

Book 1:

**Screaming into the
void**

**(\$100/month,
2018 and 2019)**

Alex West

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Preface

Before we begin. A disclaimer.

1. Zero advice

Most advice is bullshit. Or someone trying to sell something.

So I'm not going to give you any advice in this book. I want that to be clear from the start.

You only learn by doing. Not by studying. Listening. Or even reading books like this one.

So when you're done, close this book and go build a business. Experiment. Try things. And learn.

2. I don't own any of these ideas

If you find that I'm talking about things that you have thought, said, or even written before, I believe you.

Don't be stupid like me, I sometimes get mad when that happens.

At the end of the day, you are reading this. So we are somewhat similar.

3. This is not a playbook

I made my first million in my late twenties. Worked at an MIT startup. Competed in Muay Thai, kickboxing and BJJ. Completed a marathon and a triathlon. Became part of a Cambridge research study. Invented software that helps people with epilepsy. Traveled the world. And even got to meet and have coffee with one of the inventors of the internet.

That's all true. But none of it was intentional.

I was and still am a total idiot. I just kept going and got lucky. You'll see that very clearly in these books.

Cause luck is a real factor. And if anyone tells you it's not, they are full of shit.

4. These books get better over time

I am not a professional author, that's easy to see.

But my writing has improved since I started.

So these books get better over time.

Hang in there.

5. Too personal, too much information

Finally, this book might become too personal at times.

You can skip those parts.

If you actually end up reading these books to completion, you will know me better than some of my closest friends.

Which is weird. I know. But hey, at least you can call me your friend. And I mean that.

Book a time and we can setup a virtual coffee.

So now, let's begin, my friend.

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Introduction

This is not a success story. This is not a humble brag.

Two years ago, I start with the goal of reaching \$500/month from my personal projects or through a remote job.

The idea was that I could survive and live in a country like Thailand. Travel. And be free.

Of course, easier said than done:

- 6 months in, I'm at \$50/mo, riding a huge wave of momentum.
- 1 year in, I'm at \$200/mo with 3 profitable products.
- Now, 2 years in, I have shut down 2 of 3 profitable products and I'm back at \$100/mo.

Going around in circles. Wondering what to do next.

During these two years:

- I have pimps, scammers, arms dealers, and porn stars as customers.
- I get scouted and offered a job at an MIT startup that works with NASA.

- I have business meetings with the CTOs of multimillion-dollar TV networks.
- And question my ethics and morals multiple times.

This is my story.

Year 0: The spark

It's summer. I'm lying down on the sofa at my dad's house.

I'm bored out of my brain. Watching YouTube tutorials.

Learning how to code a mobile app. I have an idea.

"Alex, the neighbor's son is back from US. Visiting his parents for the summer. He's in tech too, you know. Maybe you should go and ask questions", my dad told me.

I was in my first year studying Computer Science, so it wasn't the worst idea in the world.

I went. And I'm so happy that I did. My life was changed forever.

Turns out he wasn't just a guy in tech. He was living the startup dream.

He had moved from Greece to San Francisco. Had raised millions from top VC funds. And was planning to take over the world.

I explained to him that I'm in my 1st year of university and that I'm building my first app.

So he went founder mode and gave a 3 hour Masterclass.

I don't remember much. And most went right over my head. But I remember trying to hold back my smile because I was getting so excited. Even though I was trying to act cool and tough.

He explained to me that you learn by doing, not studying. Something I still follow to this day.

As a 20 year old, I was inspired. I was hooked.

I couldn't even sleep that night. Spinning around. Looking at the clock. Waiting for the morning to come.

Before this moment, all I wanted to do is go out and party. And share crazy stories with my friends the next day about what we did.

In other words, I was a loser.

But now I knew exactly what I wanted to do.

I wanted to build the next Facebook.

The next Facebook

For the next two years, I built and ran a simple mobile app.

In my mind it wasn't simple at all. It was the next Facebook.

And I actually believed it. I remember day dreaming, pretending to be giving an interview to Jason Calacanis on This Week in Startups and reading what my dedicated piece on TechCrunch would say.
Preparing my story.

How stupid.

I made all the stereotypical mistakes:

- Kept my idea secret, only told my best friend after making him (actually) swear to keep it a secret and tell no one.
- Perfected my app for 2 years before showing it to anyone.
- Assumed marketing would be the easy part and left it for last.

It was your typical university student idea. Basically, it was "Snapchat for bars and nightclubs".

Bars and clubs could upload real time photos. And university students could see them on a map and decide easier where to go out for a drink.

You could check if the place was empty or not. If it had girls or not. What the music was like. The price of a drink or bottle. If there is an entrance fee, etc

It took me:

- 2 years
- 10,000s of lines of code
- 100s of cigarettes
- and a few all nighters

But now I was ready. At last.

Before launching, I also:

- Printed business cards.
- Designed flyers and posters.
- And came up with my global expansion plan.

These things are important. You cannot skip them.

Long story short, it went nowhere. Had a few conversations. Drove around the city and handed out flyers. Got a few clubs and bars to signup and upload a few photos. Ran a few ads on Facebook. And that was it. A few weeks later it was dead.

Years in the womb. Just to live a few weeks.

But hey, at least I was able to join a startup accelerator with this product.

I needed help.

Going indie

At the startup accelerator, I like the people. I'm actually still friends with some to this day.

But everyone is talking about raising money. No one is talking about making money. And most importantly, no one is making money.

That's odd. Meanwhile, that guy with the funded startup?

His company shuts down and he is back in Greece now, building his next startup. I think he's bootstrapped and doing great.

I run through the numbers and realize that we're playing a losing game. A game not built for us to win. But for investors. Fair play to them, but I don't want to play.

I also learned an important lesson at the accelerator.

To be ruthless with my ideas. And if they don't make sense, kill them. Yes, kill my babies.

With the help of my coaches at the incubator, we realized that my project needed funding and that it wasn't worth pursuing.

It would only generate profit at large scale, given the business model. And it was in a network effect market, so it would either go viral or die.

I decided to kill "The Next Facebook". Years of work down the drain.

But, ironically, I slept like a baby that night. With a smile on my face. I felt lighter.

Because after all, I was not my idea.

Now I had a blank slate. And anything was possible again.

I randomly find 2 videos on YouTube:

- DHH's talk at Startup School
- Pieter Levels' talk at GrowthTribe

I'm nodding and smiling all the way through, everything makes so much sense.

I discover the indie hacker movement on Twitter.

Wtf who uses Twitter? Anyway, this is cool. I'm in.

That's it, I'm going indie.

Year 1: Shotgun

In my first year I follow the "Shotgun" strategy.

Build many products, launch fast and throw virtual spaghetti at the wall until something sticks.

And when something sticks, double down.

January | MMAmatchups

Starting out, I went with what was at the time my biggest passion after tech, MMA.

I remember reading through YouTube and Reddit comments and noticing one thing. Everyone loves to talk about who should fight who next.

So, I built MMA-matchups. A simple website that scrapes all fighters from the UFC roster, shows all possible matchups, and you can upvote the ones you wanted to see.

I built the website in two weeks, I launched it on Reddit but got banned for self promotion.

I cold emailed a few MMA journalists, nothing. Zero positive replies. Zero replies in general.

I started posting on Instagram for marketing. Got a few signups and hundreds of visitors, but nothing. It was super hard to get the ball rolling and it would die off as soon I took the foot of the gas.

Like, straight away. In a day.

I couldn't see this making any money, nor that people were crazy about it, so I abandoned it at the end of the month.

- Time spent: 1 month
- Revenue: \$0
- Visitors: 300
- Signups: 30
- 0 Twitter/X followers

February | MultiNewTab

This was a weird one because I had a huge time constraint.

I wanted to build a chrome extension that allows you to use multiple "New Tab" extensions at the same time. Something that I wanted myself.

I had 1 week to build it, as opposed to 3 weeks that I thought I needed.

But I made it in time. And something tells me that if I actually had 3 weeks, it would have taken 3 weeks to build.

This is known as Parkinson's law.

Anyway, I launched on Product Hunt but at the time I had zero followers on Twitter so I couldn't create any real buzz.

It did ok, and actually got 100 users. But I only found out about that 10 days later, when the Chrome Dashboard refreshed.

This gave me confidence to keep going.

I found it magical that software I wrote was alive and running on hundreds of computers around the world, right now.

- Time spent: 1 month
- Revenue: \$0
- Upvotes on Product Hunt: 67
- Installs: 100+
- 0 Twitter/X followers

March | TalentShare

After products #1 and #2, I realized that my ideas were not targeted to people that would actually pay.

I wanted something more B2B oriented. And the next idea stemmed from real life.

A few months earlier, I applied for a remote position at Product Hunt. It was my dream job.

I met Andreas, who was the CTO at the time, and he told me that although they didn't hire me, I was in the top 10 of 400 candidates.

And that he could share my details to other companies to help me out. With my consent.

I don't know if this was true or he said it to make me feel better about the rejection. But I agreed. Thanked him. And it worked. Around five companies emailed me with job opportunities.

Unfortunately, no one hired me. But I got close.

And it gave me an idea.

A platform for companies to share the top candidates they could not hire.

The platform would be 'Free' for anyone that shares a list of candidates. And 'Paid' for companies that want to have access to the lists without sharing.

I spin up a landing page and try to drive traffic to it with something that was called "Product Hunt Ship" at the time. It doesn't exist anymore.

Instead of launching a product, you could launch a landing page and collect emails.

From the emails I collected, I see that no one is a founder or part of a company willing to share applicants.

I cold email every single founder of a transparent company that I can find. I find them on Twitter, IndieHackers, TransparentStartups, Baremetrics Open Startups, etc.

Again, no one replied. No one wants to even talk to me. As a final resort, I message Andreas, and he was cool and kind enough to reply to me.

He told me that a friend of his had tried the same idea but it was very hard to get hiring managers to share applicants.

I stopped working on the product because I ran out of cold or warm leads to reach out. And had no one else to chat with about it.

Also, I could not launch an empty platform on PH, Reddit or wherever. An empty platform is not an MVP.

- Time spent: 1 month

- Revenue: \$0
- Sign ups: 0
- 0 Twitter/X followers

Finding & quitting a remote job

I might have not found a remote job through Andreas and Product Hunt, but I found a remote job through a friend.

A friend from university was interviewed for a junior developer position. And they were open to remote work.

He didn't get the job. But he made an intro for me.

The company was in my hometown. And they built Wordpress websites for local businesses.

That alone should've been a red flag.

But I was desperate and wanted a win. Even a small one. So I gave it a shot and accepted the offer.

Who knows? Maybe I could work for them, go to Thailand and build my own projects on the side.

I thought that it might work out. But it didn't.

I hated it. I was moving buttons around in Wordpress all day. And my cringey boss would call me every 1 hour to ask me if I'm coding.

(phone ringing almost every hour)...

- "What's up, Champ? Are you coding?"
- "Yes, I'm changing the buttons on the website."
- "Cool, talk later.. Champ!"

Literally, 5-10 times a day. And he always called me "champ". Wtf.

I lasted one month. The job sucked and they paid me €450/month or \$500/month.

All cash. All under the table. Greek style.

Actually, I had to go find him, pressure him and collect the money in person cause he started telling me that I didn't hold my end of the deal and I don't deserve it.

At this point, I knew that I wanted to reach \$500/month through my own projects. Having a remote job like this one would not cut it.

I wouldn't be happy.

April | RemoteJuniorClub

Ok, the job was an epic fail.

But I was a little proud of myself. Cause I did actually find a remote job, which was one of my goals for the year.

And while finding that job, I realized something.

Junior remote positions were super hard to find. Companies don't trust juniors to work from home.

Also, everyone was building todo list communities at this time. Communities like WIP.chat were on fire. Which meant that people wanted to be part of communities like this.

So what did my unique ass do?

Correct. You guessed it.

I combined the two, and built yet another todo list community. But for junior developers that wanted to find a remote job.

People could log their tasks and actions and there was a leaderboard with:

- number of job applications per member
- number of side projects built per member
- number of blog posts posted per member

There was also a Slack chat for people to chat. And a job board where I scrapped all remote job posts from the internet.

I was envisioning building a community and then have companies pay to post a job.

I spin up a landing page again "Product Hunt Ship" and collect some emails.

Out of the 150 emails collected, 8 joined the beta. And the community got a spark of life.

But if you don't push it, especially in the beginning, a community will collapse.

I realized that running a community and chatting online is not who I am. I never really chatted online with people or had online friends. I abandon the product.

- Time spent: 1 month
- Revenue: \$0
- Sign ups: 10
- 0 Twitter/X followers

My first big realization

It's May and 1/3 of the year has gone by already.

Do you notice a pattern?

3 out of 4 products were communities or marketplaces.

And communities and marketplaces are hard to grow. Because in the beginning, without users, they are worthless.

You have the infamous chicken and egg problem.

I even knew this from "The Next Facebook". But I still made the same mistake. Funny.

The only one that was different was MultiNewTab. And it was my most successful product.

I had another look at the dashboard. It had 200 users now.

It offered the same value, regardless of users.

This was my first big realization:

I wanted to build products that offer the same value, regardless if they had 0 or 1000 users.

My first successful launches

Armed with my new learnings, I start building again.

This time products. Not communities or marketplaces.

May | GitGardener

I was really bummed out at this moment. Nothing is taking off. And it feels like I'm screaming in the void.

So I went through my idea list and picked the easiest one to build.

It wrote "Automated commit everyday on GitHub to make my github green". So stupid.

As you can imagine, I had no intention of this going anywhere. This was not a business idea. But I could build it in a week and try launching on Product Hunt one more time.

Also, it was a product that didn't matter how many users it had. It works regardless.

At this point, I still had zero followers on Twitter. But like a true psychopath, I decided to tweet out loud to myself about what I was building and gave myself a week to do it.

Funny, cause it worked. Saying something out loud publicly makes quitting harder, even if no one is listening.

I launched the product, GitGardener, on Product Hunt on a Sunday.

And (to my surprise) it was a success:

- 4K visitors
- 400 signups
- #3 product of the day
- Bashed on Reddit, but didn't care

I could not believe it. It was so humbling.

All these months planning the next big thing.

And as soon as I let go of all expectations and just focus on shipping, this happened.

The 2 ideas I thought of the least, MultiNewTab and GitGardener, were my most successful ones.

I even got 100 followers from the Twitter thread and Product Hunt post.

I loved it. I decided to build and launch 1 product every week in public.

- Time spent: 1 week
- Revenue: \$0 (at this point)
- Number 3 on Product Hunt: 300+
- Went from 0 to 100 Twitter/X followers

May | MakerFeed

Full of energy and motivation from the previous launch, I start building again.

It's Monday. And I'm launching on Sunday again.

I pick another idea from my idea list. One that looks easy to build.

It says 'Maker Feed', a website to find and follow the best makers and builders on Twitter.

I build it while tweeting every single step in a thread.

I launch it on Product Hunt and it ended up #1 product of the day! What the hell? What is happening? And why?

Maybe Sunday is my lucky day? Or it's the format working?

This gave me even more motivation and an even bigger audience.

But, again, I could not imagine people paying for this. This was the epitome of a B2C side project. So I didn't even entertain the idea of monetizing it.

Bye bye.

- Time spent: 1 week
- Revenue: \$0
- Number 1 on Product Hunt: 350+ upvotes

- Went from 100 to 200 Twitter/X followers

Making my first dollar

On Twitter, someone asks me if GitGardener could work with private repositories.

Basically, he wanted to have a green GitHub while keeping all the stupid automated daily commits hidden.

I said no. But I thought about it. It was a good idea.

I realized it would be fun if I built it as a premium feature.

Charge \$5/month for it and see what happens.

I did, launched the new feature and forgot about it. No one paid in the first 24 hours or so.

But then... I was blown away. GitGardener went from \$0 to \$50/month in one week. All free users that upgraded.

Crazy. Building in public, moving fast and having low expectations seemed to work.

Again on Twitter, a GitHub engineer encouraged me to apply to join the GitHub Marketplace.

To be honest, I was kinda surprised. I thought people working at GitHub would hate this product. Instead, they had no problem. They found it funny.

It was only anonymous users on Reddit and HackerNews that were so angry at me.

In the end, GitHub did not accept me in their Marketplace. But it was worth trying.

Who knows what would have happened if they had accepted me.

- Time spent: 1 week

- Revenue went from \$0 to \$50/month in one week
- 200 Twitter/X followers

Starting to believe

As you can see, May was by far my best month:

- Found a remote job, even though it sucked.
- Reached \$50/month through my projects.

I actually started believing that miracles can happen after all.

Maybe my dream will come true after all, \$500/month by the end of the year!

I wanted to keep up this fast pace and build other ideas on my idea list without giving it too much thought.

Low expectations. Fast feedback loop. Building in the open. Seems to work for me.

June and July | Telemonetize

I go through my idea list again.

I'm looking for something more serious.

One of them wrote, "Instantly monetize your Telegram channel or supergroup".

I was a paying member at WIP.chat, which was a Telegram supergroup you had to pay to have permission to write in.

And found a lot of Crypto channels on Telegram that were paid also.

I assumed that they handled every member and subscription manually.

So my idea was this:

- Connect your Telegram channel
- Connect your Stripe account
- Go to your dashboard, create your products and prices, customize your landing page and portal where people can subscribe, manage their subscription and cancel
- Users pay or cancel and added and removed from the channel automatically via API

Looking back, this MVP was way too complex. And the product was very hard to build.

A telegram bot. Handle payments. A website builder. Webhooks and automations.

All these were projects by themselves.

It took two months to build (all day coding) and then I launched it on Twitter and Product Hunt.

The launch goes "viral" (for my standards at the time), but reaches the wrong people.

Hundreds of thousands of impressions. And ZERO customers. Even after a week. Zero free trials!

This hurts. I am thinking that a fucking landing page with absolutely nothing behind it could have done the same job.

- Time spent: 2 months
- Revenue: \$0
- Front page on Product Hunt: 300+ upvotes
- "Viral" tweet with 300 likes

- Went from 200 to 300 Twitter followers

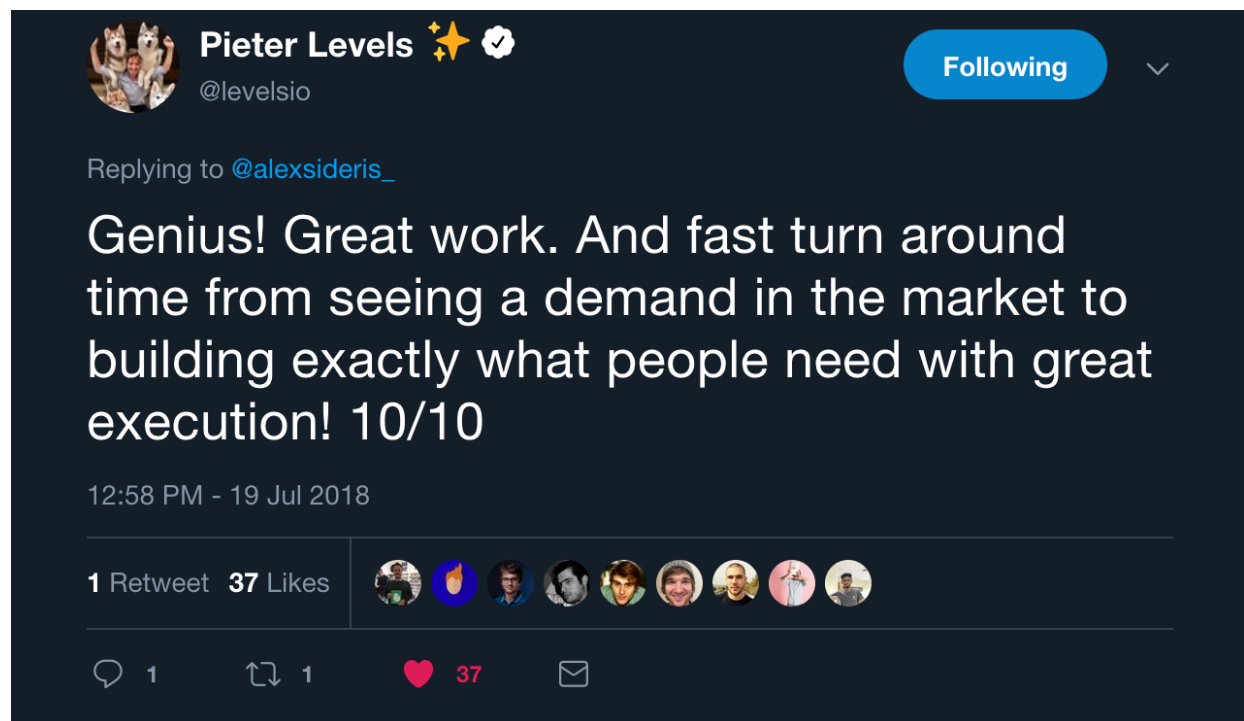
Getting praise by my peers

Getting praise from one of the people that inspired me to start this journey just 6 months later felt amazing.

I was part of the group now. I was one of the guys.

Things felt happening faster than I expected.

I felt like I was doing things the right way and that my hard work was going to pay off, in the very near future.



Focusing on GitGardener and Telemonetize

This is where the going gets tough. And progress flatlines.

I decide to focus my attention on Telemonetize and GitGardener instead of launching new products.

July and September 2018: Pimps, Scammers, Arms Dealers and Pornstars

Welcome to Telegram!

The launch brought no customers. I have to find them myself.

I find a bunch of crypto channels on Telegram and DM them.

I try all techniques:

- 'The Mom Test' on some
- I ask for advice from others
- I sell directly to others

Most of them charge in crypto. They tell me that if I supported crypto payments, they would subscribe.

I take their word for it and build my own crypto payment gateway. They never subscribe. Who would've thought.

I had a small trickle of users signing up for free trials, mostly from some blogs that had mentioned Telemonetize.

So I focus on those and tried to make them convert.

But my customers were people I didn't want to serve at all:

- I had sleazy crypto guys that were scamming
- Gamblers that encouraged others to gamble
- A guy that wanted to sell Thai prostitutes through Telemonetize
- And some white dude in Central Africa with a profile picture of himself with some AK47s, I suspect he was dealing guns.

- I even had an amateur pornstar from Germany that wanted to sell her "premium content" through Telemonetize. Basically this was OnlyFans before OnlyFans. I should've turned Telemonetize into OnlyFans and I'd be a billionaire by now.

And just to clarify, the above were not the exception, they were the rule.

99% of my free trial users were running unethical businesses. It made me open my eyes a bit on what really happens on the internet but we sometimes forget.

It's not only Wikipedia, YouTube and social media.

They were the epitome of a bad customer. Needy for time. Asking for premium support and custom features. Rude. Stingy with their money. Used burner credit cards for free trials and asked for extra time on the free trial.

I get one customer. He is running some kind of "investing" channel. \$29/month.

Abandoning GitGardener and Telemonetize

Here I am. 10 months in. And nowhere near \$500/month.

At this point:

- GitGardener is at \$25/month with 5 customers
- Telemonetize is at \$29/month with 1 customer
- So, in total, \$54/month.

Literally 10X lower than where I should be.

I have a brutal internal dialog with myself:

- GitGardener is a stupid hack
- Telemonetize is serving scammers
- I wanna build a "real" business.

I decide to stop working on both GitGardener and Telemonetize.

I go back to the drawing board and see what has worked for me thus far.

Easy answer. Launching products at a fast pace without stressing about the idea too much.

Right?

October | CryptoSubscriptions

While working on Telemonetize, I had to build my own cryptocurrency payment gateway.

I won't explain how it works because it's boring. But it was complex.

I turned it into a separate product and launched on Product Hunt, Hacker News and Reddit.

Again, zero signups. Disappointed.

I'm panicking right now, so I don't invest any more time in it. Plus, I hate the crypto space.

- Time spent: 2 weeks
- Revenue: \$0
- Front page on Product Hunt: 100+ upvotes
- Signups: 0

November '18 - December '18 | Epilepsy Blocker

I close out the year by building a new project I had in mind.

It wouldn't be ready until February 2019, because the tech behind it was extremely complex and sophisticated.

More on this later.

Year 1 Recap

Went from no product launches under my belt to \$50/month. Met failures, successes and learned about the different types of customers you can have.

I was ok with my progress for the year and kept the same goal for the next one.

Reach \$500/month.

- \$55/month
- 8 products launched
- 2 profitable products
- First 6 months felt like a dream
- Last 6 months felt like a slug

Year 2: Sniper

This year I take the exact opposite approach.

I stop blindly building new products and try to focus on the profitable ones I have.

I also try to go B2B.

January and February | Epilepsy Blocker

Epilepsy Blocker was really hard to build. Actually, I quit many times.

But I believed in the idea. So I kept going.

And I'm so happy that I did. Because this product ended up changing my life. You'll see how later.

It was a chrome extension that blocked images, videos and animated gifs that could trigger seizures to people with photosensitive epilepsy.

Like an AdBlocker, it would scan the page and hide the dangerous content before you even scroll down to see it.

The idea came to me from an article I read. A NYT journalist was "attacked" by a flashing GIF that sent him to the hospital.

"For sure there is something like an AdBlocker for this", I thought to myself.

But there was nothing. So I built it myself.

For the first and only time in my life, university was useful, as I had to use:

- linear algebra
- histograms
- python packages
- optimized C code
- and much more

I won't bore you to death here, but the tech was very complex.

I had to study scientific papers, read broadcast guidelines and code for months on end.

I didn't have the intention of making money off of it.

But a few days before launch I tested the server and saw that it crashed with heavy use even from one user.

I realize that even with 10 users it will be unusable and cost me a lot of money too.

I add a \$10/mo price tag and launch.

I launch on Reddit, in the /r/epilepsy subreddit.

My post gets taken down in the first 2 hours. Shit. Reddit never shows me love.

By the time it was taken down, it was number one on the front page. It also had 7 upvotes, 2 very positive comments and 1 paying customer!

"Validation!", I thought to myself. Generating revenue on day one. I message the admins asking why they took it down. I explained that the people of the sub reddit were finding it very interesting.

Guess what happened. They banned me from the subreddit without explaining why.

I launch on ProductHunt and Twitter, hoping to get coverage. The tweet goes "viral" (for my standards) with 600+ likes, 100+ retweets and 100.000 views. But it reaches the wrong audience.

Many people followed me, but it was mostly accessibility developers and software engineers that work at large companies like IBM, Google, Stripe, etc.

So the launch was a flop. Many vanity metrics to stroke your ego like followers, comments calling you a genius and a great human being, a DM from a VC, but no actual customers.

It reached the wrong audience, again.

I also launched in some photosensitive epilepsy Facebook groups.

Zero customers.

Setting north star metrics

Since 3 profitable products are a lot of work to balance, I set a north star metric for each one.

- For GitGardener, I double the prices and since I have one paying customer for every 300 website visitors, I aim for more website visitors.
- For Telemonetize, since I have a trickle of free trial signups coming in, I focus on retention by talking to them and trying to address their needs.
- For Epilepsy Blocker, I want more visibility to validate the idea and test the waters for any B2B spin off of the product.

Hitting \$200/month

At this point GitHub is acquired by Microsoft. As a result, private repositories become available on the free tier.

And GitGardener's premium version works with private repositories.

So my target audience expanded without me doing anything.

Combined with an extra \$10/mo tier, which a price increase, GitGardener reached \$130/month.

Telemonetize got a second customer and was at \$58/month. I don't even remember what they did, something about Italian football matches and betting odds.

Epilepsy Blocker has one paying customer, and is at \$10/month.

In total, \$198/month.

March and April | Ouch

I don't have a way for Epilepsy Blocker to get new customers.

Facebook groups aren't working, Reddit is out of the question.

I go to online forums and DM people that have photosensitive epilepsy in order for them to try the service.

Something I did not know is that many people that are challenged with epilepsy also have other conditions.

For example, many are disabled, so they can't work and rely solely on benefits.

Giving up \$10/mo was too much for them, they told me.

I always ended up giving it away for free. The world's worst salesperson.

Maybe I don't have a thick enough skin, but I remember someone telling me this.

"Hey man, I respect you trying to sell your product but I'm just not interested"

It fucking hurt me so much. It was true, and it hurt. I thought selling Epilepsy Blocker would feel different.

Turns out it feels worse.

I stopped trying to sell to individuals and chasing \$10 checks.

I'm thinking of making B2B spin off products and making the chrome extension free.

A lucky break, at last

Just like in year one, May ended up being the best month of the year.

In a weird and unexpected way, Epilepsy Blocker ended up changing my life.

The founder of an MIT startup found Epilepsy Blocker and DM'd me. He wanted to talk.

My younger brother got excited.

"Dude, they are gonna buy Epilepsy Blocker! I can feel it. You are gonna be rich. How much you gonna ask for?"

My luck had been a bit brutal lately, so I was accustomed to having low expectations.

But I thought about it. Allowed myself to dream a little. And now I was seeing dollar signs too.

I started thinking about it...

"Yeah. It could make sense for them. Great PR. A userbase they could funnel into their products. A product that is useful. I think the deal is gonna go through."

While day dreaming, I'm imagining being interviewed by Courtland Allen on Indie Hackers.

I'm explaining how I built Epilepsy Blocker, sold it and changed my life.

Of course, that never happened. Lol.

But! Something good DID happen.

They offered me a job. Yes, I know. Lamé.

But it sounded like a dream job:

- They were based out of MIT. One of the founders is a famous MIT professor.
- They use AI and Machine Learning to save lives.
- Work with the likes of MIT and NASA.

- And had offices in Boston, Seoul and Milan, which is next to Greece. So they offered me a position.

On one hand, I was disappointed. But given my credentials (a bullshit CS degree from a free public university in the countryside of Greece) it was a major success.

As you can imagine, my parents were ecstatic too.

This was a real job! And they could brag about me to friends and family.

I tentatively accept. But I explain that I'm still finishing up my degree so I'll start at the end of the year.

Of course, my goal deep inside was by the end of the year to make enough money from my personal projects. And not go.

But at least now I have a "Plan B". Which is good enough.

Sounds like a dream job. And most importantly, is not in Greece.

I just wanna leave and travel.

Going B2B With Epilepsy Blocker

Now I have a real deadline. Until the end of the year.

And it's May. We are almost halfway through the year.

I'm panicking. Again.

I take a deep breath and decide to go all in.

Non Profits

I start cold emailing and cold calling Epilepsy Non Profits in the US, UK and Canada.

They have a large audience and they might want to let their followers know of Epilepsy Blocker.

They tell me they would not promote my product because it's for profit. But they could run a survey on my behalf.

No bueno.

Clinics

I have an epiphany during class. Sometimes the most boring places are the most inspirational.

The idea was that I could go and ask neurological clinics directly if this software could be of ANY USE for them.

Huge stretch. But who knows? Worst case scenario, they say no.

Right after class, I go to the hospital next to my university.

I visit the neurological clinic and talk to the doctor in charge. She really likes that I had the confidence to just show up and talk to them.

They are super friendly, and tell me that they could possibly see a use case where the software is being used.

It was probably out of kindness because nothing ever came out of this. They later told me that in Greece something like this would be very hard to be used, but I should look into other hospitals abroad. Yeah right, as if that's easy to do.

I cold call some other experts in Neurology in Greece.

They tell me the exact same thing. I should keep my hopes very low when it comes to innovating in Greece.

I hate the idea of blaming your surroundings, but I can't risk wasting months or years on something experts tell me won't happen.

TV Channels

I randomly find a new law that would enforce all Greek TV channels to check their content and issue a warning in between commercial breaks if the content is dangerous for people with photosensitive epilepsy to view.

Something like this:

"Warning, the following scenes may include flashing images that could trigger seizures."

The law would start on September 1st.

What? That's in 3 months! Destiny!

I call the Greek "Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Media" to ask questions.

I go through multiple people and end up talking to the minister's secretary. She forwards my call to the lawyer in charge of this specific law.

I was kinda surprised at how easy you can reach and contact people at the top with a little persistence and an open mind.

She answers all my questions. This law is for real.

Now that I have validated this law, I message the CTOs of major and smaller TV channels in Greece.

I don't get a reply. Typical. But I call one of the coaches from that accelerator I attended, on a weird hunch.

Turns out I was right, he had the perfect intro for me.

The call went something like this.

"Do you think you could help me? I can't seem to find TV channel CTOs."

"Hang up, I'm calling the ex-CTO of a large TV channel in Greece."

"What?!"

...

Ten minutes later, my phone rings. The ex-CTO of that TV channel calls me and we arrange a coffee.

I met up with this guy. Cool guy.

We talk about London as he used to work at BBC and Bloomberg.

I also explain to him what I'm building. And I explain the new law that is coming into action.

He calls the current CTO in front of me and arranges a meeting.
Wow.

Business meeting with huge TV Channel

Now shit just got real. I have a meeting booked with the CTO of a multi-multi-multi-million dollar TV network in Greece.

This time, I haven't wasted months building the solution.

I'm gonna cut this deal first. And then I can build a solution that fits their needs.

I have the magic algorithm and demo ready for them.

I also conduct some research. The industry's price range for analyzing ONE(!!!!) file is about \$350!

Imagine the type of deal I could cut with a huge TV channel to check all of their content, ads, movies, etc

Millions.

I visit their offices and I only carry my laptop in a bag and a piece of paper with the new law. The important parts are highlighted. I am

organized.

I even wore jeans and a polo shirt to look smart. Which I never do.

They treat me well, they bring me a coffee, we sit down and chat.

I show them the piece of paper and go over the important parts. The CTO gives it a good look, and then he starts laughing.

"Hahahaha! This law? In Greece? They have been talking about this law for 5 years already. And I honestly don't believe it will go in effect for another 5 years. However, I have your phone number if something changes. Hahahaha."

Again, the "Greece" argument. But he was right.

Till this day, I haven't seen a single photosensitive epilepsy warning on TV. And my phone never rang.

Clean slate, impostor syndrome

It's June now. Time is running out.

I get a message from an anonymous user in the chatbox of one of my products.

"You just do anything for money, don't you? Even good things, like helping people with epilepsy and github commits."

In the beginning, I laugh. Is he really comparing a neurological condition to github commits?

Let alone the fact that GitGardener is open source and anyone can use it for free. It's not really for money.

I go on about my day but it keeps popping in my mind.

Every single one of my products that made money is kinda controversial.

- GitGardener is considered cheeky and a hack.
- Telemonetize is basically serving scammers.
- Epilepsy Blocker is asking money from disabled people.

Is this unique to me, or could you criticize every product if you really wanted to and tried?

I decide to:

- Make Epilepsy Blocker free.
- Kill Telemonetize.
- And put GitGardener on the backburner.

It felt amazing. GitGardener made me my first dollar. Telemonetize taught me how to code. And Epilepsy Blocker got me a fantastic job. Maybe that was enough.

Killing projects and moving on is liberating.

Enough of this shit. Let's sell to businesses.

This was my second big realization. I wanted to go B2B.

Going round in circles

If you start thinking, you lose.

I knew this from my Muay Thai fights.

This is exactly what happened to me here. I was thinking and doubting myself too much. So I could not confidently commit to

anything I did. And the results were crap.

The rest of the year was super stressful. I don't know what strategy to pick:

- Shotgun strategy?
- Sniper strategy?
- Something in between?

Nothing seems to work. Panicking does not help either. The shadow of a self-imposed deadline does not help either.

Shit, I'm six months through the second year. Maybe I'm not going to make it after all. Not even this year.

I am finishing uni and starting my full time job in January.

I have five months. I think I can make it.

July | Orthios

I go back to the drawing board and think about what got me results so far.

Definitely not the sniper method. Definitely the shotgun method.

I pick an idea from my idea list and build it.

It says "Uptime monitoring for chatbots". It was a problem I had sometimes with the Telemonetize Telegram bot, it would go down and users would message me about it.

This would ping the bot and let me know if it's down. And I could also expand to Slack and other platforms.

I launch on Product Hunt. Zero signups. I panic. No time to waste, on to the next one.

- Time spent: 2 weeks
- Revenue: \$0
- Sign ups: 0

August | LocalTweetTime

The idea part of my brain is in full motion. I find ideas all day long, like, at least five new ones a day.

One of them was to be able to see the local time a tweet was posted. It gives a little more context to it.

A tweet posted at 4:00 AM does not mean the same thing as a tweet posted at noon, even if the text is the same.

I build a chrome extension and launch on Product Hunt, just to get that momentum going. On to the next one.

- Time spent: 1 week
- Revenue: \$0
- Installs: 50

August | IndieChannels

I realize that I am good at building products. But suck at distribution.

I am doing research on distribution channels that I can leverage and have nice stable traffic on autopilot.

Stuff like GitHub marketplace, Shopify marketplace, Figma marketplace, etc.

I gather my research in place and turn it into a website.

I think it may help other makers so I launch it on Product Hunt. It does well, gets 500+ upvotes.

But that doesn't mean shit, this aint even a product.

- Time spent: 1 week
- Revenue: \$0
- Number 2 on Product Hunt: 500+ upvotes

September | Epilepsy Blocker for Designers

I have an idea that maybe Epilepsy Blocker could be useful for designers.

I don't jump into coding this time. I think I've learned my lesson.

I post a question on Reddit and get a shit ton of feedback. People want this.

I build it in two weeks. And launch it on the brand new Figma Marketplace.

I try to monetize it by adding a price, but no one converts.

I was wrong again.

- Time spent: 2 weeks
- Revenue: \$0
- Installs: 300+

September | DuckDuckGoSometimes

I have tried using Duck Duck Go in the past, but always find myself going back to Google.

I build a small chrome extension that redirects a percentage of your Google searches to DuckDuckGo.

It gets around 250 downloads.

- Time spent: 1 week
- Revenue: \$0
- Installs: 250

September | Splash Search

Whenever I'm on Unsplash, I find it hard to find a landscape image for a wallpaper for my laptop.

Boom, new idea.

Another chrome extension. This one allows you to "advance search" unsplash.

I build and launch it in a week. This also gets around 250 downloads.

Ironically, this stupid product got copied by Unsplash. They made it part of the main website, which technically means that my product indirectly affects millions of users every year.

But what am I doing anyway? Are these even businesses?

- Time spent: 1 week
- Revenue: \$0
- Installs: 300+
- Indirectly affected millions of users

Enough! Give me some time to think!

Now I'm completely lost. I'm just blindly building products.

On one hand, I'm building crap hoping to find another GitGardener that makes money.

On the other hand, I go all in on an idea I fall in love with for months on end, with no results. Like Epilepsy Blocker or "The Next Facebook".

I'm going round in circles.

Taking a step back and reflecting

At the end of the year, I decide to take a step back and reflect. And write what you are reading now.

I have probably failed. I'll probably have to take that job.

I need to know what to do next.

October | Researching

I need to understand what successful people are doing.

I listen to some podcasts on IndieHackers:

- Justin Jackson on the power of a good market
- Steli Efti on the importance of sales and feedback

I decide to try out what they are saying:

- Pick a good/healthy market
- Ask for feedback/advice to dig deeper
- Build a product/solution for their pain points

I pick the cybersecurity market.

I send out cold emails. Not pitching. Asking for advice. And even offering to pay them for their time.

It converts well, I arrange about one Zoom call per day with penetration testers, security consultants and security engineers.

Everyone is super friendly, helpful, and no one accepts money from me.

Their guard is down. I learn a lot, I immerse myself into their world and start to notice patterns and common pain points.

But although I started to learn their pain points and workflows, it felt like a black box.

I did not have the confidence, experience and know-how to come up with a solution. And even if I had, I could not improve it or have a grand vision of it.

I can see the tree. But I can't see the forest.

November | Interviewing

I pick the Web Accessibility market and follow the same method.

One that is closer to me and I have direct experience.

The difference was crazy.

Most never reply to my emails

Another asks for \$150/hour or buy their books

Others tell me that if it's a free product they would help with giving me advice, but if it's for profit, they have no time.

Ironic. This is a market you would expect to be full of kind people.

Weird. Right?

This was my third big realization:

I wanna pick a good market.

December | Writing

This is me now writing this.

I have decided to take the rest of the month off. To reflect on the past two years and come up with a plan for next year.

Year 2 Recap

Went from \$50/month to \$200/month, shut down Telemonetize, abandoned GitGardener, made Epilepsy Blocker free and went down to \$100/month.

Tried to go B2B with Epilepsy Blocker but didn't manage to do it. Build some other products but none had potential.

Two years in, I still haven't gotten a paycheck from a company.

- \$100/month
- 7 products launched
- 0 profitable products
- First 6 months were spent trying to go B2B with Epilepsy Blocker
- Last 6 months were spent panicking and trying to build new products

Appendix

What's next?

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for reading all of this.

Hopefully you learned something. Maybe you learned what not to do.

What's next for me? Honestly, I don't know. I had to accept that job, so I'm moving to Italy soon.

But I am still giving it my all next year!

This was my story. Thank you for reading.

Time travel

Hey. This is Alex from the future writing this.

I decided to clean up and re-post these blog posts as books.

Nothing changed. Even if I disagree nowadays with things that I said back then.

These books are for free.

But if you enjoyed them, you can do the following:

- Share it on X or LinkedIn
- DM me on X and we can set up a virtual coffee

Or don't. It's ok.

Thank you for reading.

Credits

Finally, special thanks to everyone that inspired and supported me, whether they know it or not.

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- Ali Salah, thank you for being one of the OGs from 2018 and showing me that slow, consistent growth, in a saturated market, while focusing on product, can actually happen. This hasn't been my own experience and it's another example that anything and everything can work, there are no magic recipes.

- Michael Aubrey, thank you for being another story of hard work. Seeing you try for multiple years before finally achieving success is inspiring. Reminds me of my own journey.

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Constantly updating this list.