other. This was the idea of it.

I had written Words on Medium, which was my blog. I had this visual content where I would also speak, and of course in the beginning it took me hours to record one video. My husband was standing there, and I was like, "Hello, this is Kristina." And I was like, oh no, I have to start all over. It was really, really painful. But of course I became better and better.

Now the really cool thing is that what I did for a long time was I was on Medium. I shared these stories, for instance, about Substack, and then at the end of my stories, I said, "Hey, just that I have 8,000 subscribers or 4,000 or whatever. Why not join the online writing club for more?" So I really used it at the bottom. I had this call to action also in my short bio on Medium, I put this call to action or this link.

So everything for me was this funnel going from the followers, because I knew followers were dead, to the subscribers. I saw this really as a funnel and also with YouTube. This helped me because then people would say, "Hey, I saw you on YouTube. I love your voice. I love how you talk. I love your German accent."

Of course there were others saying, "You talk too fast. I hate your German accent." This is part of the game of course, because you're putting yourself out there, you're making yourself vulnerable, super vulnerable. But I think that such a flywheel really, really works.

Again, this flywheel, what this flywheel really means is that you have one piece of content and this one piece of content isn't just for one platform. You could do this as a part-time writer. This is the best part. It's not that I'm saying, "Hey, you have to be on every platform on Instagram, on Facebook and everything." You can see this as in my example, if I would be super strategic or if I would have more time, then I would be on Medium every day, on Substack every day, I would be on YouTube every day. But it doesn't work like this.

KEY INSIGHT: The goal of a content flywheel isn't to be everywhere—it's to strategically choose 2-3 platforms where one is your "beating heart" (newsletter) and the others feed into it.

For me, my part-time flywheel is at least that I publish one video per week, like long-form video on YouTube max, or on a bi-weekly basis. Then I take this video now and publish it as a Substack podcast, which was a recommendation from a Substack employee because this person said to me, "Hey Kristina, why not use this and put it on Substack? But it has to be a podcast and this is going to be more helpful for you in regard to the views."

And then of course, everything I am sharing on the newsletter, I'm also sharing on YouTube in the community tab where I can then tell, "Hey, I'm having this new newsletter, you can check it out. Or I have a new course or a bootcamp," or whatever. And then on Medium, which to be honest at the moment, I'm not so often on Medium anymore because I don't believe in the follower metric anymore.

I'm growing super fast on Substack, I'm gaining more subscribers than followers on Medium. And my goal was always to get more subscribers than followers, which I now almost reached. If I reach 13,000 subscribers, I've got to have more subscribers than followers and I always wanted to reach this point.

So you take one piece of content, this can be the written word, you take this and then you have this long form piece for instance. You chop this into 10 parts. You then can say, "Hey, I'm going to publish this as a short form post, or 10 short form posts on Medium or the other way around, these are 10 short form posts on Medium. I put them together as a long form newsletter."

I'm seeing so many people also just repurposing stuff. Walter Ryan is a great example. He has written so many stories on Medium. Now he's taking everything he has and putting this on his Substack newsletter, which then helps him to earn more money because on Medium it might not get boosted, but then on Substack people might say, "Hey, I love this. I'm going to become a paid subscriber."

So this flywheel not only helps you to be seen more to amplify your reach, to amplify your message. If you have one specific thing you want everyone to know, you can share this through all the platforms in your content triangle. But I'd recommend just having two platforms, because so many people are experiencing platform fatigue. They say, "Hey, it's too much. I'm overwhelmed."

So I'd always go with two platforms at least, and I would always use just one platform where you say, okay, this is my primary platform for instance, this is my newsletter because this is super important for me. I want to gain subscribers and then I might have another platform where I'm sharing my stuff.

Or if you're there to become a multimedia writer, which I think is going to be a thing definitely in the future, also with short videos—the founder of Patreon said that he thinks that you can really grow now with videos. Videos because of TikTok, not the reading behavior, but the consumer's brains has changed and they are longing for short form.

KEY INSIGHT: A newsletter is the "beating heart" of your content ecosystem—platforms like Medium, LinkedIn, and YouTube are valuable as tributaries that feed people into your subscriber list.

What I see for many coming from TikTok or coming from Instagram or coming from LinkedIn, especially if they come from Instagram, they changed the whole algorithm. The algorithm now shows only less than 1% of your content. They come into Substack and they're telling me, "Kristina, for the first time, I'm feeling seen again, because before the algorithm buried everything I created, although I have been creating on the platform for years."

Or people coming from YouTube who had huge shows and then realizing, "Hey, I can't do this anymore because of my mental health. I'm having two kids in the house. I'm having these cooking shows where I'm showing how awesome I'm cooking, but it's not good for my mental health. So I definitely have to stop. And I also feel so lonely because I'm building this, but I'm not building a community."

They're coming to Substack, suddenly only a small percentage of your 100,000 subscribers becoming paid supporters. You don't have to have 100,000 subscribers on YouTube, but let's say you have 10,000 subscribers. It's just a small percentage who say, "Hey, I want to support this writer." You can already earn \$500 per month, a thousand dollars per month, \$3,000 per month.

This is the idea of the subscription based model, and that's why I always say, I would always put my newsletter in the middle of it. If it's like a body, there are all the different platforms, but always go with newsletter at your heart and whatever the legs are for you. This can also be X, the arms might be LinkedIn, because you can reach out to people who would want coaching.

And the best thing really is if people can say, "Hey, Rodney, I saw you on Substack. I also saw you on Medium," and this builds trust because they know you're a prolific writer, you're sharing your stuff, and apparently you can build an audience and build a community. This will definitely help you be seen more. And at the end, this is the most important thing, make people really, really trust you. Because we live in a trust recession. No one is trusting each other anymore.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. And so for you, the newsletter is the place everyone wants to go, and the flywheel is all about all the other things that will bring people there. And you mentioned Medium, bringing people there. LinkedIn could bring people there. And I think also notes can bring people there too, right?

KRISTINA: Yeah, definitely. Notes is one of the biggest growth tools. You also can grow via this built-in audience. Of course, there are many growth features with Substack, but yeah, also super important. I think what we have to understand really is that the follower metric really is gone. It doesn't exist anymore. Of course, it's nice to check the followers, but it's so easy to just follow. And if you gain a subscriber similar to Substack, where you also can see, for instance, I have more than 20,000 followers on Substack. I just have 12,000 subscribers. What you want to do is you want to convert these followers into subscribers.

RODNEY: Awesome. Fantastic. I love that.

KRISTINA: I hope this helps. I guess this can be a differentiation point here to the others there you have already.

RODNEY: Yes, for sure. For sure. You're the only one that's talked about a flywheel, that's for sure.

KRISTINA: Yeah. Cool.

RODNEY: And now when people, after they hear this, they want to go find more information about you, where should they go?

KRISTINA: Yeah, they can go to <https://www.onlinewritingclub.com>, and this is the newsletter. And then I would also say maybe [YouTube](#), you can link to both.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM KRISTINA GOD

On platform selection: Don't try to be everywhere—pick 2-3 platforms strategically with your newsletter as the core. For time-strapped creators, focusing on quality over quantity of platforms is essential.

On building trust: In an era of decreasing trust, being visible across multiple platforms helps establish your credibility. When someone says, "I saw you on Substack AND on Medium," it creates a more substantial relationship than single-platform visibility.

What content formats could you repurpose across your own platforms to create a more efficient workflow?

Want to build your own content flywheel?

Visit <https://www.onlinewritingclub.com> to learn how Kristina helps writers amplify their message across platforms while maintaining their newsletter as the beating heart of their online presence.

Michael Simmons - High-quality content: Creating work that stands out in an AI world

Reading time: 7 minutes

RODNEY: Today, we have Michael Simmons, a thought leader and award-winning entrepreneur who empowers individuals to create blockbuster content and become recognized experts. With over two decades of experience in personal development and content creation, Michael has built multiple seven-figure businesses, and his writing has been featured in prestigious publications like Time, Fortune, and Harvard Business Review. And a fun fact, at 16, he co-founded a business with Cal Newport, author of Deep Work. I'm so glad to have you here, Michael.

MICHAEL: Likewise. I'm excited.

RODNEY: Yeah, this is going to be fun. So, here's the question I've been asking everyone. What's one strategy or technique that's working really well for you or your clients right now?

MICHAEL: I think there's a strategy that's so simple and basic that's overlooked, which is creating really high-quality content, the highest quality that you can without procrastinating, and then improving with every article, trying to improve the level of quality. And in my opinion, most writers focus way too much on lots of different tactics and lots of different platforms, but their writing isn't at a high enough level of quality such that people will like it on any platform.

But if your quality is high enough, almost no matter what platform you're on, you can find success and stand out. This is particularly important in a world where not only is the amount of content exploding because people are creating content, but as AI comes onto the scene, there's going to be explosion of the quantity and quality of the content.

KEY INSIGHT: Focus on content quality over tactics and platforms—as AI increases content volume, only truly exceptional work will stand out regardless of where it's published.

RODNEY: Got it. What defines high-quality content for you?

MICHAEL: I think it is a very subjective thing, so there's different ways of looking at it. You could look at it as a fit. You're solving a problem for the client. You could look at quality in terms of just the quality of the production. How good is the writing? Or the quality of the idea. That's one thing I separate. A lot of people think, "Oh, it's good writing," and make it general, but there's a difference between the quality of an idea, how well it's packaged, the idea is packaged, and then how well it's turned into a piece of content.

So, one can get advanced as one goes by on all the intricacies of it, but I think the key thing is doing the best that you can, and then every article even trying to increase your standard for quality as well, not just the level of quality.

RODNEY: Got it. Well, how do you ensure that you have a high quality idea?

MICHAEL: I'd say for a lot of these things is breaking down the process of the thought leadership into its fundamental components, number one. And learning how to be good at the different components. One way to do that is by studying what has worked in the past, so looking at the data.

Some areas are harder to find than others, but one way to do it is to look at what are the qualities of the highest quality ideas that have spread the most throughout society? What are they ideas of? And how are they packaged, the naming of it? How are they introduced in the articles, the visuals that go along with it? And ultimately, that just helps you come up with better ideas that you can test.

But I have a 20 test rule that, for ideal case, whenever you have a new idea, you're immediately socializing it with lots of people as you talk to them one-on-one, people on your team, people in classes that you talk to, so you can get real live feedback, and then also posting it on social media. But if you're improving as you share it with more people, you just see how it resonates, what parts of it resonates, and you could find better ways to communicate it.

RODNEY: So your 20 test, is that 20 people that you then share it with?

MICHAEL: It could be either one. It could be 20 separate people. It could be sharing it on social media. But the key idea is you just want to build in... You know, 20 isn't a magical number, but it symbolizes you just want to get it out of your head as soon as possible and get as much feedback as quickly as possible.

I think someone who's gifted at this, they can come up with an idea and get that, they have enough people in their network or they're getting close to that number

within a few days. Where someone else, they might take an entire year to, okay, perfecting it and just keeping it to themselves rather than jumping out. And the person who's able to come with lots of ideas and test them quicker, I think is just going to be much more successful and impactful.

KEY INSIGHT: Test ideas widely and quickly—socialize concepts with at least 20 people or platforms to get feedback rather than perfecting in isolation.

RODNEY: Got it. And what do you do with the feedback? And when you ask for feedback, do you just give them the entire piece of writing and say, "Give me feedback," or do you do anything in particular to ensure that they can give you useful feedback?

MICHAEL: In general, unless I'm paying someone to be an editor, which I do, I don't share them the whole... I feel like the worst thing you can do to a friend is send them a 3,000 word multiple times and ask them to give feedback. And general feedback of like, "Hey, what do you think about this?"

So I think being aware of what you're trying to iterate on is helpful. Are you trying to iterate on the title, the intro, the idea? Are you asking them for their particular opinion, like imagine they didn't know you and saw the idea? Or are you asking for their analysis as someone who's an expert in the field, how do they think? What do they think about it?

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. So you don't ask for comprehensive feedback, you ask for feedback on a specific element.

MICHAEL: When talking to somebody, a friend or a thought partner. Just so that way... Because otherwise what happens is if you give this long thing, it takes somebody a long time to give feedback. And if you say, "Hey, what are your general thoughts?" most people aren't expert at giving feedback and they're more likely to give feedback that might not even be the kind you're looking for. And so it just wastes their time and then they have a bad experience.

Where if you know what you're looking for feedback on, let's say it's a title, you say, "Hey, what do you think about the title? How would you rate it on a 10 point scale?" Or, "Do you think you would click on this?" Or, "Pick, here are five different titles. Which one do you like the most?" That takes about 10 seconds for someone to do and is really easy to do and valuable.

RODNEY: Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, because I literally have that situation where somebody said, "Here, I wrote this book. Can you tell me what you think of it?"

And then I started reading it and then I was like, wow, this is a lot. And then a month later I'm like, oh, I still haven't finished it. And I sent a note to apologize to him a couple of days ago. I said, "I'm sorry I just dropped this."

But yeah, it would've been so much more helpful if he had said, "Here's what I'm looking for." Because I'm looking at it and I see various kinds of flaws, but yeah, I'm not sure what he would want. Does he want me to comment on the entire structure, which I think should be changed? Or does he want me to comment on the fact that I'm confused as to the point of it? What is the thing that he's looking for? So that's really good. So I'm actually going to probably come back to him with some questions, say, "Hey, what were you looking for in this?" I'm like, "I'm halfway through it."

MICHAEL: Yeah, exactly. Because a lot of times what they're looking for, you could actually... Once you really get down to it, you can actually give that feedback pretty quickly.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. All right. Now, one of the things you mentioned is this look at ideas that have spread throughout society and how they were packaged and things like that, and use those as models. So what's an example that maybe everybody would really be able to grasp of one that you examined that had spread through society?

MICHAEL: Well, just to give... I have a mental model called Idea Mountain that helps me remember it. But just knowing that some of the different categories, there's actually a finite number of things that people generally name. It's a type of person or thing. It could be a type of society. Like you might've heard of orchid child or dandelion child as like a... Even knowledge worker. Somebody coined that term at some point. Or it's a type of company, like a social enterprise or lifestyle company.

At one point, somebody actually named those terms of what the thing is. You could be naming a discipline or a domain, like Freakonomics or futurology is combining naming a thing. Crisis Investing was a famous book in the eighties, or Ryan Holiday wrote the book Growth Marketing, which is the first growth marketing book, in I think 2013. You can name a problem that people have, XYZ crisis or dilemma. You can name a mental model or framework or a fallacy. And

then you can name an intervention like an action step or belief. Those are just a few. There's a few more, but that gives you a general idea.

And so, some famous ones would be Nassim Taleb with *Black Swan* and *Antifragile*, and Cal Newport with *Deep Work*, or Eric Ries with *Lean Startup*. Those are some different ones.

RODNEY: Got it. So someone had a concept and they came up with the right term, and then they were able to promote that concept, either in a book like *The Black Swan* or... Yeah. So seems like books are some of the better ways to do a lot of these. Because I remember when I first heard the term knowledge worker, it was in the book *Getting Things Done*, and that stuck with me. I never forgot that term, even though I read that book when it first came out, before it was as well known as it is today. And yeah, it just sticks with you when you go, oh, I never thought that such a thing... I had never thought that idea before. Like why certain jobs are different than... Oh, it's a knowledge worker type job. So that's really interesting to think.

And so, when you create these high quality pieces of content, are you then trying to take one concept and spread it that way, to package it that way to make it...

MICHAEL: Yeah. Well, the ideas can spread in articles as well. 1000 True Fans started off as just a blog post by Kevin Kelly. And so once you see the power of an idea, just that one article, that article spread virally, but the concept itself spread way more virally. Millions of people, if I said, "Do you know what a true fan is, 1000 True Fans?" they would know about it. If you Googled it, you'd see tons of other people have written articles. Probably several people have written books about it.

KEY INSIGHT: Package ideas with memorable names to increase spread—concepts like "knowledge worker," "Black Swan," or "1000 True Fans" become viral because they crystallize complex ideas into shareable terms.

And so, a lot of people think, "Oh, I just want my piece of content to spread virally," where I more think rather than content marketing, I think concept marketing, and that the article is a device to spread the idea, basically.

RODNEY: I like that concept. Have you talked about that specific word concept marketing before?

MICHAEL: I have, yeah.

RODNEY: Okay.

MICHAEL: But my challenge now is I just have... I've coined probably a hundred words, so if I were doing it in the optimal way, I'd probably focus a little bit more and just keep on hitting on the same ideas over and over. But I'm also a very curious person as well.

RODNEY: Yeah, you definitely are curious. I started reading your stuff on Medium, and you've written about a lot of different ideas. You have an endless appetite, which is awesome. But I really like that term concept marketing. That would be an interesting thing to dig more into at some point. Yeah, because concept marketing, that encapsulates basically all the things you were saying today. It's concept marketing.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I think that... Yeah, to put a... How I see it is just that I think people are in some sort of dogmatism that was somehow spread of like, okay, you need to... Not publishing at all is bad, so you need to publish and the key to success is publishing consistently. And there is truth to that. Publishing something is always better than publishing nothing.

But it's just so competitive to stand out online that publishing like you're good enough, especially when you're just starting, is almost always going to fail. And over time, you're just going to see, okay, it's not getting as much traction as you expected. You're not going to know why. And at some point you're going to stop being consistent because there's getting the return.

Where when you focus on doing your best every time, you're much more likely to rise above the noise and not only creates an inequality, but you're actually creating a deeper relationship with people. You're becoming more memorable, they're more likely to upgrade to your newsletter, more likely to check out your other articles because this one really stood out. And you also gain and appreciate...

Like if you're just dashing something out, you're practicing the ability to ship, but when you focus on quality, you're practicing your understanding of quality and you get new insights on what quality means on each level, each article. And then you're like, "Okay, well, I can see I'm missing this ability. Let me learn this skill that would help me get better at naming ideas or identifying names."

RODNEY: Got it. Yeah, I could see that, because... And then wrapping that all up into the concept of the idea of concept marketing, I can see, because concept marketing involves finding the high quality idea. Okay, finding the high-quality expression of that idea. How do you package it as far as naming it is concerned? And then also the quality of the writing, whatever it is that you're doing. So that's really cool. I love that. I love that. I love the idea of focusing on quality.

Because I can see some people are really good at quantity. They just boom, boom, boom, get stuff out there, and maybe they get traction that way sometimes. But then there's other people who are like, "I don't know if I have a huge number of ideas, but maybe I have one or two really good ones. How do I spread those and do it in a high-quality way?" like you're talking about. So I like that there's two completely different approaches like that.

MICHAEL: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I think it's easy to feel good about yourself publishing consistently, and then you get free followers, and then you do all these marketing things of, "Okay, we're going to promote each other's posts," or things like that. And there's nothing innately wrong with those things, but it gives the feeling of growth, but it's not necessarily the path to building a business where people are paying you and then staying subscribed. And so it can be a false compass, I would say.

RODNEY: Got it. Got it. All right, so if people want to know more about you and what you do and kind of get into your world, where should they go? How should they do that?

MICHAEL: Let's see. I would say just my newsletter, and that's blockbuster.thoughtleader.school.

RODNEY: Blockbuster.thoughtleader.school. And when they get there, what's the first thing they should do when they get there?

MICHAEL: Read... I tried to pin some of my favorite articles near the top or a recent one, so to check out one of those.

RODNEY: Okay. And is there an article on concept marketing in there?

MICHAEL: No. I have one on... I've made one kind of on titles that there's a little bit talking about it, but not one on concept marketing. So that would be... I should write one on that.

RODNEY: Well, I was going to say because I had never heard that term, even though I love that term. I was going to look it up to see if you've written more about it, because I'm like, oh, I might want to talk about this idea and I want to see what Michael has said.

MICHAEL: I'll put that on my list to write about.

RODNEY: Yeah. Yeah, I'd love to see that. Okay. Awesome. Well, before we go, is there anything else you want to say that maybe everyone should hear about?

MICHAEL: Yeah. Well, in my newsletter I write about thought leadership, where I break down each component of thought leadership, and then how to bolster that with AI. And I think in the next few years, my hypothesis would be that it'll become really, really hard to stand out and succeed as a thought leader unless you are working with AI.

And working with AI doesn't mean just making things more efficient or you click a button and it writes an article that you don't know anything about. I think for a lot of people, they write not for just monetary reasons, but because they love the process of learning something, thinking about it, and growing as a human being. And I think if you know that, you can use AI to not only create more high quality, but to really maximize your own growth in the writing process as well.

RODNEY: Got it. And I think it's a really important point, the thing you said about AI, people needing to use AI eventually, because I completely agree with that. I actually wrote an article on that, I haven't published it yet, but I actually think that right now it's an advantage to be using AI, but eventually it's going to be the only way to even keep up at all.

Because when everybody that's successful is using it... Right now, everyone that's successful isn't using it. Some are and some aren't, or some are using it a little. But at some point, everyone that's making any kind of splash is using it to amplify their impact. And if you're not, that's like the table stakes almost at some point. Whereas right now, it's like an advantage, it's an edge. But in the future, I don't think it'll be an edge anymore. I think it'll be just what's necessary.

MICHAEL: Yeah. And it's not necessarily... At this point, it's not even close to the thing where it's like, okay, I'll do it when it gets better and I'll just suddenly be good at it. It really is this unique skill set that is complicated.

So if it's something you want to do, I think now is one of the best times to do it, because the difference between being a little bit ahead where you're kind of serving the frontier, but you're ahead of others is a much better feeling and much more rewarding because you stand out, than if you're behind, it's more like you're fighting to catch up to something that feels like it's pulling ahead further and further ahead, and that you're kind of fighting just to stay alive. So that's why I think timing is a big part of the equation.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM MICHAEL SIMMONS

On targeted feedback: Asking for specific feedback on individual elements (like titles or introductions) rather than general opinions makes feedback on your work (articles, books) more productive and less burdensome for everyone involved.

On AI integration: Working with AI will soon be essential for thought leaders—not to replace creativity, but to enhance it. Starting now gives you an advantage over those who will be struggling to catch up later.

Want to create high-quality content that stands out in an AI-driven world? Visit blockbuster.thoughtleader.school to learn Michael's approach to thought leadership, concept marketing, and using AI to enhance your creative process rather than replace it.

Robert Plank - Podcasting: Your ticket to unlimited content and expert connections

Reading time: 8 minutes

RODNEY: Robert Plank is the founder of Done For you Podcasting at dfypodcast.com. He is the host of the Marketer of the Day podcast, MarketerOfTheDay.com and author of WWHW, Why, What, How-To, What-If at wwwhwbook.com. He has helped thousands of people create online businesses through his 840 podcast episodes, 15 books and 15 online courses. He's fond of asking "How can you use your podcast and book as an advertising, marketing and traffic tool to fulfill your wildest dreams?". All right, Robert, thank you for being in here.

ROBERT: Super excited to be here. I'm pumped. I'm jazzed. Whatever the kids say these days.

RODNEY: I know, right? There's always something different. You got to throw in some emojis and then you've got the message, right?

ROBERT: Yeah.

RODNEY: All right. So Robert, what is the number one thing that's really working for you or your clients right now?

ROBERT: Podcasting.

RODNEY: Podcasting. All right. Tell us about podcasting.

ROBERT: Podcasting is sort of what we're doing right now, here. Everyone has gotten used to meeting on a Zoom call and video chat, and the best thing that anyone can do to be an expert, as you know, is you become friends with other experts that way you are associated with other thought leaders in your industry, that way they create content for you. That way you start off this relationship with giving because you're giving them access to your platform, to your audience.

Everyone needs to podcast. Even someone who is a nine to five career person, even maybe someone who's even a student, you don't necessarily have to be a business owner or an entrepreneur, it's better if you are, and everyone needs to podcast, it can be as simple as you meet on a Zoom call, you ask somebody

interesting questions about why they got started, what makes them unique, what's missing in their industry. And this is basically your ticket to unlimited content because you've record a Zoom call, now you have a YouTube video, now you can have it in audio and have it on iTunes, have it on Google Play. You can transcribe it or get notes created and now you have blog posts. You can get it made into social graphics.

KEY INSIGHT: Podcasting creates relationships with other experts while simultaneously generating content you can repurpose across multiple platforms—one conversation becomes videos, audio, blog posts, and social media content.

So, just like how we were saying just moments ago, how people of a certain age speak in a certain way, and then the kids these days, they like their emojis or they like their TikTok, or they like their short form of content. You can have a conversation with someone that you want to be associated with and then recycle or repurpose all this content into long form, into short form, and it's basically your ticket to having content, having relationships and having an online presence.

RODNEY: Got it. Now, I love how you mentioned recycling it into all these different forms. So, what are some of the ways that you've recycled some of the content you've gotten from podcasts?

ROBERT: First of all, post to YouTube. Second, get it onto the usual podcasting platforms. Third, create what are called podcast notes which is basically a bio of the guest, a summary, key quotes, important links and resources, timestamps where interesting talking points were spoken and then creating little video clips like we've seen on social media like people like Gary Vaynerchuck have where you have 30 second or one minute clips with the subtitles burned in.

And then you find important helpful quotes that someone said throughout the interview. You find a graphic, a headshot of that person. You put it on a graphic, you put URL, you put their quote on there. And those are kind of the top, I don't know how many were those, six or seven types of content. So that way, you basically bring someone on, all they have to do is be themselves, have a conversation, speak about what they're passionate about anyway and then you do all the marketing for them and put it into of these avenues, all these channels.

RODNEY: Got it. All right. It sounds really amazing and of course we've seen it because everybody in the world knows about podcasts and has seen them and almost everyone, I can't remember what the statistics are, but there's a stat out there about how many Americans regularly listen to a podcast. So, everyone knows about it and has experienced it. And people who want to start a business though, what tends to get in their way? What tends to be the obstacles that stop them from creating such a useful tool?

ROBERT: What tends to get in the way are the details. And then also maybe secondary to that is the fear, the procrastination, which is disguising as fear. And it's just... When you and I say podcasting, I guarantee that a lot of people listening are thinking like, okay, well, you said make the graphics, what tool do I use? It really doesn't matter. You use Canva, you go to Fiverr, you hire a person and get a few things done.

When you say, "Well, what kind of web camera do I use or what kind of microphone do I use?" The answer is whatever is built into your computer for now, knowing that the quantity will eventually equal the quality, which means that, you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation here, I've got 840 podcasts. This wasn't at the very beginning. I was just wearing this cheapo little \$25 headset and now I have the Bluetooth earbuds, and I have a fancy microphone that's just out of the shot and fancy camera.

KEY INSIGHT: Don't let technical details or fear stop you from starting—use whatever equipment you have now and focus on quantity first, knowing that quality will improve as you gain experience.

And so people get so hung up on, where do I host my podcast? How do I meet with someone? Well, the answer is on Zoom. How do I record a video conversation? The answer is Zoom has a record button that I know you Rodney just clicked just before we were speaking in our conversation.

And so, the solution for most people's struggles and problems is don't think so much. Go ahead and do it and find someone, anyone that you can talk about and speak to. I mean, heck even if you got your mom or your wife or someone like that to just interview you about your business and why you got started and to put your expertise in simple terms, even that is a good starting point for just a quick five or 10 minute first episode of your podcast, your first piece of content, and then you have something to work with.

And when moving from there, you could, if you have customers, if you have clients, then interview them about what it is they do or how you have helped them or even find other authors or other podcasters that you want to be associated with, or people you know on social media, just get some of these conversations started.

Don't worry about making it perfect. It guaranteed will not be perfect at first, but it will approach perfection as long as you stick with this habit and do it over time. Don't worry about what tool you use. Any tool will do. Just get into a conversation, get something recorded, get something online. Don't make it so complicated. Just do it.

RODNEY: Got it. And in light of trying to not make it complicated, right? If you were just to give someone three things, if they said I should get started on a podcast by next weekend, what were the three minimum steps would you break it down to?

ROBERT: Well, we already spoke about the... You need to get someone on a Zoom call and get their recording going, but to make it easy as far as the formats, people are always thinking, well, what length should my conversation be? What structure? The structure that works for me is what you mentioned at the beginning. Why, what, how to, what if, and you know from your educational background Rodney, there's a thing called 4 MAT where they say, well, in order to reach different kids, some kids are why thinkers. Some are what thinkers, some are how to thinkers, some are what if thinkers, but if you put it in this sequence, if you think about your podcast conversation or really anything that you create from this point forward, if you hit on all of those four sections of the format, but you put it into this exact sequence, then you'll have a really fun, interesting blog post, book chapter, webinar, but especially podcast conversations.

So, if you'll let me make it four instead of three items, when you have a conversation with someone, any conversation but especially a podcast, first of all ask the person why. Why am I listening to you? Why would someone pay attention to you? What problem brought them to you? So, why are we tuning in the first place? Give me some juicy hooks, give me something interesting and exciting. And then once you get to the why, which is basically the problem, the attention getter, what brought me here, then we move over into the what. We talk about, well, we're not quite to the stage where we're solving this problem yet. You bring on like a SAT prep instructor and you say, "Well, why would kids these

days want to listen to a SAT prep instructor? Can't they just read the book? Can't they just study?

And so, you unpack that part first. And then what. So, instead of just saying, well, here's how you pass your SAT test with a perfect score, you get into the principles or the tools that are going to be used to solve this problem in a moment. And you might even dig into alternatives and what happens if you don't take this seriously or what happens if you don't use these tools. What you might say as a SAT prep instructor that, well, the tools could be like you need to set aside time to study or have good time management, or get this tutor.

You kind of talk about the tools in the toolbox and then you get into solving the problem. How to step by step. So now that you know what the problem is, now that you know what the tools are that will solve it, now take these six steps and you recap it really quickly and say, "Here are the six steps." You unpack each step and that way your conversation can be as short or as long as you want because you can spend a couple of minutes saying here's step one, two and three, or maybe spend a lot of time unpacking step four and then recap it at the end.

KEY INSIGHT: The WWHW framework (Why, What, How-To, What-If) creates compelling conversations that engage different thinking styles while maintaining a logical flow that leads to actionable conclusions.

And then we get to what if, which is a really fun way to end anything that you have or say because now you get into the checklist, the assignment, the next steps, the things that you can now accomplish now that you've gotten a perfect score on your SATs. Maybe it's time to take the LSAT or the ACTs or apply to college.

But to make any piece of content or especially a podcast conversation really quick, really smooth, really action packed, really exciting, why am I listening to you? What are we about to use to solve the problem? How do we solve the problem? What are the steps? And now that we've solved the problem, what if? What are the possibilities? What can I do now? So, those are my three and a half or maybe four things that you need to really keep in mind especially in any conversation. Why, what, how to, what if.

RODNEY: Got it? I love that you give a specific structure and that that structure is so flexible because you can see how any type of content would work in that structure especially if it's something that has a practical nature to it. Something that people actually need to do. You can see how all those steps would actually make it possible and it's not going to come out cookie cutter like every podcast is the same because each expert has a different why and a different how to, a different set of what ifs. So, I think that's pretty brilliant. That's awesome that you put that together into a book.

ROBERT: Well, thank you.

RODNEY: Yeah. So, what would you... If people want to find out more about you and what you do, what would be the best place for them to go to find out more?

ROBERT: The best place is MarketerOfTheDay.com where as you said it, there are 840 episodes. I interview people from all walks of life. I think that everyone is a marketer regardless of what they do, regardless of their industry. Everyone needs to step up and sell themselves and put themselves in an exciting package and show how they are unique and newsworthy. And so, you can get all kinds of examples from people. Like there's a guy that runs nonprofits, there's a lady that teaches dieting by adding special spice on your Indian food. There's a guy that teaches how to open 30 credit cards and use all the points and all the miles and get all kinds of free stuff.

So, there's all kinds of exciting people from all walks of life that is MarketerOfTheDay.com and then the service to get your podcast going and making it a machine that just runs where all you have to do is just click the record button, sit in your car, pull out your phone or maybe be hop on a video chat like this and interview exciting guests and give it to me and my team and will put it on your website. We'll make the blog post. We'll make the social graphics. We'll make the video clips, all that cool stuff that is dfypodcast.com. That is a done For You Podcasting service because so many people fail to even get started. You should just get started.

But then there's kind of a middle ground growing pains where it's easy to have a bunch of guests and almost become too successful for your own good and have like 20, 30, 50 podcast episodes. Now you're saying, I've got to edit all these videos, how am I going to schedule all these things? Why not make it easier? Why not just be the person that is the face of your business and shows up and

makes some recordings with some interesting guests that is dfypodcast.com. That is our Done For You Podcasting service.

RODNEY: Awesome. And you know, I love that you brought that up because one of the obstacles I think some people have is they actually want it. If the people who want it done well and have money to get started may just want to get started that way. Because if they're all perfectionist, well, hey, get the interview done, let Robert's service take care of all the details for you, which I think is great. Or people who've already done it but have 20 episodes that they still need to do stuff with, because I had a client like that who had a bunch of episodes not published because she wanted to do things with them and she just was busy and they had a hard time. And so, I'm going to recommend your service. I think that's a great idea. Fantastic. Awesome.

ROBERT: Everyone needs it.

RODNEY: Everyone needs it. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for coming today Robert. I really enjoyed the call. I learned some things. I actually took some notes here on the things that you said so that I'm going to follow up with. And so, thank you so much.

ROBERT: You're very welcome.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM ROBERT PLANK

On content repurposing: The key to maximizing your podcast's value is systematic repurposing—convert each interview into YouTube videos, podcast audio, blog posts with timestamps, short video clips, social media graphics, and quote images to reach different audience preferences.

On overcoming perfectionism: The solution to most podcasting struggles is "don't think so much." Your first episodes won't be perfect, but they'll improve over time if you focus on consistency rather than perfection. Start with whatever equipment you have and upgrade as you grow.

Want to start your own podcast or get help managing an existing one? Visit MarketerOfTheDay.com to see Robert's interviewing style in action, or check out dfypodcast.com for Done For You Podcasting services that handle all the technical details while you focus on being the face of your show.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Focused Guidance for Course Creators

When I tell people I'm a Course Builder Coach, I often get the same response: "Oh, so you help people with the tech side of creating online courses?"

Not exactly.

What I actually do is help coaches, consultants, and experts create courses their students actually *finish* and *implement*—by focusing on the one thing that matters most: results.

The Minimum Required Information Principle

My approach centers on what I call the "Minimum Required Information Principle."

Unlike conventional approaches that pile on more content, more strategies, and more complexity, I'm obsessed with finding the minimum effective dose—the smallest amount of information and action that will create the biggest impact.

This focused approach amplifies your effectiveness exponentially.

Think of focus like light. A flashlight can illuminate a large area, but it can't cut through metal. A laser—that concentrated pinprick of light—can slice through steel because all its energy is directed at one point.

That's the power of focus I bring to course creation.

From the Classroom to Course Creation

My journey to becoming a Course Builder Coach began in public school classrooms, where I spent years helping students break through learning barriers. One of my proudest moments was taking a student from complete math confusion to a thriving accounting career—by identifying the precise misconception holding her back and addressing it directly.

This principle of identifying and eliminating obstacles has shaped everything I do.

Later, as a facilitator for Tiago Forte's Building a Second Brain program, I refined my approach to course design by ensuring every live session involved practical application, not just theory. Participants consistently reported that these hands-on sessions were where their greatest breakthroughs occurred.

My methods are grounded in the Theory of Constraints and strategic thinking frameworks from thought leaders like Roger Martin and Richard Rumelt. I've adapted these business principles to create learning experiences that deliver results with minimal overwhelm.

Results That Speak Volumes

When physical therapy professor Skulpan Asavasapon came to me, he was struggling to teach his unique approach to helping chronic pain patients. Despite his expertise, his students weren't implementing his methods effectively, and patients weren't seeing the results they could.

Together, we developed a structured course that not only received enthusiastic feedback from his students but was eventually adopted by Kaiser Permanente for a pilot program. The result? For the first time ever, resident physicians using his approach achieved higher MAP scores (Member satisfaction, Access to care, Provider performance)—a metric that had previously resisted improvement despite multiple interventions.

This is what becomes possible when we apply ruthless focus to course creation.

How I Work With Course Creators

When I work with clients, we don't begin with topics or content ideas. We start with outcomes and obstacles:

1. What transformation do your students need?
2. What's standing in their way?
3. What's the minimum effective intervention to overcome those obstacles?

Then we ruthlessly eliminate anything that doesn't directly contribute to that transformation.

My process involves brainstorming all possible strategies, then systematically cutting them down—often by half, then half again—until we arrive at the one approach most likely to overcome the obstacle with the least effort.

This counterintuitive method has helped my clients create courses with completion rates 3-5x higher than industry averages.

Ready to Create a Course That Gets Results?

If you're tired of the "more is more" approach to course creation and want to build a learning experience your students actually complete and implement, I can help in three ways:

1. [Subscribe to my newsletter](#) for weekly insights on focused course creation and audience building
2. [Explore the Atomic Course Blueprint](#)—my 33-page guide with a simple, repeatable system to outline, write, and structure high-impact courses in weeks, not months
3. [Book a discovery call](#) to explore how one-on-one coaching might help you create your most effective course yet

Whatever path you choose, remember this: Your impact doesn't come from how much you teach, but from how well your students learn.

Let's create something they'll actually finish—and use.

Rodney Daut
Course Builder Coach

