

18 MONTHS, 2 BLOGS, SIX FIGURES

How I built a six-figure online business in a year-and-a-half
Full income estimates for my independent business in 2010-2011
How I made \$11,000 in 72 hours with my first product launch
How to build an audience big enough to earn a living from
The reality of life as a location independent "solopreneur"
The simple breakthrough that can lead to rapid success

BY CORBETT BARR

no bosses

no employees

no investors

no overhead

no fixed location

no office hours

no facetime

no busywork

no set salary

no "2 weeks of vacation" b.s.

no permission required

total freedom

all in 18 months

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How I created a six figure online business in 18 months (while living part-time at the beach in Mexico).

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What you're about to read happens part time in San Francisco, part-time in Mexico, part-time while road tripping around the U.S. and Canada. I'm going to tell you exactly what I've done, how I've done it, and how you can build your own dream lifestyle fueled by a successful online business.

18 months ago, I started the blog called Free Pursuits to chronicle a six-month road trip through Mexico and share stories of amazing people living unconventional lives who my wife and I met on our trip.

I had no blogging experience, little idea of how a blog could become a business, and almost no experience selling products or services online.

Today I have a thriving six-figure business on my hands with no investors, employees or partners to answer to. I can operate my business from anywhere in the world and take time off to travel or pursue whatever interests me at the moment. My revenue potential is limited only by my creativity and how much I decide to work.

The best part? Much of this business was created while living on the beaches of Mexico. I sincerely love what I do for a living now, and it was all built in less than 18 months.

I wrote this detailed free guide about how my business works because I believe in the power of small businesses to change the economy, our society, and most importantly individual lives. I want to show you why you don't need anyone's permission to be successful, and that you don't have to live how other people expect you to.

This is my story. I hope it helps you live the life you want, and to do what you love.

If you like what you learn here, I would really appreciate it if you share the guide with other people or write a review on your own site. I would also love to hear your comments and feedback at my blog Free Pursuits:

<http://www.freepursuits.com/18-months-2-blogs-six-figures>

Thanks so much for your support, and best of luck with your own journey.

Cheers!

-Corbett

If you're trying to build an online "lifestyle" business, your #1 question is probably "is it really possible?" That's likely followed by "how much can I make?"

Full Income Estimates for 2010-2011

Let's dive in. I'm not going to beat around the bush here. If you're trying to build an online "lifestyle" business, your #1 question is probably "is it really possible?" That's likely followed by "how much can I make?"

At least that's what was on my mind for the first 6-12 months after I decided to pursue being an *independent lifestyle entrepreneur*.

Independent Lifestyle Entrepreneur: *someone who builds a small, flexible (generally 1-person) business as a means of living a dream lifestyle in the present, without focusing on selling the business to become wealthy as the end goal.*

So, what does my small business look like after 18 months of creating it?

I have one business built around two blogs (I'll get into why I have two blogs later in the guide). I've built audiences around two topics. I then sell products and services to those audiences.

This is a highly effective business model. Instead of taking the "old economy" approach of creating something to sell and then looking for an audience, **this new model starts by building an audience and then asking them what you could sell to help them in some deep and meaningful way.**

Back to my specific case.

I've been working on this business for about 18 months as I write this. The beginning was slow. In fact, I earned very little revenue during the first 12 months. That may have had something to do with [living in Mexico](#) for much of that time. Starting a business while road tripping around a foreign country will definitely slow you down. On the other hand, it provided limitless inspiration and topics to write about.

Recently though, I'm really starting to reap the benefits of all that time spent blogging and connecting with people during the first 12 months. Things have been ramping up very quickly as I have released products and really started to leverage the best techniques for earning a living online.

There's a learning curve for everyone. Just building an audience isn't enough. You have to build an audience that comes to respect you as an authority or provider on your chosen topic to make this model work. Beyond that, you have to learn how to produce, market and sell solutions online.

Sure, the steps themselves are clear enough: 1) build audience, 2) provide tons of value to that audience on a specific topic, 3) ask audience members what you can sell to them, 4) build the product and/or service they ask for and 5) sell the product/service and start growing your bank account.

In practice though, there are a ton of nuances to learn and hurdles to overcome. Not the least of which include the mental roller coaster you'll be on as you wonder if you're smart enough, talented enough, dedicated enough and worthy of becoming blissfully self employed.

In my case, there was plenty of struggle involved. On more than one occasion, I wondered what the hell I was doing, and who the hell I thought I was for pursuing such a dream. I had to talk myself off the ledge on a monthly basis for a while and just keep blogging, keep believing and keep building on the value I provided to people who were willing to listen.

As you probably guessed from the title of this guide, that effort has resulted in a six-figure business. That is to say, I will make over \$100,000 in the coming year from my business. Specific details on the exact amounts, sources and timing of that will follow.

A Crash Course on How to Make Money Online

So, how do you actually earn money from this model I've been talking about? Well, I hope you've figured out by now that a blog isn't a business. A blog is simply a way to reach an audience and deliver value to it.

The actual *business* is something else. You can build a business *around* a blog, but don't expect to start blogging and magically make money.

A business isn't a business without some way of getting people to pay you for providing some specific value.

The business I've built set out to help people with two specific things. First, I help people learn to live the life they want (which I write about at [Free Pursuits](#)). Second, I help people build high-traffic websites and blogs (and write about it at [Think Traffic](#)).

There is significant overlap between these audiences. This enables me to sell the same products and services to both... to some degree. Think of Free Pursuits as the introductory level, and Think Traffic as the intermediate level of the same journey.

A business isn't a business without some way of getting people to pay you for providing some specific value. **Most businesses built around blogging earn money in one of the four following ways:** 1) through advertising, 2) by selling products, 3) by selling services, or 4) through affiliate marketing.

Three of those revenue models (advertising, products and services) should sound familiar to you. They're used by all kinds of businesses, not just online businesses. The fourth, affiliate marketing, might be unfamiliar. If it is, you might want to check it out. Affiliate marketing is a powerful way to earn money online without having to create any products of your own.

Affiliate marketing is a simple concept. Thousands of businesses online have products to sell and are willing to pay you a commission for referring new customers. You don't have to build a product or support it, you just need to find people who might be interested in particular products and

then tell them about it. If they purchase, you get paid. How cool is that?

I'm a big fan of affiliate marketing. In fact, it's how I got started making money from my blog-based business. When you're just starting out, developing an entire product and figuring out how to sell it is daunting. With affiliate marketing, you can focus on just one piece (the marketing aspect). Then, when you start to understand how to sell things online to an interested audience, you can move on to products and/or services.

That's exactly what I did. After some modest early successes with affiliate marketing, I moved on to offering services. I started my second blog Think Traffic around a very specific problem. Nearly every online entrepreneur struggles with attracting visitors to their websites at first. Think Traffic provides advice on how to build a high-traffic website or blog.

Then, for readers who need more hands-on help, I offer consulting services. The blog is the engine that sends me a constant stream of new customers. People who contact me already know how I operate and what my expertise is because they've read the blog. It's a beautiful model, and any freelancer who isn't blogging should seriously consider starting a blog.

Around the same time I was developing my consulting service packages (I highly recommend creating packages of services, because it makes people more likely to buy from you), I was also building my first product.

I started by surveying my audience to find out what they might be inter-

Think of expertise not as an absolute, but as a continuum. Everyone has something to teach other people about.

ested in paying to learn more about. An overwhelming number told me they'd like to take a course on affiliate marketing for beginners. And that's exactly what I built, a course called [Affiliate Marketing for Beginners](#), which walks complete newbies through the process of building a new site from the ground-up that earns money by selling affiliate products.

“But I Have to Be an Expert” Bullshit

There's a key point to understand here. When you're starting out, you may worry that you're not an expert on anything. You may fear that without being a world-class expert, you can't possibly create a compelling product that people will buy.

I call bullshit on that.

To understand why that's a bullshit way of thinking, I have to tell you about a mental framework I first heard from Dave Navarro of [The Launch Coach](#). It goes like this. Think of expertise not as an absolute (as in, I have to be the best in the world so that I can teach anyone), but as a continuum (I have more expertise than some people and therefore have something to teach those people).

For many people in my audience, they didn't need the world's foremost authority on affiliate marketing. I'm not even close to that level, and learning from a top-level expert wouldn't help most beginners. My audience

I will earn an estimated \$128,154 from July, 2010 to June, 2011.

simply wanted to learn the basics of affiliate marketing. They also wanted to learn it from someone they trusted because there's so much garbage out there about making money online.

So it turns out that my 6-12 months of experience was plenty for creating a course aimed specifically at beginners. My audience bought the course in droves, which I'll detail in a later chapter.

How's it going so far? Is this all helpful? I hope so. I wish you could answer back to let me know. Such is the nature of writing a static document. Let's move on.

But You Said You Weren't Going to Beat Around the Bush

Alright, let's get back to those hard numbers I promised at the beginning. I thought a little explanation made sense before I just dropped my pants, so to speak.

For the 12 months starting in July, 2010 and ending in June, 2011, I will earn an estimated \$128,154.

How do I know that for sure? I don't know *for sure*, because it's an estimate. But it's not a complete guess because I have many signed agreements that will be bringing in guaranteed income. For the rest, I'm using

my recent earnings history to project forward.

For better perspective on my estimates, consider that my business earned \$14,590 last month (August, 2010) Mind you, that was a month in which I launched a product, so it's somewhat higher than average. But you get the picture.

Here's how the total revenue for the year breaks down according to the three revenue streams I outlined above:

Affiliate Marketing: \$29,821 (23%)

Consulting: \$44,715 (35%)

Product Sales: \$53,618 (42%)

Please don't take any of this as bragging. I'm sharing these detailed numbers so you can decide if this is a path worth taking, or to set some goals for your online business.

If I really wanted to brag, I'd tell you about how much I earned while consulting to Fortune 500 companies. The independent online business I'm building is very much a longer-term strategy and a way to live the life I want. Working in cubicles on projects I didn't care about for 40 years wasn't part of that plan, no matter how much money was involved.

It's pretty damn cool to be paying out thousands in affiliate commissions to other online entrepreneurs and friends.

Now, if you're a "business" type, or if you're running your own online business, you might be wondering "what expenses are involved in running this business?" Since I work online and sell digital products, I have very low overhead. There are no office costs or significant travel costs (unless I want to attend a conference or something). Total expenses are negligible.

There are however, some sizeable "costs of goods sold." I mentioned affiliate marketing earlier as a way to sell other people's products and earn commissions. Well, there's another huge way I use affiliate marketing in my business — paying others to sell *my* products.

For the products I sell and will sell in the future, I offer commissions of 51% or higher to people who refer customers to me. That's a big reason I was able to sell \$11,000 of my first product in just three days.

About half of my product sales have come from affiliates. That means I pay out about 25% (51% of 50%, stay with me here) of total product sales back to affiliates. My gross profit then after subtracting affiliate commissions paid out for the coming year will be \$113,810.

If you're planning to sell a product, I highly recommend running an affiliate program of your own. It's actually rather simple to set up, and it can bring in a lot of sales you wouldn't otherwise have made. Plus, it's pretty damn cool to be paying out thousands in commissions to other online entrepreneurs and friends who are trying to build something just like you.

Why Focus on Three Different Revenue Models Instead of One?

That's a great question. I often wonder myself how I ended up with two blogs, three revenue models, a dozen clients... It can all be a little overwhelming at times. To be honest, I plan to focus on fewer things in the future.

But as I started to build this business, I simply followed the opportunities as they came. Affiliate marketing was the easiest to break into. Then, I started consulting with clients on marketing. Finally, I released my first product. And now, here I am.

By now you might be wondering how I split my time among all the different aspects of my work.

Here's approximately how my time is spent currently. 25% of the time I'm blogging and promoting the business. 30-50% of the time I'm consulting with clients and 15-35% of the time I'm working on my own products or affiliate marketing. The rest of the time (I hope this is adding up ;) is spent helping friends and advising startups and new entrepreneurs.

Notice I didn't list those times in terms of hours. That's because my work weeks and days tend to vary by a lot. Some days I'm putting in 12 hours and others I'm putting in just 4 to 6. Some days I don't work at all, and I

Consulting is a great way to earn immediate income, but it doesn't scale well.

occasionally take the better part of a few weeks off for a vacation or trip.

I'll talk more about my lifestyle in a coming chapter, but I may have mentioned already that I've spent about 9 out of the past 18 months traveling and living out of the country. I plan to continue that trend for many years, so I'm working to build my business around that plan.

Consulting is a great way to earn immediate income and I really enjoy working with clients. However, it isn't always the most conducive to taking extended time off. When I leave for a trip, the product sales and affiliate marketing I do can pretty much be on auto-pilot. With consulting clients however, I have to do some pre-planning and scheduling to make it work.

Also, consulting doesn't scale as well as the other two revenue sources. To grow a consulting business, you either have to a) work more hours, b) charge more per hour or c) hire employees to work on projects for your company. That pretty much leaves me with b) charging more per hour, which only goes so far. I'm not interested in working more hours or hiring employees.

I guess this was the long way of telling you that I plan to spend more time building products and less time consulting as I scale my business. That will allow me to earn more while maintaining the flexibility to work and live where and when I want to.

And Why the Two Blogs?

To be completely honest, I tend to get bored with projects quickly or find myself frustrated that I'm not making progress as quickly as I hoped. After working on Free Pursuits for nine months or so, I started getting the feeling that I wanted to build a consulting business to bring in some revenue until I had enough products to support myself.

I tried offering coaching services through Free Pursuits, but the relationships often became a little awkward. You see, Free Pursuits is (or was at least) aimed at newbies to lifestyle design. When I started coaching clients, many of them were so new they didn't know what they wanted to do to achieve their ideal lifestyles. Some of them had serious personal issues to deal with. Some of those coaching calls turned a little closer to therapy sessions than I was comfortable with.

It was clear I wanted to help people more with business problems than personal problems.

So, I did some more self-examination to figure out what other services I could offer. I used the time-tested criteria of finding the combination of a) something you're good at b) something you enjoy and c) something people will pay you money to do.

I realized that I love helping people build audiences for websites and

blogs, that I've been somewhat successful at it personally, and that attracting traffic is the thing online entrepreneurs struggle with most.

Think Traffic became the vehicle through which I could offer those consulting services and eventually products that will help people develop followings online.

It turned out to be a great decision to start that site as much of my revenue is now coming directly from it. I decided from the beginning to make the site a case study itself, following my own advice about building business around a blog and telling my audience exactly how I'm doing it.

I'll be honest, running two blogs at once is tough, but I'm managing. I sometimes wonder/fantasize about combining the two blogs somehow but haven't come up with a good way to do it. So for now, I continue writing for two blogs almost every week.

Getting Here (Every Situation is Different)

There's one serious luxury I had in getting here that would be irresponsible to omit. It's taken me 18 months to build up to this point. I mentioned before that nearly 12 of those months were spent without any significant income from the business.

During those 12 months, I lived on savings I had accumulated during my

There's a way to get from here to where you want to be. Your job is to figure out what that is and dedicate yourself to making it happen.

long stint working for other people. I've been self employed since 2006. Much of being able to support myself without having a "real job" was possible because of that cushion I worked so hard to build.

Your case might be different. You might have a day job, or you might have to work part time while building your business. If I had been in a position like that, I definitely would have started building up my services business far earlier. If you have professional skills to offer, getting set up as a freelancer might be your fastest way to break free from the regular 9 to 5.

Don't take this admission of my privileged situation and throw up your hands saying "*well, he was lucky. There's no way I could build a business like that while having a day job.*"

Every situation is different. People make all kinds of things happen while working a day job. And don't underestimate your ability to take time off while building your business, no matter your financial position.

I lived in Mexico deliberately to save money for much of that first year. Living is incredibly cheap in many other countries. And I have to tell you, it was a dreamy way to live — taking breaks to learn surfing, learn Spanish and explore a foreign culture all while building my future.

The point is, excuses are like assholes, we all have 'em... ok, the point is that your situation is what it is. There's a way to get from there to where you want to be. You have to figure out what that is, dedicate yourself

to making it happen and work your ass off to achieve it. That part of the equation is the same for everyone.

PART 2

Wait, you mean I don't have to work for someone else for 40 years, take just a few weeks of vacation a year and count down the days to retirement?

Quick, Let's Figure Out How to Fix Our Economy and Society

Alright, I Understand the Greater Good Thing, But What's in it For Me?

The Rise of the DIY Career

The Reality of Life as a Location Independent Solopreneur

Quick, Let's Figure Out How to Fix Our Economy and Society

Here's the whole premise behind what I do. To me, there are more fulfilling ways to live and work than the typical 9-to-5. I want to help people who feel the same way achieve independence just as I have, but I only focus on the people who are willing to work hard. Get-rich-quick schemers need not apply.

I don't know your specific situation, so I can't say exactly what might be right for you. However, I do know that the allure of working for yourself on something you love while having the flexibility to live and work where you want appeals to a lot of people. That's why I started blogging in the first place.

If you'll indulge me for a moment, let me share a little of my deeper philosophy.

Our society is in rough shape. We've given so much money and power to so few giant corporations that most people are left with precious little control over their own lives. Everything we've given up has left us with a monster recession that we may never fully recover from.

Let's take Wal-Mart as an example (because they're easy to pick on). Wal-Mart employs something like 2,000,000 employees. The wealth that has

been created by the Wal-Mart dynasty has placed four of the Walton family members among the top 10 richest Americans.

We're talking about a combined wealth approaching \$100 billion dollars in the hands of just 4 people. That's not to mention all the other family members and executives that are wealthy because of Wal-Mart as well.

Now, imagine a world where Wal-Mart didn't exist, and where no other retail giant took its place. Imagine if those two million employees worked for 200,000 small independent companies that sold everything from clothing to bikes to electronics to groceries and whatever else Wal-Mart sells. That would be an average of 10 people in each of those companies.

Of those 200,000 small companies, let's say each is owned by one person. Let's also imagine that the total wealth held by Wal-Mart family members and executives and shareholders (roughly \$200 billion dollars) was distributed among those 200,000 owners and their families. That would equal one million dollars in wealth per owner.

What effect do you think that would have on our society? What if ownership was distributed much more equally? In reality, that wealth would be distributed among not just the owners, but also the employees, who would earn better pay and benefits than working for the notoriously low-paying, low-providing Wal-Mart.

And what about the quality of life for all of those people, both employees

Wouldn't you rather work for or own a small family-run business than work for a giant faceless corporation who doesn't give a shit about you or your quality of life?

and owners? Wouldn't you rather work for or own a small family-run business than work for a giant faceless corporation who doesn't give a shit about you or your quality of life?

Wouldn't you rather shop at a place like that? Apparently not. That is, at least for the average American.

I'm not picking on Wal-Mart per se. There are countless other examples of places like it in the retail, banking, insurance, hospitality, health care, food service and other industries. And it's not Wal-Mart's fault they are so huge. They've just operated within the American rules and taken what they can from a society all too willing to trade their livelihoods in exchange for cheap Chinese-made junk or a less expensive checking account or whatever.

We've created our own "[forever recession](#)" (as Seth Godin calls it) and now we wonder when the jobs will come back. The problem is though, the jobs aren't coming back. Ever. The rules have changed for good.

What does this have to do with you or me, or this book I'm writing? Maybe you care, and maybe you don't. The point is, there are more reasons to want to work for yourself and take back control of your life than personal freedom. I believe the future of our society is at stake and that we're all better off when smart people decide to build and patronize small businesses instead of accepting society's current defaults.

If enough of us be the change we want to see in the world, it will eventually make a difference.

I don't know what it will take to get people to realize that they're acting against their own best interests by shopping at places like Wal-Mart. Logic probably won't do it alone. I do know that you personally can create your own freedom now through a very small business. And **if enough of us be the change we want to see in the world, it will eventually make a difference.**

I'll get off the rant box now, but I wanted you to know what drives me to help people work for themselves. It's why I'm writing this book.

Alright, I Understand the Greater Good Thing, But What's in it For Me?

I'd be lying if I said I first decided to become an entrepreneur because I wanted to change society. That's simply not the case, no matter how high the horse I try to ride on.

My situation was probably like a lot of yours. I was working to the bone week after week on projects I could care less about and had very little time to actually live my life. For the better part of five years, I flew across the country every week to consult with Fortune 500 companies on ways to improve their businesses through technology.

The money was great, but I had no life to show for it. When you're working that hard with very little time off, you tend to blow the money on

If you're in a situation you don't love right now, if you're thinking about radically changing your life, I highly suggest taking some time off to really think about things.

things to make you feel better anyway. You don't really need that much to live on when you don't need to buy a new BMW just to make you feel superior for throwing away all those hours at work.

At some point, I finally had enough. My wife had had enough as well. It was time to start thinking about more than just earning the highest salary possible.

The transition wasn't immediate. In fact, in between leaving that consulting firm and being blissfully self-employed today, there were a couple of other turns. I worked for another (much more caring and locally-based) consulting firm, and I started a "traditional" startup in Silicon Valley where we raised venture capital, hired employees and had a fixed office.

Those were all steps in the right direction, but I still wasn't completely satisfied. The startup taught me a lot, but I ended up working way too much and feeling really stressed out about pleasing my business partner, our employees and our investors. It was like having a dozen bosses in the end.

So, when it became clear in 2008 that we wouldn't be able to raise enough money to keep the entire team of our startup intact, I took the opportunity to move on. Only this time, I decided not to jump right into the next thing. All that jumping from opportunity to opportunity without taking time to think didn't seem to be serving my best interests.

If you're in a situation you don't love right now, if you're thinking about

radically changing your life, I highly suggest taking some time off to really think about things. Weigh all of your options. Maybe you really want to be a forest ranger, or maybe you want to be a musician or an artist or a veterinarian. Don't be afraid to really explore your deepest desires and give them a chance to make their case.

That's what I did in early 2009. My wife and I set off on a road trip around Mexico. It was a sabbatical, and it came at the perfect time. On that trip, we both were able to listen to ourselves in ways we never had before. The pushes and pulls of society and family and our assumed identities faded away. Out of that silence grew this journey I've been on for the past 18 months.

I finally understood that I didn't want to run a company with employees. I didn't want to have investors to answer to or a co-founder to argue with. My ultimate working situation, for now at least, is to be an independent lifestyle entrepreneur. To work for myself, by myself and to have the freedom to pursue what I want when I want.

Maybe your dream is similar. I'll assume that's why you're still reading. Or maybe you skipped the last part and are now wondering what the hell I'm rambling about. Let's continue.

The Rise of the DIY Career

**Relying on permission
from other people to build
your career is so last
century**

Here's what I realized on our trip — **relying on permission from other people to build your career is so last century.**

Compensation based on facetime, employment practices that favor seniority over competence and hard work, and distribution models based on physical media and backroom deals instead of fair artist compensation and consumer preference are all dying.

I decided none of that was for me anymore. Instead, I decided to pursue a "Do-It-Yourself (DIY) career."

I knew I wanted to achieve the ultimate in flexibility. I wanted a business I could run from anywhere, that I could scale up as needed and take time away from when I wanted to.

It seemed like building an online business would be the best way to do that. As I looked into things, it became more and more apparent that blogging could be the foundation of that DIY career for me. People like [Chris Guillebeau](#), [Leo Babauta](#), [Steve Pavlina](#), [Brian Clark](#) and [Darren Rowse](#) were the inspiration. They all were part of a growing group of people supporting themselves through a blog-centered business.

Side note: I'm not sure why I thought blogging would be such a good thing for me, personally. I hadn't written anything longer than an email or PowerPoint presentation since college, and I didn't particularly enjoy writing. It turns out now that I love it and I think writing about things I care

Remember, you don't make money from a *blog*, you make money from a *business*.

about has everything to do with that.

But remember, **you don't make money from a *blog*, you make money from a *business***. Your blog happens to be a fantastic vehicle to build a business around, but it's not a substitute for the actual business.

I can't say I had that part figured out when I started. Just learning how to write about things people will actually read (and hopefully share with others) takes some time. I read from the people who inspired me that if you build an audience first, you can earn a living from it later (just don't expect advertising to be your golden goose, and choose a topic that has some commercial viability).

Now that I've built the audience and figured out how to earn money using the blog as a platform, the whole DIY career thing is finally intact. I don't have to rely on anyone to give me opportunities or give me permission to do something. I'm truly my own boss in the purest sense of the word. Well, my wife might say otherwise, but you get my meaning.

The Reality of Life as a Location Independent Solopreneur

You asked earlier "what's in it for me," right? Well I won't sugar coat it. The past 18 months have been simultaneously blissful and grueling.

If you have a family to support, you'll have to work much more than a 20-something who shares an apartment in Buenos Aires

If you think you can build a business to support yourself and provide ultimate freedom in a year or two while working just four hours a week, think again. I've said this many times before: it will take a whole lot of 60 hour workweeks to create your four hour week. For most people I don't really think a 4 hour workweek is possible or even really desired. Don't fall for the hype or succumb to get-rich-quick mentality.

Of course it depends on your needs as well. If you have a family to support, you'll have to work much more than a 20-something who shares an apartment in Buenos Aires. My friend and minimalist blogger [Everett Bogue](#) swears he only works two hours a day, but he falls into the younger/single category, and he also seems to have superhuman blogging powers. The rest of us have to put in a lot more effort.

I mentioned that the past 18 months have been both blissful and grueling. The grueling part has been getting this business off the ground. It's been tough, and partly that's due to the emotional roller coaster that every entrepreneur experiences. But it's also been more fulfilling than anything else I've done work-wise in my life. I can't explain how much I love what I do now.

As for the blissful part of it all, I probably don't have to sell that part too much. 9 of the past 18 months were spent traveling, visiting friends, exploring new places and learning new things.

Much of that time was spent at the beach in Mexico during the winter.

Your thing might not be living in the tropics every year. Maybe you'd like to explore more of the world. Maybe you'd like to become a vagabond. Maybe you'd rather stay put and just have more time to spend with your family and friends.

We're headed back to Mexico this winter as well, where we'll be enjoying the sun, surfing whenever we want, hanging out with friends and swimming in the warm ocean every day. We'll be living oceanfront, and all this costs us less than half of our cost of living in the U.S. What's not to love?

It's not all fun and games while we're there though. I will also be working most weekdays for at least four hours or so. Some days will be longer. Sometimes I'll take a week off to entertain visiting friends. It really is a grand lifestyle, all made possible by the work I put into this business.

Your thing might not be living in the tropics every year. Maybe you'd like to explore more of the world. Maybe you'd like to become a vagabond. Maybe you'd rather stay put and just have more time to spend with your family and friends.

Whatever the case, building a business around doing something you love is a fabulous way to achieve those goals. In the next section, we'll talk about how to build an audience big enough to support yourself.

PART 3

How to Build an Audience Big Enough to Support Yourself

Size doesn't matter as much as you might think.

Be unique, different and unforgettable. Then, have a point of view and say things that really matter and help people.

Ruthlessly focus your efforts on things that work, and stop spending precious time on things that don't.

Just be yourself and practice what you preach.

Don't give up. Seriously, **DON'T GIVE UP.**

Get outside help. Here's how to get it for free.

There are lots of people out there who are creating their own realities and building businesses by writing about topics they're passionate about. You don't need a huge audience to make it work, either.

Size doesn't matter as much as you might think.

I was at a dinner last night with four bloggers, myself included, and each of us earn a living entirely through our small online businesses. One of those bloggers has a huge following and started about four years ago. But the rest of us have only modest sized audiences and started much more recently. Two of my dinner companions actually started within the last year.

There are lots of people out there who are creating their own realities and building businesses by writing about topics they're passionate about. You don't need a huge audience to make it work, either.

Between my two blogs, I regularly attract about 35,000 unique monthly visitors. That may sound like a lot, but I personally know dozens of other people who have close to or even larger audiences. It's certainly achievable, and you don't have to aim to be the next [Lifehacker](#) or similar just to make it.

Online business advice is a dime-a-dozen, but good advice is hard to come by. I'll spare you the run-of-the-mill crap and give you the best advice I can here about building the right type of audience for creating a business around. Here it is... (and if you're looking for more advice about building an online audience, I write about how to do that every week at my blog [Think Traffic](#))

The reason most blogs fail is that most people don't write anything worth reading.

Be unique, different and unforgettable. Then, have a point of view and say things that really matter and help people.

There are like two billion blogs in existence or something. Most of them are about somebody's kid or someone's obsession with [Robert Pattinson](#). But even when you weed those out, you still have a shit ton of blogs to compete with.

And here's the bad news. Nobody cares much about you or what you say, except your mom and sometimes your boyfriend. That is, unless you have something interesting to say or something that will help people in a meaningful way.

The #1 reason 99% of blogs never get off the ground isn't that the author hasn't figured out the latest Twitter promotional strategy or how to make a killer Facebook page or how to get more search engine traffic. **The reason most blogs fail is that most people don't write anything worth reading.**

Don't kid yourself on this point. Get your ego out of the way. Lock it in a closet and try to think like someone who comes to your site for the first time. The question you have to answer quickly and clearly is "why should I read your blog when there are billions of other choices out there?" If you can't answer that with your blog, it's time to dig deep and figure out a

new strategy.

I'm not saying you have to be God's most gifted writer. Everybody struggles with this question, and it's something you have to answer regularly. Don't think you can just explain your reason for being once. You have to repeat it often for all the new readers you're attracting. If not, your audience won't grow.

Study your favorite bloggers and see how they answer this question. Why do you read those blogs? What do you get from it?

Worry about developing a killer unique point of view first and about providing unmistakable value to your readers before you worry about how to turn the latest social network tool into a marketing platform. **Content really is king. Promotion is prime minister.**

Oh, and did I mention how important it is to choose a topic you actually care about? You might identify what seems like a huge opportunity in the Asian collectible coin market, but will you care enough to write about it every week for 12 months or more? Focus on your passions and everything will be easier.

Do you really need to read every Tweet that goes by or respond to every comment on your blog, or make the 101st little tweak to your logo? Not really.

Ruthlessly focus your efforts on things that work, and stop spending precious time on things that don't.

If you could only accomplish one thing today, what would you want that to be? Great, now tackle that first. That should be how you approach every day.

The Internet is a giant distraction. It will gladly keep you from getting any real work done every day. You jump online to check your email and the next thing you know, you're watching a YouTube of a chimpanzee humping a frog.

There's a time and place for such hilarious videos, but you have to get the important stuff done first. If you let your inbox, Twitter or the Internet at large dictate how you spend your time, progress towards your real goals will come to a halt.

That also goes for all those little things that you think are important, but really aren't in the grand scheme of things. Do you really need to read every Tweet that goes by or respond to every comment on your blog, or make the 101st little tweak to your logo? Not really. If none of that stuff happened, but you still did your important work (like writing a blog post or creating your first product) you'd be on the right track.

Put all that little stuff off and focus on the core of your business first every

Being successful is about letting lots of little bad things happen in favor of doing relatively few really important things.

day. Then get to the other things if you have time.

I heard [Tim Ferriss](#) say in-person recently that being successful is about letting lots of little bad things happen (like someone getting mad at you for not replying to an email) in favor of doing relatively few really important things (like working on your book). There simply isn't enough time in the day to do it all.

Just be yourself and practice what you preach.

I've learned some lessons about blogging recently that took me over a year to understand. **Authenticity and personality are the secret sauce of the blog universe.**

Being yourself and letting your true voice shine through takes courage, skill and vigilance. It's far easier to write like a robot, as if you're writing a textbook or something. But that is not why people read blogs. They read blogs because of the human element. They read because they want to get the perspective of a real person, not some corporate drone.

This is what's known online as "finding your voice." I wish it were as simple as just saying "be yourself," because that's essentially what you need to do. Only, it takes a lot of practice (or at least it's taking me a lot of practice) to make your true self come through in your writing.

Existing clients called me to ask why I had never told them I like to do the worm at parties. Seriously, I really had that conversation.

The benefits of being yourself are amazing. People really connect with you when you're open and honest and witty and funny and emotional or whatever other dimensions you possess that someone would expect from a real and interesting person.

Being myself is still something I struggle with, but I've seen a glimmer of what happens when your real personality shines through. I wrote a post a couple of months ago called [33 Things I've Never Told You \(or, How to Re-Introduce Yourself and Kick Your Watered-Down Self in the Ass\)](#). The response to the post was amazing. It started a little meme across the blogosphere and dozens of other bloggers wrote similar soul-baring posts on the same theme.

Readers reached out to me to tell me how much they connected with the post. New clients contacted me and said they wanted to work with me because they realized we had so much in common. Existing clients called me to ask why I had never told them I like to do the worm at parties. Seriously, I really had that conversation.

Most of all, above all the reaction I received, writing from the heart and really being myself felt deeply satisfying in a way I've only experienced on the most intimate occasions with friends or my wife, or when really nailing a part in acting class.

Again, study the bloggers you respect most. Notice how much personality comes through in their posts. Try being yourself when you write. It's free-

If you really believe in your heart of hearts that your dream, whatever that is, is worth pursuing with every fiber of your being, than you shouldn't give up.

ing, satisfying and more effective than trying to be someone else.

Don't give up. Seriously, DON'T GIVE UP.

I can't tell you if you're cut out for blogging, or if the site you've already started or are thinking about starting will lead to big things. What I can tell you is that if you really believe in your heart of hearts that your dream, whatever that is, is worth pursuing with every fiber of your being, than you shouldn't give up.

There's a huge difference between pursuing a well-worn path and hacking a path through the jungle with a half-finished map and an untrustworthy compass. In either case, you might decide to give up, but in the jungle case you'll question whether you're going the right way so often it might drive you crazy.

That's the difference between studying for a traditional job and being an entrepreneur. If you want to be a doctor, the path is clear. Millions of other people have already done that exact same thing. There's no question where the path starts and where it ends.

When you're an entrepreneur, the path is different for everyone. There's no one guiding you at every turn, telling you which classes you have to take or how many hours you have to intern for. You carve your own path and hope it will lead to a destination worth reaching.

I've thought about giving up on a bunch of occasions. In fact, I let my fears and anxiety lead me to start and kill a half-dozen other projects along the way. If you've followed me for a while, you might remember other sites I started like Morning Spanish or Gatejumper, or other products I talked about working on but never finished and other services I offered and stopped.

But through it all, you have to keep your eye on the goal. You have to know that what separates success from failure is often simply perseverance. And I'm not necessarily talking about persevering on one specific project, either. I mean persevering towards your One Big Goal.

That might mean you have to start five different blogs or websites before you find one that works. Or, you could be lucky or smart enough to make your first project a success. Just remember that everyone trying to do something only vaguely defined will have those thoughts of quitting.

Lucky for me, I stuck with my first blog Free Pursuits long enough to launch products and services and to learn affiliate marketing. And lucky for me I also decided to launch Think Traffic and stick with that because it's a big part of my business now. You'll never know exactly how things might turn out, but you'll never know unless you keep trying.

Get outside help. Here's how to get it for free.

I couldn't be where I'm at if I had tried to do everything completely on my own. I've had a lot of help along the way, most of it informal, and most of it free.

There are two kinds of help you should seek. First, you should look for a mentor or a coach who has achieved what you want to achieve. Second, you should find other people who are on similar paths.

The mentor or coach will provide inspiration and be able to provide short-cuts you wouldn't be able to come up with on your own. He or she might also save you the trouble of pursuing what might seem like a brilliant idea to you, but that would turn out to be a major distraction or waste of time.

These mentoring relationships can happen by reaching out to someone you look up to who decides to help out of the goodness of her heart. Or, they can happen by paying an expert to coach you. It really doesn't matter either way as long as you reach for help. **Everyone I know who is successful had lots of help from mentors.**

The second type of help I mentioned is from people who are on similar paths. These are your peers, and they're struggling with much of the same issues you are. They can be there to provide guidance on things they've done before, or just to help with moral support. You'll need people to

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my mastermind group.

commiserate with along the way, trust me.

Mastermind groups are probably the best way to accomplish this. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my mastermind group. They have talked me out of some dumb ideas and encouraged me to run with the good ones. They've let me vent about whatever was bothering me so I could move past it.

If you're not familiar with a mastermind group, here's how mine works. There are four of us. We are all online entrepreneurs at similar places on our respective journeys. We live in different places around the globe. We found each other originally as acquaintances and I now consider each of the members close friends.

Our group meets every week, on Monday over Skype. Each meeting is exactly one hour long. When we start a meeting, each member recaps what accountability item they had assigned themselves for the prior week, and whether they accomplished it. It's all about holding yourself accountable and setting goals each week. If you didn't achieve your goal, you have a small monetary penalty (a \$25 donation to [Kiva](#) in our case) and the mild shame of telling the group about your failure.

Next, for the following 50 minutes or so, two group members will take the podium separately and talk about something they are working on. The goal here is to solicit feedback from the other group members and get help with whatever you might be stuck on.

Finally, we close the meeting by each stating an accountability item we'll be working on over the next week.

It's a simple process and doesn't take too much time. **The benefits have been extraordinary for all of us in the group.** I wouldn't have made so much recent progress without my mastermind group. Thanks guys (and gal) for all the help. I hope I'm helping you as much as you help me.

In addition to the tactical benefits, each of us has also benefited from cross-promotion and personal introductions. I really can't express how important I think this is.

Try creating your own mastermind group. Keep it to four people. Use the agenda I laid out here. I think you'll be really glad you put one together.

PART 4

How I made \$11,000 in 72 hours with my first product launch

Don't Take My Ramblings Alone, Learn from the Masters

7 Ways to Make Your Next Product Launch a Smashing Success

Final Words on Product Launches

In Conclusion, And in Summary, You Can't Spell "America" Without "Tim Calhoun"

A Very Special Thanks and Places to Look for More Inspiration

If You've Read This Far, I Hope You Don't Mind Me Asking a Favor

Much to my pleasure and surprise, my first product launch was a huge hit. I mentioned before that my audience bought the Affiliate Marketing for Beginners course in droves. I'm going to explain exactly what went into that first product launch so you can engineer your own killer launch.

The course brought in over \$11,000 within the first 72 hours of launch. Since then, it has been selling about \$2,250 a month. I've sold over 200 copies of the course.

These numbers blew away all of my estimates for how well the product would sell. Looking back on it, there are a number of reasons why I think the launch exceeded my expectations. Let's take a look at the key aspects of launching a product and how you can make your first launch a big hit.

Be forewarned, the stuff that follows is a little advanced. If you're not to the point where you're thinking about building and launching a product, you might want to save this chapter and refer to it when you're ready. Ready? Let's jump in.

Don't Take My Ramblings Alone, Learn from the Masters

First of all, I didn't figure any of this out purely on my own. Yes, I have built other online services in the past and learned from my mistakes. But for this product launch, I did a ton of research and learned from the experts.

Specifically, there are four masters of product launches I have to thank, and I highly recommend you check them out as well. First, no discussion of online product launches would be complete without mentioning [Jeff Walker](#) of Product Launch Formula. Jeff's course sells thousands of copies a year for upwards of \$2,000 a copy. That's not a misprint. Jeff brings in millions of dollars every year from his flagship course on how to launch a product.

I haven't sprung for Jeff's course (yet), but I have learned a ton from him just by reading everything he publishes for free online. Jeff really understands how to provide tons of free value to an audience and then build products people will jump at the chance to buy.

Next, there's a book you absolutely should purchase if you're planning to launch your own product anytime soon. It's called "[How to Launch the **** Out of Your Ebook](#)" and it was written by [Dave Navarro](#) and [Naomi Dunford](#). It's a complete course on how to research, plan, produce, market and sell an ebook (or in my case an online course). I learned a ton from that book, and it became my bible as I was building the course.

Finally, I've learned a ton of valuable information from watching, talking to, buying products from and selling products for Chris Guillebeau of [The Art of Non-Conformity](#). Chris has loads of generous free information on his blog about running a very small business. He also has produced half a dozen in-depth guides if you want to learn more.

If this guide is doing it for you so far, Chris Guillebeau has a similar (although probably much better written) free manifesto he put out last year that is a must read for anyone interested in working online. It's called [279 Days to Overnight Success](#), and it was the inspiration for what I'm sharing here, and a huge source of motivation as I forged my own path over the past 18 months. Thanks, Chris.

After spending countless hours pouring over everything I could learn from Jeff, Dave, Naomi and Chris, I put together my own hopeful launch plan. I'm going to highlight 7 things I highly recommend you focus on when building and launching your own product. Those are:

- 1) Ask your audience
- 2) Make your product unique, but don't stress about it
- 3) Don't talk yourself out of it, no matter what
- 4) Get inside your buyers' heads
- 5) Create a sub-list and pre-sell
- 6) Get affiliates involved and give 'em time
- 7) Create an upsell

1) Ask your audience

Alright, I'm going to go ahead and beat this one to death. Bear with me because it's important.

Building a product and then looking for an audience is a risky game. I'm not saying it can't work because lots of companies have succeeded doing it that way. But many more companies have failed than succeeded.

Developing a product takes lots of time and sometimes money. Reaching customers is the hardest part of building a successful business. When you build a product and then start looking for an audience, you put yourself "in the hole" so to speak before you even get started.

Instead, you can almost guarantee an audience for the product you build if you find that audience first and then build a product through interaction. Clay Collins calls this the "interactive offer."

There are lots of ways to find out what your audience might be willing to purchase from you. The most obvious and direct way is to ask them in a survey. I've done this before. You simply put together a short survey that asks people what they're struggling with most in relation to the topics you blog about. I also recommend actually listing some proposed products. Say, "if I were to build and sell one of the three following products, which one would you be most likely to buy from me?"

Simple, but effective.

Work the crowd and find out how you can help people.

You don't have to be quite so direct if you don't want to. You can also combine various methods including the survey for understanding what your audience wants.

Another way to figure out what product to build is simply through the process of blogging. Blog about different topics, and focus on topics you think you could build a product around. Interact with your audience as you go. Create "ask the readers" posts where you ask pointed questions. Interact with your readers in the comments and ask more questions. Ask, listen and ask some more. Don't just "preach" to your audience like some untouchable authority figure. **Work the crowd and find out how you can help people.**

Keep in mind that only a very small percentage of your readers will bother to leave comments. Something like .1% might ever leave a comment. For this reason, you shouldn't assume (for this purpose and any other) that comments represent the majority. That's why I also encourage you to survey your audience to get responses from the shy people as well. The people who don't comment represent a bigger set of potential buyers.

Finally, another technique requires offering services like coaching or consulting. This is a big reason why I offer consulting through Think Traffic. By spending time with individual clients, you can learn about problems that might be shared by a much wider audience. In that way, **consulting can also be market research**. If you've helped multiple clients get through the same problem, that's a good candidate for creating a product.

You have to answer the question all potential customers will have: “why should I buy from you (or read your blog) when there are millions of other choices out there?”

2) Make your product unique, but don’t stress about it

On my blogs, I talk a lot about the concept of the “unique selling proposition” (or unique *market* proposition if you don’t like the word “selling”). The USP concept is easy to grasp, but difficult to develop. When creating a concept for a blog or business, you have to answer the question all potential customers will have: “why should I buy from you (or read your blog) when there are millions of other choices out there?”

The easiest way to answer that question and convince your new visitors to stick around and even to return is to put yourself in a category of one. Set yourself apart from the competition by developing a unique offer. Something people can’t get from anywhere else in quite the same way.

When it comes to selling products, much of the need for a USP usually holds. But in the case of selling a product to an audience you’ve already built, things are a little different.

You absolutely still want to come up with a compelling way to market your product, and “points of difference” are a good way to do that. But the bar for how unique your product needs to be is far lower, for one important reason:

Your audience already knows and trusts you.

If you've been attracting an audience over time by providing consistent and unmistakable value, you have an advantage when it comes time to sell a product or service. You'll probably have some followers who would buy nearly anything you produce, and plenty of others who will buy something from you *simply because they know you*, even if other similar products exist on the market already.

I'm making this point because I see too many online entrepreneurs creating products that are just too clever or too contrived.

Your audience probably needs help with the basics, the fundamentals, the core issues that surround your topic. Your best bet is likely to address those core issues head-on in your products instead of trying to come up with something no one else has ever done before.

It's a balance, for sure, but don't overlook the benefits of keeping things simple and direct.

For example, the name of my first course is Affiliate Marketing for Beginners. Nothing revolutionary there. Direct and to-the-point.

There are unquestionably some people who bought the product from me simply because I was the author and it was a topic they wanted to learn about.

Then, I took the product and added a few things to make it stand out from other courses on the same topic. I did that so that people who don't already know me will also have reasons to purchase.

What did I include to make the course unique? First, I focused on beginners as a market segment. Existing courses on affiliate marketing are too broad and overwhelming for someone just starting out. I set out to teach a solid foundation strictly for beginners.

Second, I addressed a major concern most people have upfront about affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing (and making money online in general) has an unfortunate reputation for being scammy, so I built my course around what I call ethical affiliate marketing. It was something I practice anyway, so I just had to accentuate those aspects in the course and sales material.

Finally, I made the course interactive. Users can ask questions right within the course, and I'll answer back directly. It's a much better experience for people who purchase the course (although it takes more time on my part to maintain).

Making your product unique enough to sell to strangers while still focusing on a core topic is probably easier than coming up with some whiz-bang entirely new take on a fringe topic. It's definitely a reason why my first product is selling so well.

**Finishing a product,
any product is a huge
accomplishment.**

3) Don't talk yourself out of it, no matter what

Once you've figured out what kind of product you want to build, it's time to build it. And don't mistake how difficult the process of developing a product might be. It's a lot of work. There's no way around it.

It will probably take you weeks or months to develop your first product. During that time there will be plenty of opportunities to talk yourself out of it.

At some point, you'll probably find yourself questioning the logic and chain of events that led to choosing the product you're building. You'll probably lose momentum at least once, and the product will languish in a half-written state for days or weeks.

Here's where you need to make a promise to yourself, before you even get started. Commit to yourself, once you've chosen a product and started working on it that you will complete the product and launch it, no matter what breakthrough piece of wisdom you might come up with and try to convince yourself on the contrary.

Finishing a product, any product is a huge accomplishment. And even if it only sells \$100, the process is all worth it.

If you don't commit to finishing the product no-matter-what, you might

wake up months in the future to realize you've started and abandoned a whole string of products without having anything to show for it.

Just finish the damn thing you started! Put your head down and don't look up until it's done. You'll be glad you did.

I nearly abandoned the affiliate marketing course on a few occasions. In fact, if it had been only up to me I probably would have. Luckily, I had the support of some blogger friends to tell me what a dumbass I was being. Thank god.

4) Get inside your buyers' heads

I'm not going to give you a whole lesson on buyer psychology here. I wouldn't do it justice. And seriously, learning about the psychology of purchasing decisions is something that deserves your attention for a couple of weeks. Or a couple of months.

Understanding what drives someone to buy something will mean the difference between selling a couple copies and selling a couple hundred copies of your product. It's that important.

To get started, check out the work of [Robert Cialdini](#) on persuasion. If you plan to sell anything (either online or off), you absolutely must check out his work. Many of the people I mention in this guide owe some of their

success to Cialdini.

Here's the thing. There are several powerful emotional factors you can leverage to make more sales. Like it or not, but being an entrepreneur requires that you understand and get good at every aspect of building a business. One of those critical components is marketing. All marketers worth their salt understand a little about buyer psychology.

Once you learn about the emotional triggers, you can decide which you want to apply and which are a little too "salesy" for your taste. Don't worry, there are plenty of things you can do to encourage sales without testing your moral compass.

In my case, I chose to leverage a few emotional triggers during the product launch, and they made a huge difference. The main ones were: **scarcity, value and social proof**.

You can see much of these triggers in action on the [sales page for the Affiliate Marketing for Beginners course](#).

Here's a little about how each one works.

Scarcity basically refers to resources that are limited in some way. When resources are limited, human psychology causes people to act quickly to acquire those resources if possible.

When you're writing an electronic course or book, it would seem that the supply is unlimited (it doesn't take anything to deliver another copy). If your book or course is available for sale indefinitely, there isn't a strong reason for your visitors to buy it today because they can think about it for a while and perhaps buy it tomorrow. But then, most of those people will forget or talk themselves out of it and you end up with few sales.

This is why you see so many online product launches that last for a fixed period of time. The author is building scarcity into an otherwise endlessly abundant supply. Instead of just releasing a product and letting it sell indefinitely, many marketers make products available for a week or a few days only, which drives a lot of sales because of the scarcity trigger.

In the case of *Affiliate Marketing for Beginners*, the course is now available on an ongoing basis. However, when I originally launched it, I started with a fixed-period sale for the first 24 hours. This served as a legitimate way for me to get a small group into the first version of the course so I could test and revise things. It had the other benefit of driving a lot of sales during those first 24 hours.

Value is the emotional trigger that works on the psychology of wanting to get a good deal. This is why sales and promotions are so common in business and it's why haggling is a common practice in many parts of the world. Everyone wants to feel like they're getting a good deal.

You've probably seen a lot of online marketers try to tell you their product

is a \$X,000 value, but they're selling it for just \$197 or something like that. The technique is used on infomercials all the time.

I cringe at the cheesiness of all that, so I don't bother with the crossed out prices and fabricated value comparisons. Instead, with the AMfB course, I simply offered a reduced price during the first 48 hours of the relaunch of the course. The course was \$30 cheaper for those 48 hours, and that drove a ton of sales during those two days.

For that technique to work, you simply have to let your audience know that your product is available for a limited time at a reduced price. Make it clear and let them know when the offer expires.

Have you heard of [Groupon](#) or [Living Social](#)? These services have become huge successes over the past year by working almost entirely on the scarcity and value emotional triggers.

Social Proof is the phenomenon where people will do things they see other people doing. It's why you're more likely to go to a somewhat busy restaurant than an empty one. You assume the busier one is better.

When you launch a product, it's imperative not to just share *your* thoughts on the product. You have to include proof that other people like the product as well to move your potential customers to purchase.

One way to do this is through testimonials. Before you launch your prod-

uct, send evaluation copies to people and ask them for a testimonial if they like it. These can be from either well-known people or regular folks. A mix of the two is probably best.

I used testimonials as social proof for the course I launched, but I also relied on interviews. I conducted a series of interviews mostly with well-known bloggers on various topics related to affiliate marketing. The social proof I captured wasn't so much validation of the course itself, but validation of affiliate marketing and of me as the author of the course.

5) Create a sub-list and pre-sell

While you're building your product, it's important to start telling your audience about it in advance. This builds buzz and gets people thinking about your product before it's available. The people who learn about your product before hand are more likely to purchase because they've been prepped and have overcome some objections.

This is another area of product launches that's well worth your time to study in depth. You can research it further by Googling the "sideways sales letter" concept. I believe Jeff Walker came up with the concept first. Basically, you want to turn your launch into an event, and introduce potential buyers to the product gradually over time.

One of the most important aspects of this event process is capturing email addresses on a separate interest list. Just set up a unique email list for this

Set up a unique email list for your product launch. The people who sign up will be much more likely to purchase.

product launch. Include the sign-up form wherever you mention the product before it's available for people who want to learn more (you can offer a discount to that group if you feel like it).

The people who sign up on that list will purchase your product at a much higher conversion rate than everyone else. People from my pre-sell list bought at a rate of 25% or more. That's because you can communicate with them about the product even more than your general audience. They have told you they're interested (by signing up for the list), so they won't mind if you market the product a little bit harder.

But there's another huge benefit to having the separate pre-sell list. You can actually sell your product to that audience before it's finished, and make much more on each sale than you will when the product launches. Here's how...

Simply find other products for sale before yours is available that are a) very complimentary to your product b) have a good affiliate program and c) sell for considerably more than your product will sell for.

With the AMfB course, I made a few offers to my pre-sell interest list before the course was ready. In each case, I offered to give the readers a free copy of my course (when it was released) if they purchased a copy of one of the other products within a specific period of time. Because those other courses offered affiliate commissions of between \$90 and \$250, and my course was selling at the time for just \$47, I made more from those

pre-sales than I would have had I waited. And the customer got two great products for one price. It's a win-win.

6) Get affiliates involved and give 'em time

I explained in the first chapter that my affiliates are responsible for up to 50% of the revenue my course brings in. That's huge. I greatly appreciate all of the affiliates who have sold or tried to sell any copies of the course. The affiliate relationship is a beautiful thing.

Making sure you include affiliates in your launch plans might not seem revolutionary, but it's very important and many people screw it up. Taking the time to prepare and treat your affiliates right can have a huge impact.

Think of it this way. You're competing for affiliates along with everybody else who has products to sell. Your affiliates only want to offer the best stuff to their audiences, and they want to offer things they think will sell.

To win over those affiliates, you have to sell them on your product in much the same way as you have to sell your potential customers.

One of the biggest mistakes people make with affiliates is not giving them enough time to review and digest your product, and to plan an affiliate promotion strategy. Many also don't explain their products well enough. Some people are in such a rush to get their product launched that they

don't tell potential affiliates about it until the day before launch. Big mistake!

Instead, make sure you add affiliate preparation to your launch plans starting a couple of weeks before you release the product. **Set up a separate email list for affiliates and communicate with them clearly and regularly about your launch plans.** Sell them a little. Let them know why your product will sell well, and to which types of audiences it's best suited.

You also need to offer your time and support to your affiliates if you want them to make sales. Interviews are a great tool for selling with affiliates, so make sure to let people know you're available for interviews.

And don't overlook the "small fish" affiliates either. Some people focus on just trying to land the big names as affiliates. You can also get great results with a lot of smaller affiliates. Some of them might surprise you and sell a bunch of copies of your product. And those smaller affiliates will be there for you with even bigger audiences the next time you launch something.

Care about your affiliates and you'll get great results. It's not a difficult concept, so don't be one of those people who treats affiliates as an afterthought.

7) Create an upsell

How would you like to make 25% more money on every product you sell, without having to do a whole lot of extra work? That's what the upsell is all about.

"Upsell" simply means offering something of extra value for a slightly higher price than your base product. This is another human psychology thing to some degree. People want to get the best version of the products they buy. If you offer a deluxe version of your product (and price it reasonably in relation to the additional value), the majority of your buyers will probably take you up on the extras.

That's been my experience, at least. I offer two versions of the Affiliate Marketing for Beginners course. The "base" version, which includes the complete course, and a "deluxe" version, which includes the course, interviews with several experts, access to monthly Q&A calls with me and five additional audio lessons I recorded on related topics.

The deluxe version sells for \$20 more than the base version as I write this (\$97 vs. \$77). Can you guess how many people opt for the deluxe version? Over 80% of all buyers. When I found that out, I was damn glad I spent those two days putting that deluxe version together. That effort has been worth an extra few thousand dollars so far.

Other people who sell products online have had very similar experiences. **Just be careful and test out your offer.** I initially offered a deluxe version that included a coaching package, but that package was \$100 more than

The most important part is that you actually launch something.

the base version and sold just a couple of copies. Not all upsells are created the same, evidently.

Final Words on Product Launches

All of this advice might seem a little daunting to you at this point. Yes, you should think about all of these things if you really want to maximize your product launch. But no, none of it is really necessary (except developing the product, of course).

If you forget everything I've told you about launching a product, just remember this one thing. **The most important part is that you actually launch something.** Fretting over all the details and trying to make everything perfect could very well keep you from ever releasing anything. That would be a terrible shame.

Even if you release your first product and completely screw up the launch process, you'll still make at least a handful of sales. And from that modest start, you can learn and build and try again. Just get something out there. It doesn't have to be perfect. Don't bite off more than you can chew the first time around.

I hope you'll see that your reality is what you make it. You don't need anyone's permission to pursue the life you want to live.

In Conclusion, and in Summary, You Can't Spell "America" Without "Tim Calhoun"

I think I misplaced this chapter title somehow. Anyway, it's clearly time to wrap things up.

I hope this all has been helpful. I know it was a great experience just writing it. I sincerely wish that this guide is useful.

Where you go next is entirely up to you. I can't say if you choose a path like the one I've taken that it will be easy, or even that you'll succeed. Being an Independent Lifestyle Entrepreneur isn't for everyone. I know that some people aren't cut out for building an online business like this. Truthfully, a lot of people will start but give up in frustration before seeing any results.

Blogging might not be the right path for you. Building an online business might not be the right path for you. But in any case, I hope you'll see that your reality is what you make it, and that you don't need anyone's permission to pursue the life you want to live. **I'm just a regular guy who is chasing my dreams with some success. I wish you the best of luck if you choose to do the same (and if you don't, I still wish you luck).**

A Very Special Thanks and Places to Look for More Inspiration

I'd like to give my deepest gratitude to the people online who have guided me (either knowingly or not) on my journey. There are undoubtedly many more, but these are the people who have had the greatest impact as I've developed this business. In no particular order, thank you:

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[Lea Woodward](#)

[Gary Vaynerchuk](#)

[Naomi Dunford](#)

[Brian Clark](#)

[Tim Ferriss](#)

[Leo Babauta](#)

[Philip Greenspun](#)

[Rae Hoffman](#)

[Sarah J. Bray](#)

[Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson](#)

I also want to thank everyone who has supported me, whether on my blog, through the social media universe, or in person. You all are so awesome for helping. Thank you!

And thanks to [Matt Gartland](#) for helping me edit this guide.

If You've Read This Far, I Hope You Don't Mind Me Asking a Favor

If you've found this guide helpful, **I would really appreciate it if you share it with someone else who might benefit from it.** My livelihood depends on reaching new people and I really appreciate it if you feel like helping out.

Specifically, if you have a blog of your own, a review and link from your site would be awesome. If you have a [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or some other social media life, sharing it there would be great too.

And I always love hearing feedback and comments from readers. Please, let me know what you think about this guide here:

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Sincerely,

-Corbett